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REVEL revues électronique de l'UNS - plate-forme pepiniere

Peter Greenaway

Friday, February 13, 2009

We started late, look, it's already 10 past 8, I have a sort of programme where I always anticipate to talk for about two hours, so you're going to be here until at least 10 o'clock, is that alright with you? All of those who object ought to say so now.

Alright, as well as obviously being, I suspect, polemical, and I hope also to be able to irritate you, and I certainly want to provoke you, but what I also need very much to do is also to entertain you. So what I'm going to do tonight as you could see from the title on the screen is to offer you I suppose indeed new possibilities, not so much I suppose under the aegis of the idea of cinema but of concepts of what we might describe as the screen. I'm here to do two talks to audiences.

There's a way that there's a confluence, there is an association between these two lectures, but very broadly, what I'd like to do tonight, indeed – I suppose this is rather a bit of an ego trip as well – is to show you really what myself and all my collaborators have been doing maybe in the last two and a half years and then to follow it up tomorrow with something maybe which is a little more concentrated, and in some curious way actually does turn back to the cinema you and I know. I'm just wondering how many of you here tonight will also be present tomorrow, or indeed, perhaps you don't even know! Or perhaps you'll have to wait to make your minds up, because today you find me so boring and so tedious. Is there a likelihood that some of you in the audience tonight will also be there tomorrow night? Good, good, put your hands up now. This is also useful for me too because I have to be careful that I'm not again going to bore you by repeating everything tomorrow which I'll have already prologued again today.

But let's see how it goes. I've done this sort of thing before and I'm very sensitive to audiences. And if you start standing up and talking and rustling your feet, I know that I have to entertain you a little more fiercely.

Alright, here we go. I don't know quite, because I know I'm apparently quite popular on Youtube, etc, so people tend to suss me out before they come to these sorts of events. And I suppose provocation is certainly part of the game, I sincerely believe, unless I can convince you things are broken, you will make no attempt whatsoever to try and mend them.

So I'll start off I suppose with my normal provocative statement is that I do sincerely believe that in essence, cinema is dead. I listen for the moans and the groans after that statement.

And of course I can sit here and talk to you for a very long time to qualify and explain why I think those things to be true.

Let me make an attempt without spending too much time to try to explain what I mean by that. If you believe, and of course you're French, and the chances are you do believe, that cinema began on December 26 on a windy night four days [sic] after Christmas in 1895, then you will know, since this is obviously 2009, that cinema has been going for 114 years. Other cinema historians, of course, would maybe create a much earlier date for cinema. I just spent a lot of time examining the painters who started painting in terms of artificial light round by the 1620's,1630's, people like Velazquez, Rubens, Caravaggio as a prime example, and certainly Rembrandt. And there's a good case to be made out and maybe cinema actually began in1642 which is in fact the date of Rembrandt's most famous painting called *The Nightwatch*. But if you read your history, people will say, well, even that cannot be true, it's the ancient Greeks with their shadow playing or even the ancient ancient Chinese who manoeuvred notions of candle-lit shadows, who actually laid down the basic vocabulary for notions of illusionistic suspension of disbelief, as a sort of proto-proto-proto-cinema.

So you must decide, I suppose, in some ways 1895 is such a sort of easy convenience. However, I would follow up my provocation by saying that now, in 2009 and at the beginning of the 21st century, the cinema is dead, with another more excessive provocation to suggest that maybe cinema was never alive in the first place.

I'm trained as a painter and I sincerely believe that cinema should be a visual activity. I was born in Wales and my grandmother, after she became 65, every Thursday afternoon, since she used to get a free ticket and didn't like to go to the cinema on her own, would drag me along, aged about four, five, something like that. And she always referred to the cinema as, and of course I had to speak in English, as "the pictures". Well superficially I suppose it is about the pictures. Though you wonder sometimes because really we do have a text-based cinema, we do not have an image-based cinema. It's impossible for me or anyone else to go to a film studio or a producer with four paintings, three lithographs and a

book of drawings and say: “give me the money!” They won't. They will not themselves have enough cultural visual sophistication to be able to understand that surely, since cinema is a visual medium, its origin should be visual as well. You know and I know that the studio, the producer, the banks, the funding organisation, whoever they might be, they need to have text. It's almost impossible to imagine any film that you think you might have seen actually beginning with any other sort of conception.

Godard famously said: “OK, if this is the way we have to make cinema, and have been making it for over a hundred years, then let's play the game. Let's write the goddam text, convince the producer or the studio that what we want to do is what they want to do as well. Make sure you've got your check in your pocket, put it in the bank, even wait three days to make absolutely certain that the check is valid, and then throw the script away and go and make a film”. Because the script and the film of course are not at all the same phenomenon.

You know and I know, for social change, political change, economic change, I would argue aesthetic change, that the cinema is not what it used to be. It's ironic, I think film historians in cinema would argue that the apogee of cinema in the West would somehow be relevant to the career of the Beatles. When the Beatles were most successful, then so was cinema. And ever since “Magical History Tour” in 1963, cinema has been on the decline. I'm not going to push that analogy anymore, otherwise we might all try to demonize the Beatles too much. But I think certainly since about 1965, in a public sense if not an aesthetic sense, we know that cinema's been on the slide. Certainly a lot of apologists would argue that cinema is supposed to be the great seventh art, the superbity of art in the 20th century. I doubt that, I doubt it very profoundly. Another countryman of yours suggested, Bazin of course I'm quoting here, that cinema was a combination of the theatre, literature and painting. I would argue there's precious little painting in cinema, there's an awful lot of theatre and there's even more literature. And cinema has always had a very strong umbilical cord with the bookshelf. And if it can be proven that the work, the script, the project, the proposal, the conception has already worked very well in the bookshop, then the chances are it should, or could or ought to work well in the cinema too. Examples of this in the last twelve years, of course are *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*. We know this to be absolutely valid because the books themselves are still very successful in the bookshops.

But that's not good enough, is it? And it's also an indication that cinema knows, in a curious way, that it doesn't have its own roots. It is not species-existent. Let me make you a very vulgar evolutionary comparison because this year 2009 is also the year of Charles Darwin. Horses and zebras cannot fuck to make an offspring. So in a curious way the notion of creating a totally autonomous species cannot possibly exist from such a union. But you know and I know that cinema can fuck with anything which certainly doesn't even remotely give it any sort of arrogance to regard itself as a species or autonomous entity. Anything you've seen in cinema, witnessing the fact that it started as a text, can easily be deconstructed back down to something else. So surely that means that cinema itself has not created its own essential identity.

Ok, let's rewind. Even if I can persuade you that cinema has never been born, and that nobody in this audience has ever seen a film, and all you've seen is a 114 years of illustrated text, which isn't the same thing at all, we're back to the first stage again, of course, which is this notion of if it ever did exist, then essentially it's dead now.

