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LUPERCYCLOPEDIA

*Moving Images and Living Archive**



On the 17th of June 2005, Peter Greenaway set about his first VJ performance. It was the beginning of a worldwide live cinema tour, but mostly, it was the beginning of what later would have become the *Lupercyclopedia*.

Based on *the Tulse Luper Suitcases*¹, the project consists of a living encyclopaedia conceived for the information era, characterized by the presence of particular figures, *motifs*, themes and a peculiar recurring symbology. This conveys the idea of an archive, which works as a database able to support and feed the contemporary “cinematic-scape”. In particular, the main hypothesis I will try to demonstrate is that this last work by Greenaway can be considered as the author’s own archive. Not by chance, *Lupercyclopedia* sounds obviously to be the encyclopaedia of Tulse Luper, who is Peter Greenaway’s alter ego.

We are thus presented a live reinterpretation of Tulse Luper’s story, which is rendered through the combination of 92 characters, 92 settings in place, 92 global events, 92 individual stories, 92 natural elements, 92 symbolic objects and a final sequence, which is the result of the montage of 92 explosions sequences.

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¹ *Tulse Luper Suitcases* is a multifaceted project by Peter Greenaway. It is composed of different parts, including a wide range of media platforms; among these products it is important to mention at least the three feature films devoted to the figure of Tulse Luper (*The Tulse Luper Suitcases, Part 1: The Moab Story*, *The Tulse Luper Suitcases, Part 2: Vaux to the Sea*, *The Tulse Luper Suitcases, Part 3: From Sark to the Finish*), a series of travelling exhibitions, a web site (<http://www.tulselupernetwork.com/basis.html> [Accessed 26 June 2011]); moreover, there are a blog (<http://blog.tulseluperjourney.com/> [Accessed 26 June 2011]) and an online game (<http://www.tulseluperjourney.com/game/> [Accessed 26 June 2011]), both entitled *Tulse Luper Journey*. This is a meaningful choice by the author, both for the nature of the archive which represents the object of this study, both on a theoretical level, since Greenaway’s use of different media is to be considered and related to the post-medium condition of cinema. As regards, the *équipe* producing the online game has been pointing out that «Greenaway’s statement that ‘cinema is dead’ calls for new ways of communicating ideas. This game is part of the search for a crossover format that breaks the boundaries and rules that have been imposed by film, theatre, books, games and other traditional media» (<http://www.tulseluperjourney.com/about.jsp> [Accessed 26 June 2011]). As far as the post-medium condition of cinema is concerned, please refer to the last essays by Francesco Casetti, and mainly to Casetti, F., 2011. Back to the Motherland: the film theatre in the postmedia age. *Screen*, 52 (1), pp. 1-12; an interpretation and application of the same debated concepts is to be found in De Rosa, M., 2010. David Rockwell’s *Hall of Fragments*. Looking for Film’s Genius as a Medium through Audiovisual Geographies. *Comunicazioni Sociali online*, 3, pp. 40-49. Available at <http://www.comunicazionisonline.it/2010/3/6/loadPDF/> [Accessed 26 June 2011]. The moving images provided to re-release the video-performance, which is the subject of this essay are basically taken from these products, as from the whole director’s filmography.

The outcome is a complex multimedia-based project. To make it clearer and easier to contextualize, it could be useful to shortly summarize the narrative linked to this character:

In the last century an extraordinary man called Tulse Luper archived his entire life in 92 suitcases. Although his life is still a mystery, we know that he was present at some key-historical events, spending his life as professional prisoner, he managed to collect a large amount of objects and stored them in suitcases. In a way, the suitcases represent the world according to Tulse Luper².

This is how the opening sequence of an online videogame trailer sketches the figure of Tulse Luper. Besides, according to the contemporary hybridization trends and the current intermedia practices³, I think the introduction to this game can be useful to outline the fictional background of the whole project connected to Greenaway's favourite character, and to emphasize its multifaceted feature. In fact, the game trailer uses the on-line Tulse Luper archive (which is basically a web site⁴), adopts filmic images, and includes cinematographic shots which were not selected to be edited and inserted in the director's films. But the most important quality to highlight is that it shares the same logic of video performances, since all the media products and the artworks gravitating around our mysterious protagonist nourish the imagery linked to him, and feed one another.