I think that probably the last great throw of cinema would've been in the 1970s probably with Germans. So if I could pick five names out of the hat, Straub, who I think is the most profound of the group of German filmmakers practicing in the middle 70s, Herzog, Wenders, Schlöndorf maybe, and certainly Fassbinder. There are many people around who earnestly think that Fassbinder was the last true, how should we say, conventional orthodox filmmakers' filmmaker. And after that time of course the whole emphasis, the whole axis, the whole phenomenon switched from the notion of cinema to become, of course the dates fit admirably well, to notions of television. So by the end of the 1970s, television had taken over as the prime communicative medium. I would be a little more generous, and add I suppose the notion of digital revolution to the idea of the death of cinema, and I would give you a date. And it's 31 September 1983. Let's use that to mark the death of cinema. And it's the date which is now I suppose generally recognized as the true beginning of the singularity of the post-digital visual age, the beginnings of a new sort of visual literacy.

Take our date again: 31 September 1983 is the day when the remote control was introduced into the living rooms of the world. What does that mean? That means the beginnings of troth. OK, if you go back, some of you are old enough, to this date, you imagine the zapper in your hand as you sat on the couch in front of the television, you could from a distance interfere in so far as you could turn a programme on, you could turn the programme off, you probably could change channels, you might

possibly have had some way of organizing the volume and maybe you could actually fix the contrast control – so certainly very very primitive according to what we can do know, but you see how the aura of responsibility has changed. In some curious way you have taken control of the film that you are watching away from the directors and the producers, and you import it to yourself. It's a question of the time frame.

I think I'm well-suited to talk about this because I'm trained as a painter. And I know, if you think about the painting, that you can go to the Louvres in Paris and you can look at the Mona Lisa for three seconds, three minutes, three hours, three days, three weeks, three years if you want. The timeframe is yours, you are responsible for the activity that happens between your sensibility and what you're looking at. But latterly of course I have involved myself in the business of cinema, and now you don't have a choice. I can hold up my hand for as long as I want to hold it up with a view that you can only see, only the front and not the back. So you have lost the time frame and I've regained it. This hand is now in my control and not yours.

All of you I'm sure have DVDs at home, and I sometimes think the DVD is absolutely the ideal medium for me because it can broach the notion of a time frame. With a DVD, I can indeed be the director I think I ought to be, but you also, by interfering with menus and agendas, can be the audience that you think you ought to be.

Looking at this analogy I suppose in a different way, there is a feeling abroad that art galleries are becoming theatres and theatres are becoming art galleries, and all the possibilities that would have existed heretofore are beginning to erode and breakdown.

I would quite frankly, and you have to look at my face and realize I have far more past than I have future, but I would like to imagine that my ideal audience, and I'm searching your faces now, would certainly be members of what we'd likely call the "laptop generation". These are the audiences of the future, these are the people who are both going to consume and certainly make any notion of what we might think the cinema might be in the future. And these people, of course, are the prime candidates for understanding questions of choice. Open up your laptop and choices rush at you, far more sophisticated of course than they would've been on 31 September 1983.

But profoundly relevant, this is not an idle game. This is not a proposition that's going to go away. And we know and you know that cinemas cannot have that sense of choice. Cinemas cannot be interactive phenomenon. So going back again to basics, one of the profound reasons why I think essentially cinema is dead is because of this factor of notions of interactivity.

There's another phenomenon too: in the world at large there's a great concern for concepts of multimedia. In some strange way, just look at the architecture of this cinema, look at how it's organised, a whole series of seats, a slight break in the building, dark room, screen at one end. Don't you think watching cinema is the most ridiculous and absurd proposition? First of all, you're required to sit in the dark, what the hell are you doing sitting in the dark, man is not a nocturnal animal?

But then again you are all looking in one direction, so that means that 270° of your experience are behind your head. There's more of a world behind your head than there is in front of it. But if you're going to watch a feature film, which nowadays is about two hours long, you're going to be obliged to sit still for two hours. And even in your bed last night I don't imagine that your body was still for two hours. So sitting in the dark looking in one direction for two hours, you all play this stupid game for as long as you've been coming to places like this. I think we've had enough of that, haven't we? Haven't we got to break that up, haven't we got to throw that away? It's happening of course, whether you like it or I like it.

My adopted home now is Amsterdam. The Dutch have the worst statistics in the world for going to the cinema. The average Dutch citizen only goes to the cinema once every two years. Don't laugh, what happens in Holland on the Monday happens in the rest of the world by the Wednesday and certainly the whole of the world by the Friday. So soon, I'm sure, and there's every indication, and I'm not just bringing this up as a provocative idea, but cinema is in enormous decline in France. That is particularly surprising because I have a lot, I suppose, to owe to the notion of what the French version of cinema is, because France invented the notion of cinema being an art form. The rest of the world were quite slow to catch up. I'm also appalled by the fact that I'm told in Paris there are 50,000 people in Paris alone who are all-supported by cinema as an industry. 50,000 people is an awful lot if you consider their children and their wives and their grandmothers and their Philippine cleaners, and their Brazilian babywatchers. A lot of people are being supported by French cinema, or let’s say, let me repeat that, by the French cinema industry. But why is it you make such lousy films? What's the point

of having 50,000 people all living off some concept of film industry and you still make lousy movies? Isn't that a paradox that makes you feel very very uncomfortable?

What am I giving you? I'm giving you more and more reasons to actually suggest we really do have to wave what we have described as cinema good-bye. Now of course this doesn't mean to say that its actual inherent technology is going to disappear overnight. I wouldn't be surprised if there are at least five surveillance cameras in this room. But certainly the cinema will die but the notion of the screen is going to be here to stay and develop and exist for a long long time.

When I gave you those statistics about Dutch audiences, of course, it doesn't mean to say necessarily that they are not watching some form of audiovisual experience but they're not watching it of course in places like this, they're essentially watching it primarily at home and in all sorts of other places which don't require architects to make black boxes like this one.

So if this is the general feeling and if we want to continue to remain to be very optimistic, I sincerely believe we have to do something about this. We have to see what the laptop generation is doing and wanting to do, speculate about ideas or notions of interactivity and multimedia, and adjust ourselves accordingly.

Now I suppose I have been arguing this for a very long time. In the early 1990s I almost gave up cinema completely because I felt it to be so deeply unsatisfactory to the impoverishment or the anti-ability for cinema to be able to sincerely provoke the human imagination.

I went away and made a whole series of exhibitions and I suppose this is really my introduction to the whole world of museology, which of course is an enormously blossoming current concern, I think there are more students wishing to become museum curators in northern Europe than in any other discipline, so it must be working in a very very powerful way to make it an attraction. So that, as it were, move away from the cinema came with the suggestion that cinema language itself was really truly extraordinary, and I sincerely mean that. But in a curious way, cinema was wasted on cinema. The tools we now have to make a product far exceed the uses to which we put them. Cinema is still basically, is it not, a nineteen century theatrical fourth class wall experience where the best definition of an actor is somebody who has been trained to pretend that they are not being watched. If we had the time, I suppose we have checked, made a check list here of all the external characteristics that put cinema in its place and I certainly in association with these exhibitions we had in the beginnings of the 1990s really realized that notions of cinema rather like *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* were also far more damaging from within.

My proposal again, and that sounds again like an easy checklist, is to describe four tyrannies in the sense we talked about already, or one of them. Let me say them again: I would say that the four tyrannies of text, the frame, the actor and the camera are destroying cinema from within. I have already of course talked about the notions of text, we need an English based cinema we need a text based cinema, we must change that, cinema must free itself away from notions of the bookshop.

The next one is the question of the frame – not for the moment, I suspect you are all looking at me, but in a minute you will be looking at this frame here, of course there are lots of frames in this room, parallelograms with four right angles, you have looked at all the plastic arts for the last six hundred years since the Renaissance through a frame. The frame I suppose was initially a painting device which separated itself from architecture. I suppose about 1400 there weren't many parallelograms in Western architecture. But then when painting did dissociate itself and stand up for its own, very rapidly the theatre copied notions painting, it ended up with a proscenium arch, you might be able to argue that there is a phenomenon called theatre in the round but 98 percent of theatre in Europe is again through a frame an artificial notion of a parallelogram and of course most of the ballet you see, most of the dance, certainly most of the opera, and of course all the cinema you see, and television has copied cinema, even pictures in books correspond to this notion of a fixed rectangle. We have to change that, we really do have to change that because as you look at me and as I look at you I don't see you through a frame, I see you through a very irregular organic sort of shape which really has no correspondence with this rigidity you know, and as I suppose all those technologies are moving towards notions of reality and virtual reality, surely these old man-made concepts are no longer particularly valid, so I think cinema has to lose the notion of a fixed frame.

The third tyranny is very difficult for people emotionally to overcome, I sincerely believe that cinema does not exist as a playground for Sharon Stone, but that's not Sharon Stone's fault, it's cinema's fault. We desperately underuse actors in the cinema, we use actors in the cinema the same way that Chekhov used them in the theatre. Let me come back to that definition: an actor is someone who has been trained to pretend they are not being watched. So I really seriously believe we have to

address the whole phenomenon of the use of what an actor does, what an actor is, what an actor stands for, as a link between what a director wants to say and what an audience wants to listen and see.

May be the fourth tyranny is even more difficult. There are two cameras looking at me, we have to get rid of the cameras. That sounds like a paradox, but the curious thing is that those cameras have no intelligence, they are just mechanical objects which will simply put down on celluloid or take what appears before their lens. However amazing the person operating the camera, however enormous amounts of imagination the director wants to put and communicate to the cameraman, to produce to you some sort of fascination and entertainment, the camera's lenses are a mechanical object which will only repeat mechanically what it is put in front of them. But that's not what cinema is about, is it? One of the main things that I think cinema did to painting was allow painting to get on with what we really really want to do. A lot of people said that cinema would destroy painting inalterably, but in fact it has totally and absolutely freed painting to move essentially to the enormous inspirations of the twentieth century. So in some curious way if we were to get rid of the camera then someday maybe cinema would explode into life in most extraordinary ways and would not be straight-jacketed with all these responsibilities we give it.

Let me give you two quotations: the two greatest visualists of the 20th century for me would be Picasso and Eisenstein. Picasso I think is self evident, his huge body of work and this ability to stand astride most of the years of the 20th century are in itself evidently worthwhile. Maybe not so many people know about Eisenstein, I sincerely believe he is the greatest film director we ever had I suppose in the pantheon of the filmic experience. I would put him up with Beethoven and Shakespeare, and I know precious few film directors you could pay such compliment to. Picasso said "I paint not what I see but what I think" and Eisenstein on his way to Mexico to make a film passed through California and met Walt Disney and Eisenstein this great great cinema man said that Walt Disney was the only true film maker. Now I am sure Eisenstein was not talking about Walt Disney's sentimentalism and I am sure he wasn't discussing his business sense and I am sure he wasn't even thinking about his anti-Semitism. He was using Walt Disney as the basic phenomenon of the idea of a totally created image in a sense, the cartoon.

And you can see the comparison between those two quotations. What we need to do now with cinema and all its future is to move towards the notion of really making it a phenomenon of creation, and not simply recreation like those cameras are doing. I have to be very careful with the word re-creation, because if you say it quickly in English it is almost like recreation and we are back to California again. So from without and from within, I am taking a long time here and I don't want to make you feel impatient but I hope you can see there are many many reasons why the notion that the cinema is dead is not such a crazy provocation but it certainly has got its roots in something very sensible. What are we going to do about this? Even if I can convince you that the phenomenon is broken and you and I have to try and remake it, the best way I can do that is to try and make a product and that will essentially be, I suppose, the essence of what I would like to talk to you or a similar audience about, tomorrow.

But there is a prologue to that, and there is an encouragement that the potentiality of the screen as opposed to the cinema is alive and well and has huge amounts of potential. I want to show you a whole series of clips, where we utilize and explore both these negativities and these positivities. I suggested to you that there are other people other than cinema managers who are certainly prepared to use the notion of projection and light and the throne audiovisual image as significant. What are my, I suppose, most supportive audiences, curiously, is Italy. A lot of these, not necessarily for reasons that are completely circumstantial have appeared in Italian context. In Milan there is a design museum that concentrates very largely, chauvinistically, I suppose patriotically on Italian design, and last year, about this time last year, they put on a big exhibition about Italian design since the end of WW2. They asked me to make a prologue, a prologue which in itself might demonstrate the possibilities of notions of design but also to make an accomplishment. I was very ambitious, I suggested that they not simply start in the year 1945 but let's go all the way back to 2000 years of Italian design, let's go all the way back to Pompei at the beginnings essentially of Roman painting in 1860. So they gave me all the room and all to make a projection situation and we made I suppose a sculptural entity of many screens, most of which were at least 18 metres high, so in a sense they would dwarf the notion of the human being there. But we also customized the screens to be not just these parallelogram shapes but to be able to find the way that the object projected on in some way was associated with the objects that we projected on it. If you think about it, a giraffe is an animal with a long, vertical neck. How do you portray a giraffe satisfactorily on that screen. If you think of a snake, which is basically a horizontal

item, how do you really successfully – and think of painting practice – organize your shapes and your aspect ratios if you are still stopped with a straightjacket? [...]

I imagine that you would also agree with me with enormous amounts of affection that the Italians tend to be a little bombastic, so we invented a triumphal arch, patting themselves on the back about notions of Italian design.

We also wanted to indicate a geographical spread and the notion that maybe the thin layer of air around the world indeed is remarkably thin so we made some of our screens incredibly long and narrow – think of the giraffe's neck – and some of them extremely wide – think about the horizontal snake – to represent the horizon of the world. Also since the very back of this sculptural projection area we wanted to indicate a big global overview so we took a slice of the world surface, one quarter of the globe.

Now have a look at this. Of course, it's a DVD, of course the scale is a problem, but imagine the circumstances of what I have just said and consider here is two thousand years of Italian design in seven and a half minutes:

[*The Obsessions of Italian Design*, 7'30 extract]

Cinema as archetypal multimedia phenomenon not related to you sitting in an audience, not particularly related to the notion of being in the dark, something to experience from the front, from the side, from the back, to be in a sense part of a sculptural architectural phenomenon but still retaining of course the fascinations of projecting light. The opportunity to continue with these things was also pursued in another Italian location, this time in Turin. There is, or has been, being performed, as opposed to being organized in the last ten years a huge palace called Venaria Reale, the royal hunting lodge. It exists outside the city of Turin and was one of the original palaces that belonged to the Piedmontese family of Savoy, ultimately with the unification of Italy they became kings of Italy indeed, but that's a long way in the future because the essence of this building is essentially a mid-seventeenth century phenomenon, it reached its apogee I suppose round about 1650 and continued until Napoleon came along and blew it all away in 1805. It is an extraordinary place, it has stables for about 800 horses and all the people who would be needed to serve those horses, and I think at those particular times it was considered that every horse had at least three minders, grooms, servants etc. The staff that was necessary to run this huge palace was so big that they had to build a separate village to house all its occupants. It has orangeries and parterres and huge gardens and five and a half kilometres of corridor and hundreds and hundreds of rooms.