A meaningful element shared by both the online game and the video-performances is the suitcase (i.e. the 92 suitcases abandoned all around the world containing the evidences of the fabulous life of Tulse Luper), which plays a deep symbolic role. If the online videogame is constructed following a kind of "research scheme", where finding the 92 suitcases is the main challenge, in the VJ performance we already have them on the screens all around. They are definitely the main recurrent element and one of the typical devices of Greenaway's narrative, because they regularly appear throughout his whole production, becoming one of his objectual marks. *Lupercyclopedia* does not lie outside this rule – even better, on the one hand it synthesizes the director's poetics, while on the other hand it thematizes the issue of the archive in an expanded sense.

In order to deal with these points, I will explore two different analytical levels: firstly the one concerning the shape acquired by the archive, that is to say the form it takes and the processes leading to this configuration (I call it the *mise en forme* level); secondly, that of the real organization and staging, linked to the true and physical performance space, its disposition and its appearance (I identify it as the *mise en scène* level). We will see how this elaboration works, which particular mechanisms it involves and how the events are

² *Tulse Luper Journey*: the game trailer voice over can be listened to at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqcsnVTI2zw&feature=related> [Accessed 2 May 2011].

³ Many scholars dealt with the theme of intermediality in the last years; at least see Spielmann, Y. ed., 2005. *Hybrid Identities in Digital Media. Special issue of Convergence. The International Journal of Research into New Media Technology*, 11 (4); Spielmann, Y., 2006. *Hybridity: Arts, Sciences and Cultural Effects. Leonardo*, 39 (2), pp. 106-108 and 39 (3), pp. 214-22; Spielmann, Y., 2010. *Hybridekultur*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag.

⁴ As already mentioned, see <http://www.tulselupernetwork.com/basis.html> [Accessed 26 June 2011].

able to build a real collection. In fact, as far as this second passage is concerned, *Lupercyclopedia* eventually offers a hybrid form of expression, which expands the cinema precinct and contributes to shape a new dramaturgy of cinematic experience.

The second hypothesis, then, is that the widening of cinematic experience⁵ goes hand in hand with a possible broadening of the concept of archive, which has thus to be considered in the same widening way. In this sense, the archive will be intended here at least⁶ in a double perspective: source and encyclopaedia.

Lupercyclopedia *mise en forme*

As anticipated, *Lupercyclopedia* is the most recent result of an expressive research that began some years ago. Since 2005/2006, Peter Greenaway presented a series of VJ performances, which progressively and systematically became centred on Tulse Luper's story, though they offered a diverse range of elaboration as formal solution. Shows as *Tulse Luper VJ performance* (Guanajuato, 2006, and other different venues, till 2009), *A Life in Suitcases. The History of Tulse Luper* (Moscow 2008, Mantua 2009, among others), or *Tulse Luper Suitcases Project* (Krakov, 2007) took place around Europe, mainly during festivals, happenings or *ad hoc* projections, where they animated city squares or clubs as principal and spectacular attraction. In each end every one of these shows, Greenaway used the same conceptual and composing procedure, which is shared with *Lupercyclopedia* too. The only difference among these first productions and the one on which the following analysis will focus, pertains the organization of the performance space, that is to say what I depicted as *mise en scène*.

On the contrary, it is possible to trace continuity as far as the representational perspective is concerned, because on a content level both the fictional element, the symbolic references and the conceptual process, which guides the assemblage and the compilation of the archive, are to be found in all of these artworks. The director employs in a very severe and precise way his own cinematic and visual repertoire, showing a certain ease and expertise in using the sources. This implies an accustomed archival practice as essential composition tool. Such a feature represents a recurring characteristic in Greenaway's career, which is self-evident in many productions: films as *Les Morts de la Seine* (1989), *The Falls* (1980) or *Vertical Feature Remake* (1978), but also *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982) are emblematic examples. Here we can recognize a categorization and cataloguing tension – an action that from time to time has been rising as central issue of the narrative of the movies itself. It is an action expressed through a deep taxonomy attitude and an attempt to handle the visible in a controlled, structured way. The same *motif* is to be found in the author's curatorial activity (a couple of exhibition are particularly noteworthy: *100 Objects to Represent the World* held in 1992 at the Hofburg Imperial Palace and at the Academy of Fine Arts of Vienna, and *Some Organizing*

⁵ For a definition of cinematic experience, see Casetti, F., 2009. *Filmic Experience*. *Screen*, 50 (2), pp. 56-66.

⁶ Many other accepted meanings of the concept of archive are theoretically possible: organizing principles as those typical for thesauruses, atlases, and dictionaries – just to mention some of them – are variants of a similar categorization system, expressing the same collecting and cataloguing tension.