You could see I am almost I suppose describing Versailles and of course that was what this Italian family wanted to do. They wanted to copy Louis XIV and create the absolute royal court. It was outrageously expensive of course and could not last for ever and in terms of social justice it was absolutely deplorable. There was an army I suppose of three million people supporting the privilege of about 500. But it had all the characteristics of a royal court and all the privileges, it was a certain sort of marriage market, it was a power broking affair, and as well as all these people spending in a sense their summer vacation away from the big city, hunting the wild life, it was also very necessarily a practicing court in miniature.

They had the architecture, they had the furniture, to a certain extent they had the paintings, but what makes these places really really alive is the people. I was brought in with the proposition that we would people the palaces. Now the ability to manoeuvre a programme projection is becoming very sophisticated. In terms of a scenario for this activity I can get a duchess to come from the back of the cinema, to greet her daughters coming in by that camera over there, who waive to their father over here, who pats a dog down here, who goes to the servant for a pair of new shoes here, who goes over there to negotiate a meeting with the cardinal, who runs across the room to waive to his mistress.

Now, the notion of that sort of activity which conceivably can be a scenario in a given architectural space would be impossible to continually organize every single day in the life of a museum. You know and I know there are all sorts of museum activities which very expensively employ actors or figurants to dress up and perform this sort of activity. But this programme is to last for the next twenty years. Let's consider now, even if it was humanly possible to be able to choreograph that sort of activity, how you would bring it to the performance. Thanks to the marriage I suppose of now post production cinema activity and a certain amount of notions of how to programme television, we can now do this. So, we went to a studio for about three weeks and we employed a whole series of very famous actors and actresses who delightedly engaged – we had Sophia Loren, we had Gina Lollobrigida, we had Ornella Muti and a whole series also of contemporary television personalities, and you know what Italian Berlusconi television is like – who came and gave their

services to make duchesses and grooms and cooks and page boys and stable people etc. so a whole pyramid of a society could be organized like this. I was actually given the responsibility of about five or six different areas of the palace in order to make – I can't exactly explain this interactive phenomenon, I suspect interaction and many of its activities – there would have been a way that every single visitor to the palace could be visited by a virtual reality figure, but if you could see it suddenly there would be a crowd of 200 people, how on earth could 200 people individually act with the figurants. Here is what we did in terms of the activity in the very front of the exhibition. We began to introduce characters which had job description but also try to develop them so they had a much larger three-dimensional sense of entity:

[*Peopling the Palaces at Venaria Reale*, 6' extract]

As you can imagine all these individual performances were separately filmed against black and then brought together in series of compositions. The basic idea is to make sure all the characters, as you could see here, represented in the lower screen, to be exactly the same size and scale as the visitors so there is a deliberate notion of confusion about who is inside the historical wall and who is outside it. You could see how the activities related to the beginning of the day's hunt, very very early in the morning, and the horses and the horse people are gathering together in order to make preparations for the day. With the figurants in the private apartments we did something else: we put a projector on the ceiling and we filmed all the occupants of the royal bed:

[*Peopling the Palaces at Venaria Reale*, 3' extract]

We did performing in various forms in theatres and opera houses with this notion of having to hold a cinematic control of the time frame. And of course there are various devices to do this, one of the ways I suppose which is also relevant to one of my interests, which is a desire to make non-narrative present tense cinema, so that every time you see *Spiderman*, every time you nostalgics want to see *Casablanca*, it will always be different. Now I don't know whether you really want to see your films exactly the same over and over again, but in terms of what is now possible with the new tools, I could with comparative ease remake a film to show it to you and it would look different every night of the week. Enormous problems for the so-called straight-jacketed notion of managers and cinema managers and certainly programming, but it would certainly be part and parcel I am sure of the cinema of the future. For the moment that is still quite primitive but take a look at this: the notion of trying to organize the idea of Godard's … if we could consider the idea that we could be able to change the pacing of film according to some other disciplines, like the second violin has suddenly decided to play very slowly or the percussion wants to pick up the speed, I am sure you are all familiar with notions of the VJ and the VJ phenomenon is not just to be made relevant to places like discotheques but is now making its space very largely filmed in established opera houses and in concert halls.

Last year in the centre of Spain, in Saragossa, they held a – I am trying to manoeuvre my machine and talk to you at the same time, I am going to slow up a bit, make sure I am happy with this before we do it again, here we go – the theme of the Saragossa Expo last year was water and preserving the notion of water on the planet. We were given the commission of making the departing opera. We made a production called *The Blue Planet* which was related to the business of organizing temporal cinemas so that we could change its place according to the performance of the actors and also according to the performance of the music which was played by a live band under the control of Goran Bregovic who wrote the music for the opera. The other interesting thing I think we did was also to introduce this notion of temporality in terms of second life. Who of you in the audience are second lifers? One tentative hand in the second row! Nobody else? Is this because you are all cultural snobs and refuse having anything to do with it? It is, some people are nodding. Shame on you. This really is a very important indication of the way that cinema is going to go. I suspect you go to the cinema for notions of being fascinated, emotionally disturbed, excited by notions of design and form as well as content. My god, you got all those in second life and if you were to make or want to experience a sinking of the Titanic the best in the cinema you can only appreciate it with your eyes and your ears but on second life I assure you you can have water in your lungs. The future of second life which is now practiced by over 120 million people in Europe and certainly by far more in the Far East and growing numbers in America is extraordinarily important for the future of how we look at our notions of cinema.

Take a look at this:

[*The Blue Planet*, 6' extract]

The characters on stage have control of their alter egos or their avatars on second life. So there is an interactivity between the reality of the stage and of course the associations of how the music

recreates that temporality with the notion of the activity which is also happening on the screens. Let me show you another similar sort of example for this. This is a version of a famous piece by Schönberg about the survivors of Warsaw which we did last summer in the opera house in Florence. This again is related to not fixed imagery but the ability to organize the space and time associated with the music being played, in this case by Zubin Mehta with the Florence Opera House in order to make a much greater census between what you see and what you hear. And here, this is not fixed imagery, but is organized by a VJ touch-screen:

[*The Survivor from Warsaw*, 9' extract]

Utilizing some of the same technology – and I think in this clip you will see some of it in actual practice – last year in the Albert Hall in London and also in the Richard Roger's new building of Lloyds in the city of London we put up a performance called *Writing on Water* which self-evidently is basically about nature appearance.

But it is important to consider that title because we wanted to try and make that particular metaphor very much apparent. It is a work as you could see indicating the age of the century of music work but it was associated again with this ability to organize the temporality of imagery. It lasted about half an hour but the music was done by David Lang, I don't know if you know that name, New York fourth generation minimalist working with the group called "Bang on a Can". The lyrics of the piece were related to a series of texts taken from I suppose three major watery literary works: Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Melville's *Moby Dick* and also Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, so in a sense in the true tradition, much of which is organized nowadays, the lyrics were an appropriation from classic English language texts. But you could see – in a minute what you will see of course is not a performance but a DVD record of a performance – two things: first of all again the desire to shake and change both the size and scale and the aspect ratio of those objects onto which the imagery is indeed projected, but also to be able to consider this possibility of manufacturing live imagery in association with the ability to make it temporal according to other disciplines. There is a way that I, operating on a touch-screen can change the pace of activity according to not only my subjectivity but the pace it is organized by the orchestra. And we also, and why not, with a title like *Writing on Water*, have a calligrapher who is writing the text at the same time as the orchestra is playing the music. So take a look at this:

[*Writing on Water*, 6' extract]

OK, you have seen the interaction of this sort of material associated with museums, theatres and opera houses. Now take a look at another sort of intervention which is related to the phenomenon of interactivity and indeed multimedia as regards painting. The year 2006 was the celebration certainly in Northern Europe, certainly in Holland, of Rembrandt's 600 birthday. There were exhibitions all over Holland. There were certainly exhibitions about Rembrandt's mother, there were exhibitions about Rembrandt's dog, I am sure there were exhibitions about the fleas on the back of Rembrandt's dog. So you can see the whole affair was very obsessive. I am a Dutch citizen now, I live in Amsterdam so the equivocations of course in some ways came in my direction. Rembrandt's most famous painting as you probably know is *The Nightwatch*, painted in 1642, and it hangs in the very centre of the Rijksmuseum in the national collection in Amsterdam. I have an attic in my house which I use as a studio and when I look out of the window I can see the towers of the Rijksmuseum. I tell you all this because there is a way I use the Rijksmuseum I suppose rather like my front room. I have a pass in my pocket which allows me to go there practically 24 hours a day because the museum is often open at night. So when the Rijksmuseum asked me if I would like to make some sort of installation vis-à-vis this extraordinarily valuable uninsurable painting of course I leapt at the chance. Now if you know nothing at all about Rembrandt, there is a general feeling that, and I think I mentioned it already this evening, he is one of the greatest exponents of making an examination of the world under conditions of artificial light. And what is my business, my business again, is some notion of the cinema and cinema could be explained as being the manipulation of artificial light. So in their wisdom or their foolishness the Rijksmuseum put me and Rembrandt together in association with *The Nightwatch*. We had the audacity to actually change the circumstances, the colouring, the shadows, the manipulation of light on the original painting itself. What I am going to show you of course again is a debased DVD, a record if you like, of the actual event or installation. But when you watch it, realize that this is happening on the original, singular totally unique painting by Rembrandt, which certainly the Dutch regard as their most important painting of the years of the Golden Age. I suppose artistic journalists have considered the possibility that the most celebrated a painting in the Western world may be *Mona Lisa*, the second would probably be Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, the third would probably be

Michelangelo's ceiling in the Sistine Chapel, and the fourth would be indeed Rembrandt's painting of *The Nightwatch*.

The exhibition installation was available to the general public for about four months and was visited by about six thousand people every day, so a great many people saw it. To get it, I suppose, into a position where I could make comparisons between notions of cinema and painting, we did a series of things with it which supposedly you are not supposed to do – again a question which always fascinates me about temporality, and we gave the painting a soundtrack. Have a look at this:

[*The Nightwatch*, 4' extract]

You can catch the plane tomorrow and of course the painting is totally totally unharmed although we drowned it, and we burnt it, and if you were very observant we also covered it in blood. I don't know if you know but the current insignia of Amsterdam is three crosses. I suppose they stand for the three crosses of St Anthony, and you pray to St Anthony to preserve Amsterdam against fire, it's a medieval city, it was very largely made with wood, against flood, and I am sure everybody knows that most of Holland is built below seawater, and against the plague – that's of course a little more difficult to grasp because most people in 1642 never realized that the flea on the back of the black rat was actively responsible for spreading plague all along the Atlantic sea border. So we utilized those three notions again, flood, the fire and the flea to make I suppose a narrative import for this particular usage of this painting. I suppose since it's a painting which would never be moved from its sight in the Rijksmuseum this projection of course was made very much for the people of Amsterdam whom I suspect will have understood all those references. As well as then being very successful for three months of general public, it was an exercise which was also looked at by many gallery intendance and collections all over Europe and, as you could see from the screen, the next one we tackled which took us most of last summer was this famous painting by Da Vinci *The Last Supper*, once upon a time of course tackled by Dan Brown in the *Da Vinci Code*. The original painting is in a terrible state. Da Vinci used all sorts of experimental activities on the plaster wall, technically it is not really a fresco, but is a watercolour painting on plaster. And because of this experimentation the painting has been falling off the wall ever since. The painting is protected by dust doors and when you go to visit you have to have your clothing hoovered down to get rid of so called excess dust. So the chance of us actually projecting a light on the real original was highly circumstantial for the activities of very large groups of Italian art historians. But we pursued and pursued and we eventually had to go to the very top and get the signature of Mr Berlusconi himself but eventually it worked.

So here is our examination then, a projected light bringing very contemporary computer programming to organize the architectural spaces of this painting. If the Rembrandt was very much about light and chiaroscuro, the painting by Da Vinci of *The Last Supper* is very much about space. Two-dimensional space organized in a three-dimensional room, in one of these rare occurrences where the painting is actually painted in situ and is still there. There are many many many things to say of course about this painting, because it has been looked at and examined for over four hundred years. If you take – I don't want to preclude too much and force you to look in areas you might not wish to – but the certain ways in which we exaggerated and emphasized the compositional nature of the painting – for example we isolated the hands, which Da Vinci proponents have suggested are actually created as musical notes on a manuscript stave, to reduce the piece of music which we used in a commission so that the music which runs along with this is related if you like to the actual devices used in the painting by Da Vinci.

There is another proposition: there are many objects on the table, and when put together they diagrammatically make a cosmography which actually anticipates by three hundred and fifty years the evidence of the planet Pluto in the solar system. We also of course made many many references to many many other sorts of painting, a lot of them very contemporary, and we were also curious about the ways in which this painting itself is approached, obviously made by the intellectual Da Vinci but as a very high emotional devotional pilgrimage activity which of course has served to deeply move many people over many many many years. So we examined its religiosity and the uses to which it is put, as well as its piety.