Principles, held the following year at Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea) or in other artistic fields, such as painting and audiovisual projects for TV programmes (i.e. *A TV Dante*, 1989). It becomes quite clear, then, that Greenaway is guided by a documentary desire, which drives him to collect, stock, preserve, organize, assemble figures, objects, symbols, formal solutions, etc. In other words, his aesthetic is hinged on what Hal Foster defined in an acclaimed essay as «archival impulse»⁷: what can be thus identified is the attempt to close cinematic fragments of the world in a controllable domain, to make them traces of reality, documents to be filed. And in this sense, the director's action perfectly fits with the description Foster gives of a kind of “archival art”:

the work in question is archival since it not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private. Further, it often arranges these materials according to a quasi-archival logic, a matrix of citation and juxtaposition, and presents them in a quasi-archival architecture, a complex of text and objects⁸.

Here, in the explicit connection to the issue of the archive, lies a deep philosophical question. Because the recording temptation represents a mere illusion – it is nothing but a pure anthropological, epistemic problem, concerning the effective possibility to exercise a global prehension on the whole human knowledge, which is precisely gathered in the encyclopaedia just to be managed and curbed.

It is possible to recognize the same essential urge in Greenaway's work, tracing back his attitude to this complex dynamic. The director seems to be aware of this adherence: he is conscious of the typical features of his style, attempting to answer to a sort of collecting necessity, and thus tries to exploit it. In particular, the solution conceived by the design of the VJ performance to make advantage of such a deep human need, is based on the reference to the semiotic category of encyclopaedia.

As Umberto Eco stated, the encyclopaedia is to be intended as a «library of libraries – assuming that a /library/ – it is an archive as well, collecting all the nonverbal but somehow recorded information»⁹. In other words, it is a kind of texts network, able to create and establish the interpretation, which is functionally and automatically activated whenever the subject has to deal with something requiring a specific cultural and meaning resource. Finally, Eco characterizes the encyclopaedia as opposed to the dictionary, since in his perspective the latter represents a closed totality of linguistic knowledge, concurring to create meaning, while the former is to be envisioned as general whole, gathering any knowledge regarding the world. For this reason the encyclopaedia has a factual, potentially open and illimitate nature – a fact that

⁷ Foster, H., 2004. An Archival Impulse. *October*, 110, pp. 3-22.

⁸ Foster, 2004, p. 5.

⁹ Eco, U., 1984. *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*. Torino: Einaudi, p. 109 (translated by the author).

permits to give a shape and depict a dictionary, but makes it difficult to fully represent the concept of encyclopaedia.

Following Eco's suggestion, *Lupercyclopedia* not only represents a certain typology of archive as the atlas or the thesaurus could be, but also stands for the director's background knowledge. It is something different from the massive vastness of the archive tout court, for it is referred to a singularity, as it belongs to an individual (who is Peter Greenaway, a.k.a. 'Tulse Luper'). Thanks to this expedient, *Lupercyclopedia* assumes the form of a subduable encyclopaedia, featuring the presence and the action of a shaping and defining power.

It is interesting to observe how the very concept of archive etymologically includes the idea of a kind of power. It is Jacques Derrida that eventually evokes it, linking it to the category of "consignation" and analyzing the two accepted meanings of this last term: «in the ordinary sense of the word, [consignating refers to] the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve, to deposit in a place and on a substrate»¹⁰, while on a different meaning level it express «the act of consigning through gathering together signs. [In this sense,] consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system [...] in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration»¹¹.

Through exhibited archive aesthetics, Greenaway expresses his power, which corresponds precisely to this sort of disposition attitude. What is most interesting in Derrida's formulation is the further definition of this power, identified by the philosopher as "archontic power", able to «gather the functions of unification, of identification, of classification»¹². The result of such an attitude is the configuration of a *mise en forme*, responding to Greenaway's idea of the cinematic experience, and thus substantiating itself as living archive of moving images. In this sense, we witness a personalistic structuring of the encyclopaedia, created live for the public by the demiurgic power of the director. The role played by Greenaway, in fact, is clearly strategic: he shows himself as *auctor* – the person invested of an exclusive hermeneutical auctoritas (**Fig. 1**). He is the one who guards the moving images but also re-employs them to his desire. On the one hand, this expresses the ratification of a strong, emphasized authorial role, while on the other hand both a controlling and a manipulating function are made explicit. Greenaway's presence does not simply evoke a guardian figure, because the encyclopaedia is not merely guarded: he is the archive animator. Better – he stands for an author-demiurge, who works on the moving images in order to compose a new filmic artwork. The performance presents thus a strong biographical/authorial relation between the cinematic archive vivified for the public and the director, which is its main subject and actor. In a new present – the setting of the show – figures and symbols coming directly from the cinematic past of Peter Greenaway are rendered, re-proposed, re-located and reframed in a new *mise en forme*. In this way, the mechanism triggered by *Lupercyclopedia* somehow retrieves one of the most common metaphors referred to the idea of

¹⁰ Derrida, J., 1996. *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*. Translated from French by E. Prenowitz. Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 3.

¹¹ Derrida, 1996, p. 3.

¹² Derrida, 1996, p. 3.

archive by the dedicated literature, that is to say the theme of archaeology. In fact, the performance appears as a work based on a kind of archaeological action of the director, who assumes this very attitude to rework his own filmic and visual DB. Lev Manovich also expressed the conviction that I just anticipated briefly, pointing out that particular filmic productions, such as the one by Greenaway himself are to be considered as a cinematic «intersection between database and narrative»¹³. It is not a chance, then, if *Lupercyclopedia*, «progress[es] forward by recounting a list of items, a catalogue which does not have any inherent order»¹⁴, but it is ruled by different systems of order. There are numbers, a series of suitcases are presented, each one disclosing a peculiar element or event, recurrent *motifs* and many others typical instances that are offered to the spectator. In this way, during the VJ-ing, this ensemble works as a catalogue showing samples that belong to an exquisitely Greenawayan visual narrative. I think the most evident result of this intertwining logic is precisely what has been called *das System Greenaway*¹⁵, meaning an exclusive, subjective authorial whole.



Figure 1. Peter Greenaway performing his VJ-pièce *Lupercyclopedia* at Sani, Greece, summer 2010
[© Photo anti | itna]

This permits to those of the public who do not know the director's poetics, to approach his work embracing a historical perspective; in other terms, it gives the opportunity to re-present and go through his organized, accurate, archival universe in order to try to reconstruct a system, starting from traces and clues. But here the traces and clues are not something that belongs to the past, as usually happens: they are not residual presences, collected and gathered with preservation aims, but are rather vivid materials. Images, figures, numbers and *motifs* are visualized and circulate on the screens, reflowing again and again; in this way they are constantly enlivened and become part of a living archive. They are pieces of a puzzle, which is continuously changed and remodeled in its formal shape – as in a mosaic, whose tiles are interchangeable. A paradoxical and prolonged montage takes place, where the effort of the editor is not to

¹³ Manovich, L., 2001. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, p. 237.

¹⁴ Manovich, 2001, p. 238.

¹⁵ Spielmann, Y., 1998. *Intermedialität: Das System Greenaway*. Paderborn: W. Fink.

accomplish a narrative organization of the units, but actually to limit their reflux, avoiding them to colonize the present.

The action of the director becomes the very central practice in order to handle the rough material excess and its almost free and fluid flowing. The encyclopaedia is thus the product of a particular *ars combinatoria*, which makes it able to update and renew itself every time it is put on screen for the performance. From a technical point of view, it consists in a digital editing released thanks to a sophisticated “connection-selection-combination system”. Greenaway uses a big touch-screen as technological device, on which film excerpts and frames are stocked waiting to be resurrected by the director’s gesture, who composes the visual sequences following the music (Fig. 2). These immediate configurations are directly projected on the surrounding screens, giving birth every time to a new visual pattern.

As in montage, the selection excludes from time to time some elements, showing once again the inborn, unavoidable impossibility of covering the completeness of the encyclopaedia, even a personal one.



Figure 2. *Lupercyclopedia*: close-up of the touch-screen
[© Photos anti | itna]

Lupercyclopedia *mise en scène*

Hence, *Lupercyclopedia* attests and confirms the openness of this particular archival form. It is a strong conceptual cornerstone of the whole project, able to influence not only the *mise en forme* but also the *mise en scène*. In fact, the central formal feature that distinguishes *Lupercyclopedia* from the other video performances is the structure of the arrangement; the previous shows basically proposed a frontal articulation, where the screens were located just opposite the public. At least they could adhere the room walls, whenever the performance took place indoor. *Lupercyclopedia* presents instead a more refined space design, for the staging is projected according to a specific organizing principle, in order to reverberate on a spatial level the theoretical approach to archive standing behind it. The shape of the screens, which are disposed along a semicircular line, formally renders its irreparable openness. The result is a full responsiveness be-

point from which the whole cinematic experience can be developed. This location permits to his archontic power to manage the entire visual scene, recalling in a certain way a panoptic arrangement, which expresses very explicitly the tension to control the world and dominate everything that can possibly be known¹⁸. *Lupercyclopedia* becomes thus Greenaway's "world" as Jean-Luc Nancy would define this term: «an assemblage or something being-together dealing with a form of art – a *téchne* – whose sense and exercise are precisely the same thing»¹⁹.