Here it is:

[*The Last Supper*, 7' extract]

We have a programme of nine classic paintings, we will see if we can create this sort of cinema painting examination. Right back to the beginning of our conversation tonight there have only been a 140 years of cinema but there has been over 8000 years of Western painting. I believe that very largely huge amounts of cinema activity would benefit enormously from the examination of our incredible

visual heritage and in order to steadily make inroads into I suppose these crossover discussions, we have indeed of course tackled this painting, and we have indeed tackled this painting, but this year, and indeed we are already working on it very hard we are tackling Veronese's painting of the *Marriage at Cana*, which many people believe – and indeed Veronese was taken in front of the Inquisition – is in fact the marriage of Christ. The original was stolen by your Napoleon from Venice and now exist in Le Louvre, so we are making a magnificent same scale clone which will be set up in the place, the location where the painting was originally painted in Venice, and indeed, we will begin this exposition at the opening of the Venice Biennale this year and close on the last night of the Venice film festival if only to make correspondences between the necessary relationships which surely ought to exist between painting and cinema. Then we move on to this very famous painting by Velazquez which is in the Prado, extraordinary painting about symmetry and harmony and notions I suppose of metaphorical diplomacy and absolutism. Then we will tackle this famous painting by Picasso which should really be in this country north of Spain, its association with the Guggenheim, but unfortunately for political reasons resides still in Madrid in the Reina Sofia. Then we will tackle probably since it is part of your French heritage this very famous version of the water-lilies by Monet, in the Orangerie at the Tuileries Gardens in Paris. We will then tackle this Seurat in Chicago, this Jackson Pollock in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and, for me, crème de la crème, we will try our best to create the diplomacy to make an exposition of this extraordinary painting, and I say that as a personal fundamentalist atheist, it is still an extraordinary painting, about beginnings and ends, failures and successes, and in some ways the epitome of notions of civilization, which I am sure you know, is in the Vatican in Rome. Thank you.

Saturday, February 14, 2009

I think it is important that every creator should try to use his own technology. One of my favourite painters, Vermeer, used a sort of *camera oscura*, and as he used] this fantastic object, he had to view the objects upside down and in black and white, so even despite a lack of development in certain senses when you compare the magnificence of lenses now, it is a perfect example of a prime creator using the technology of his age.

The technology of our age is very very familiar to all laptop users and it is imperative that we should push, shove, pull the whole concept of the visual literacy of cinema into a television age which uses all these extraordinary tools.

I will offer you I suppose a sort of part provocation: if you watch four minutes of CNN tonight you will probably see eight lines of hypertext, five will probably be moving, up in the top right hand corner where you'll have a series of logos that you never hesitate changing, you'll have talking heads and script screens, you'll have e-patterns, you'll have animated diagrams, you'll have cloud patterns, you'll have a huge host of various forms of information coming at you very very fast. It is almost impossible to imagine that that heat of visual and oral communication exists anywhere at all in cinema. I am not going to talk necessarily about the content, or even maybe the particular, I suppose, political or social aspect of that particular television channel, but the language is extraordinary. And that's only a small bite of the cherry.

For those of you who were here last night, you could see all the various ways that I personally am hoping to manipulate and organise the uses of modern technology and often of course not existing in places like this at all, but taking the brilliant cinematic language out of the cinemas, and making it used and useful in the world in entirely different sorts of ways. The anxieties that then I would have, and though you can see really when I say I am not that desperately anxious about the death of cinema, I would say: good riddance, let's move on, let's break away, from that particular organization with very limited appeal and find new ways in a sense to put new wine in new bottles. Human beings though are desperately cautious and move very slowly and all the history of cinema really has been a very very slow and I suppose reactionary progress – they say that cinema only invented two things, one I think very profound which is the *montage* notion invented very largely by the Russians and primarily by Eisenstein, and that other rather curious thing which I suppose is an American idea in the cinema, it invented the notion of the glance. But Good Lord, if you look at a Roman portraiture of AD 60, you will see the concept of the glance in full swing, it's two thousand years before cinema was even thought about or let alone invented.

So the actual activities in terms of language and language that the cinema has given us I think are remarkably few on the ground. I will actually say provocatively that maybe Scorcese makes the same films as Griffith. OK, the publicity material and the publicity engines are a thousand times more sophisticated and indeed of course the actual technology is amazingly more sophisticated, but in terms

of narrative content beginnings middles and ends, in terms of conceptual notions of negativity to positivity, to concerns about the psychological organization of characters, and certainly as regards the conceptual Christian notion of redemption, the cinema has hardly ever changed. And I could certainly talk about notions of redemption with Scorcese, who seems to be doing the same goddamn film over and over and over again.

It's curious, isn't it, he is a man who still believes in good and evil. Do any of you still believe in good and evil? Or do you ever believe in good and evil in the cinema? Now there's a thing. So, against then this slow motion of activity, and this desire to participate in a very contemporary world, there are lots of opportunities which I think both audiences and filmmakers should seize.

I ran briefly last night through a whole series of reasons why I believe the cinema is not exactly dead but is certainly dying on its feet, those reasons were of course social and political but they were also aesthetic. And I talked about what I would regard as the four interior tyrannies that are destroying the notion of a real radicalisation of cinema. For those of you who indeed were here yesterday let me remind you what those four tyrannies were:

the tyranny of text, cinema should not be an adjunct of the bookshelf, and it is

the tyranny of the frame, you and I do not see the world through a frame, so why should cinema,

the tyranny of the actor or the actress, which is rarely ever the actor or the actress's fault, it is the way in which the cinema as a formulation uses the services of an actor

And probably the most paradoxical of all: the tyranny of the camera. The camera is a mechanical instrument that offers nothing apart from mimicry and we are not, are we, interested in mimetic cinema, we are interested in the cinema of de-creation.

OK, if I continue then to be negative, it is not in the service of *my* imagination and it is probably not in the service of yours, so it became very very necessary for me to try and make something which will encompass my anxieties and also hopefully promote certainly a path for me to go forward to see and imagine how cinema might develop.

But I need first of all to give you just a little bit of back story. So the BFI, the British Film Institute, who have supported my activity for a long time, produced a series of DVDs on all my early work, that is all the work I made before *The Draughtsman's Contract*. And this has been around now, it is something you might know, for some time, so quite lazily now I will just show you a piece of the menu agenda from some of those DVDs as an introduction about what we are going to talk about tonight.

Fascinated by Encyclopaedias, dictionaries, directories, fulfilling I suppose that inevitable human desire to try and put all things in one place, contriving a programme that united the angels in their heavens to the stones on the road – a mocking ambition, but many scientists and indeed many artists have continuously over the last two thousand years tried very hard to do that very thing.

And here is another mocking example, a film called *The Falls*. It's divided up into 92 sections, 92 biographies, each corresponding to the particular experiences of one person. And those people are all being afflicted by a phenomenon called the VUE, the violent unknown event. But the film in some ways is an attempt to try and understand what this VUE is. Many theories are put forward because in some ways also this film is also about 92 different ways to envisage the end of the world and also maybe, very self-reflexively, 92 different ways from which to make a film. A general consensus of opinion when you view this 3 ½ hour film is to consider that somehow ornithology of birds or even more importantly notions of death by gravity and a dream of flying are responsible for having created this phenomenon. It is though man in his hubris, in his desire to fight the gods, in his overweening ambition to fly, has made such a challenge that it has backfired and hit an enormous number of people in the community of the world so that many people are afflicted by phenomena that somehow are much more to do with birds than to do with man.

[*The Falls*, 2' extract]

Since there is such a lot of material here, the wide scope of considerations of so many different aspects of the human endeavour of course are included.

The actual structure, and the structure is extremely obvious, is very much to do with dictionary procedure because all the characters, all 92 of them very simply have their surnames beginning with the letters F.A.L.L and it doesn't require huge amounts of imagination to make a reference here to the fall of man.

So the desire then to… and I think of that particular phrase that Dante used about the manufacture of the *Divine Comedy*… to "unite the angels in their heaven to the stones on the road"

takes the most extreme and fanciful metaphorical, metaphysical subject matter to the most prosaic in order to create the ultimate ultimate catalogue.

We now live in the information age: at the push of a few buttons, there is practically nothing in the world we cannot connect with and hopefully find useful information about. And I sincerely believe that all our art forms are becoming very much aware of this enormous attribute and excitement. And I would certainly like to make films for the information age.

Now that sets up all sorts of phenomenon which I feel are extremely interesting. It needs an examination for example about our attitudes towards history. I believe that there is no such thing as history, there are only historians. And I believe that the way we would tackle history is so subjective that somebody like Walter Scott writing the *Ivanhoe* novels in the 19th century and somebody like Gibbon writing the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and somebody like Ridley Scott making *Gladiator* all, in some curious way, have an equal voice. Their purposes and their vested interest are all different, but in some curious way not one is any more pure as another when notion of history is considered. Gibbon writing about the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was really not talking about the Roman Empire at all, but was talking about the British Empire. And was sending out warning signals to all thinkers and chatterers and political apologists to be certain to send a notion of our corruption from within and without as he regarded the future of how the British Empire would develop. I think Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*, a member almost of a Coliseum sub genre of cinema – there had been so many films about this particular attitude – suddenly struck something which was very relevant to the time of its making about eight years ago which was full of a new sort of 21st century irony, if you like a post modernist irony which was completely different from the way that *Spartacus* was made, or *Ben Hur* was made or indeed all those early Roman Coliseum movies like *Tiberia* for example.

So there was a way in which though many people would have imagined that *Gladiator* was sheerly there for your enjoyment, what was also happening had all sorts of other profundities which were all very interesting indeed. One of my favourite literary heroes would be Borges. Way back in 1947-1948 he wrote two short stories. One short story suggested that it would be necessary to make a man the same scale as the world, which seems like an extraordinary impossibility and also of course highly problematical – where on earth, on what table could you possibly lay out a man that were the same size as the world, the only place you could put it would be on the world itself which of course sounds remarkably counterproductive. It also sounds of course, speaking of 1946, even speaking of 1956 even 1966 even 1976, an extraordinary piece of fantastical science fiction… even though that's not true because in the year 2006 we all have Google Earth – in a sense, it exactly typifies exactly what Borges was predicting in 1947. So we've arrived, we've arrived already in a manifestation of that piece of fantasy.

Borges also suggested that a true history of the world has to be a history of every single one of its members, living or dead. That proposes again, back in 1946, absolutely incredible impossibilities, but now we've seen 15 years of new genetic studies and conceivably it's not at all impossible to imagine we can resurrect huge thousands if not millions of people by the examination and collection of their DNA and not necessarily of their DNA but the DNA of their successors. So it might very well be possible not only to recreate completely and entirely Marilyn Monroe and Napoleon and Frederic Barbarossa and the Emperor Claudius but everybody else as well. So you can see how very very rapidly these profound and ambitious science-fiction ideas suddenly have a real glimmer of practicality. But think of those two big ambitions, and I incredibly vaingloriously of course think along the same lines, to make a product that is associated with that sort of thinking. The result of all this was a large project we've been making for the last five years and it certainly hasn't gone beyond closure and it will still continue and there are people still working all over the world, is a project called *The Tulse Luper Suitcases*.

Just before I progress to tell you more about the ambitions of this project, let's backtrack again because I think it is very important to look at notions of cinematic encyclopaedic activity, let me just entertain you with the introduction and the first couples of biographies indeed of this film which was made in 1982 called *The Falls*:

[*The Falls*, 5' extract]

OK, that's enough of that. You've just seen two biographies and there are 90 more to go and the film is nearly 3 1/2 hours' long. They chose to give you what is happening here and the notions of methodology, the deep ideas of the intransience of information, the equal balance between what is true or what is false or what is hearsay, what is apocryphal, a whole embrace not only of the concerns from

the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* all the way to *Wikipedia*, with all the built-in faults about the garnering and the gathering of information. I always remember the story of Virginia Woolf's father who at the tender age of 24 set out to write a ten-volume work about the biographies of celebrated Englishmen. He lived till he was 89, but he had only got up to the letter K. So the whole mocking insistence, if you are indeed going to build encyclopaedias, this built-in notion about the inevitable failure to make these works according to the ambition of completeness that you want to. So I suppose my attitude towards that would be to build in the irony as the actual procedure continued. The other methodologies are obviously very self-evident, we have a very very simple alphabetical organisation of characters which is familiar from every dictionary of the world and also to use numerical systems.

I think that cinema is a very poor narrative medium, cinema knows this, that's why it is always going back to the bookshelf, so it is often – I suppose I have to bring in my painting background here – a necessity for me to see if I can always find non narrative structures and strategies in order to organise the information.

John Cage, who along with Borges is another very important hero, cultural hero for me, suggested that if you introduce more than twenty per cent of novelty into any art work, watch out, or you'll lose eighty per cent of your audience. And most people, do they not, and I include you, go to the cinema to be told a story. That's why we have ended up with a cinema which is basically only bed time stories for adults.

So if I'm going to chuck away, if I'm going to throw away, if I'm going to give you the limit of the notion of narrativity in the cinema, I'm really going to have to strongly re-educate you not wish to go to the cinema to be told bedtime stories.

Isn't it also extraordinary that most people see their cinema indeed just before they go to sleep? It doesn't sound very encouraging does it? You know, is cinema a bromide? Is it a cup of cocoa to lull you into a sensation of peace and complicity so you don't have to ... – like Brecht famously said, he said that those people go to the theatre – and we can read the cinema for that – and leave their brains with the hatchet girl. Well, if you are preparing to go to sleep immediately after you've got to the cinema in the evening maybe you can understand why he would be so vociferous in such a statement.

Let me make another quotation which I suppose is also quite French. There are two Renoirs aren't there, Renoir father and Renoir son. And the son is supposedly the film maker to have asked his father the painter that he certainly and definitively wanted to become a film maker but he was a bit frightened that he had nothing to say. And his father said: "Don't worry about that at all, you just engage in the language and put all your energies into it, and you'll soon find something to say. And don't forget that all artists basically have only a very very few things to say, and they say them repeatedly".

So let's say that most artists only have two or three ideas, and it stands them in perfect equanimity for however long they are prepared to live. And that really is very positive because most people don't have any ideas at all – of which, of course, there is an indication here of this film, *The Falls*, made in 1982, in a curious way has been both the basis and the standard and the germs and ashes of all the movies that I've made since.

All the movies I have made in some curious way are encyclopaedic or catalogue or listing movies. I don't know whether you've seen some of these titles: *The Draughtsman's Contract* is a film about thirteen drawings and they are itemized one to thirteen. *The Belly of an Architect* is about eight architectural periods of classicism in their own. The idea of *Zed and Two Noughts* is an examination of eight evolutionary periods as suggested by the 1859 *Origin of Species* by Darwin. What else can we talk about… let's take, I suppose, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* is really just a menu list in a first-class restaurant somewhere in the Western world with the dishes itemized one after the other.