Moreover, the presentation of himself as *deus ex machina* is not the only element that makes Greenaway the hub of the performance: he is also the main actor of the show. His pervasive presence characterizes the real performance context, since he is evidently taking part to it in the flesh, but at the same time he discloses his presence on a representational level: assuming the identity of Tulsa Luper, he appears on screen too, as fictional character, who personifies his own alter ego. For these reasons the moving images could be considered Greenaway's own emanation.

Conclusions: the Living Archive

As I just tried to prove, the *mise en scène* coincides with the spatialization of the encyclopaedia, since during the performance the archive is unfolded throughout space, substantiating itself in the set design arranged for the show²⁰. The archive merges with the space becoming a *dispositif* – intended as something that disposes itself in the environment²¹. This inscription of the moving image in the context underlines in an even more marked way that the Greenawayan archive is configured as an open world: although it is systematically organized according to particular symbologies and recurrent figures, it consists of something which acquires its shape and meaning in the very moment of the live performance. Then, we do not deal with "objectual fantasmatic traces"²², but with vivid materials, which are made organic again exactly by the plastic action of the author on them. In this sense, *Lupercyclopedia* is not simply an archive aiming to systematize past, it doesn't represent only an attempt to dominate the filed materials, but seems to be a place where the collected elements overflow outwards. The millions of images and traces belonging to Greenaway's world are both residual and potentially innovative, because they can be transformed and thus can concur in producing a new artwork. In particular, they could organize a new *mise en forme* through a performance that always arranges a renovated *mise en scène* of them. The moving

¹⁸ This is not the place to deal with a possible analysis of the performance design as a sort of Panopticon, even though the spatial feature of the *dispositif*, the position and role of the author and the sense of control suggest a possible link to a series of interesting considerations about an interpretation of *Lupercyclopedia* based on the categories and frames, which are typical of the classical surveillance model.

¹⁹ Nancy, J.-L., 1997. *Il senso del mondo*. Translated from French by F. Ferrari. Milano: Lanfranchi, p. 55.

²⁰ Even Lev Manovich emphasizes the importance of the spatial level in his analysis of Greenaway work as DB: «No longer having to conform to the linear medium of film, the elements of a database are spatialized [...] This move can be read as the desire to create a database at its most pure form: the set of elements not ordered in any way. [...] the only way to create a pure database is to spatialize it, distributing the elements in space». Manovich, 2001, p. 238.

²¹ The suggestion of *dispositif* as something able to dispose elements in space is to be found in Agamben, G., 2006. *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* Roma: Nottetempo.

²² Roberti, B., 2007. Il deposito dei simulacri. *Fata Morgana*, 2, p. 54 (translated by the author).

image of *Lupercyclopedia*, is part of a cinema that «archives and reintroduces it as it was a new one, relaunching thus the revival possibility of the image itself»²³.

Assuming this, the process triggered by Greenaway in his VJ performance appears as an operation which works on the persistence, the insistence, the prolongation of the value and the validity of the collected elements. In other words, he reactivates his own encyclopaedia, extending what Aby Warburg would have defined its *Nachleben*²⁴. This pertains the body of the moving image, which becomes a plastic substance to be mixed, rearranged, reorganized again. The director's editing creates thus a kind of neo-baroque pastiche²⁵, starting from the exceeding and overflowing visual material created for different past productions. His constant post-production nourishes a personal remodelling and re-editing aesthetics, that reveals a kind of *museification* sense, ironically perpetrated through the liveliness of the performance.

The performance becomes thus the place of Tulse Luper's huge presence, it constitutes itself as a domiciliation for those moving images able to symbolize him and tell his story, standing for the visualization of Greenaway's encyclopaedia in space. As such, we do not have to do with a closed deposit, but an open, mobile, performed and living archive, which tends to exhibit its materials and to let them overflow in order to make itself fresher and prolific again.

²³ Roberti, 2007, p. 62 (translated by the author).

²⁴ Warburg, A., 2008. *Der Bilderatlas MNEMOSYNE*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

²⁵ See at least Murray, T., 2011. *Digital Baroque. New Media Art and Cinematic Folds*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, and Ndaliansi, A., 2004. *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.