So you can see my procedures are not at all different from these very early productions and of course I am leading up now to say of course that this huge work called the *Tulse Luper Suitcases* works exactly on the same presentiments. But if I am going to make a work for the information age, that has to occupy me in the significant, it has to have a very very wide geographical spread, and a very very wide historical spread. Well, there is a limit indeed to these things, but I chose I suppose, like all artists, to make it deeply autobiographical. I was born in 1942, I certainly wasn't born in 1911 when this film begins, but the major centre of the cinema covers the centre of the twentieth century, what I'd call the years of uranium.

Now, again, you probably know that the atomic number of uranium is 92. There was certainly an indication that that was indeed the case, in the association with the clip of the film that I have just shown you. You can see I am struggling here to find my place in my scheme of things on my laptop cinema… But we will get there and indeed here we are.

So I needed then a scheme, an organisation which was essentially non narrative but had a universal significance. The element uranium, which ultimately stands for nuclear fission and certainly ultimately ends up with the atomic bomb in the early days of, I suppose, atomic history, was discovered for the first time in the Western world in 1911 in Moab, in Utah, so my hero necessarily has to begin his life there. But I think we could say that the essence of a chapter of post-history of uranium would be from Hiroshima to the coming down of the Berlin wall, so we are talking of 1945 to 1989. So really, in this concern for my notion of creating schemes and strategies I have here a profound opportunity, a deeply metaphorical number, 92: we can create the whole mass of future civilisation but watch out, also we can entirely destroy it.

If I am born in 1942 I could of course regard myself as a uranium baby. I came of age, I was 21 in 1963, and that was the time when all young people indeed were extremely agitated about nuclear power, its advantages and disadvantages, it was the time of the Vietnam War and certainly all over Europe young people were marching against the bomb.

Today's young people will have different concerns: primarily the pollution of the planet, maybe overpopulation, destruction of the ecology systems of the world. But I regarded certainly then – it was part I suppose of the reasons for my social and political development – the notion of nuclear power has not gone away. I suspect all the activities of the late president Bush would also be relevant to that in association with him thinking he was perfecting or not perfecting in terms of his activities in the Middle East.

Fossil fuels are about to run out, I think the worst case scenario is fifteen years, all the different forms of alternative energy really are not going to satisfy, so the power is far too young in its infancy to be satisfactorily applicable in twenty five years or indeed in fifteen, and if you read your newspapers certainly nuclear energy is on its way back again and we are going to have to readdress ourselves to all those anxieties and all that notion of which we for at least twenty five years now have tried to tidily push underneath the carpet.

So if the presentiment of a young man in 1963 feels the significance of uranium and the atomic number 92 would be particular relevant to the exact middle of the twentieth century, I would argue with you it's all coming back again, so to create a pyramidal structure upon these ideas is as relevant now as it was then.

The Tulse Luper Suitcases - don't worry too much for the moment about the idea of Tulse Luper but do worry about suitcases. On this laptop in front of me, you know how the AppleMac organizes its information in folders which in all sense and purposes are suitcases. Actually if you go to Nice airport tonight and you go to the baggage departure lounge and you look at the carrousel you will probably find very very few "suitcases" on it. We have different means now of purveying our luggage around the world but the notion of the suitcase certainly through a middle period of the twentieth century was very significant. I do not have a piece of wood to knock on here, but you know that infamous, three strikes on your front door at twelve o'clock in the morning, in comes the representative of some totalitarian system and says: "you have three hours to pack a suitcase to God knows where. What on earth are you going to put in that suitcase?" Experience not only of German fascism, but Soviet totalitarianism. Are you simply going to put in a clean pair of pyjamas, and a new toothbrush? Are you going to put in your memories, one of the things that most people rush to gather is all the photographic evidence of their life, their children, their families, so that somehow encapsulates particular thesaurus of treasure that they do not wish to be without.

But suppose that you want to put in your mother's love letters, suppose you want to put in your own personal collection of pornography, your dinky toys, your Barbie dolls, even your collections of VHSs or your notion of vinyl records, what is it, what do you feel significant, to be able to represent you in a sense in one packed suitcase on a journey, you don't know where you are going, if you'll ever come back, or indeed if it has any purposes which are in any way positive to you.

Well, the *Tulse Luper Suitcases*, we pack 92 suitcases in this production, I call it a production because it's not just a film, because I am looking for information age notions of the future of cinema, I don't much want to make this film a cutting edge material, we certainly didn't shoot it on celluloid, celluloid already is an old fashioned medium for the purveyance of visual literacy, it is certainly all shot on tape, when we started making this film in 2001 we used 2KHD but now it is 4KHD and the

quality of the imagery is absolutely extraordinary and can be made to exist in perpetuity. There is a way that imagery unlike celluloid will never decay. And if there is a way which we move on to something which is even more superior to 4KHD, as I am sure we will, it will be easily transferable. My challenge is that I am going to pack every single suitcase for you and not only all of you in this audience spot, remember the Borges story, everybody in the world, living or dead. My challenge to you is that I have left nothing out. So angels in their heaven and stones on the road and everything in between is packed into this definitive collection of 92 suitcases.

Now if again I want to make a product for now, 2001, 2002, to 2009, and the story goes on, there is not much point in making it essentially for the cinema but there is a way of course that my producer and I can still find funds to make films within the cinema performance.

But we need to make it relevant to the laptop generation, so certainly we are going to make a whole series of television programmes, certainly we are going to make a web site, certainly we are going to make a library of books, and certainly we are going to find the way to make it manifest with a whole series of DVDs. We are planning indeed 92 DVDs, one for each suitcase. Now I don't want to waste enormous amounts of audience time in the cinema, packing and unpacking suitcases on this screen. So you will be able to pack and unpack all these suitcases on each of the 92 DVDs, and that of course will be interactive so you can interfere and you can pack and repack in all sorts of different orders which might be relevant to you.

The amounts of information again, think of those two Borges stories about geography and history, are going to be immense, and I have to say to you that we did indeed spend three and a half years making the film and it was a total disaster in the cinema: too much information, huge amounts of multiple stories when most cinema audiences are used to singular stories basically about a few characters and primarily about one character, it has a rush, and a push and a swelling of information which is almost impossible to be able to comprehend in any way that you would normally comprehend a narrative movie in the cinema.

Let me give you a taste of some of this by showing you the first episode of *The Tulse Luper Suitcases*:

[*The Tulse Luper Suitcases*, 4' extract]

And it goes on like that for another 3 1/2hours.

But we made a comparison about half an hour ago that when you sit down and watch CNN and you have that huge amount of information rushing at you, you can make it comprehensive, you can have a heart attack if you sit on the settee, you can sort out what you need and what you want without necessarily completely denying all the peripheral information. So I am sure with that sort of training it is quite possible to imagine that that rush of information can be understood and comprehended within the aegis of the notion of feature film as well.

But as I said, there is a way that the complexity needs to be learnt. Go back again to that John Cage notion: "if you introduce more than twenty per cent of novelty into an artwork, watch out, you will lose 80% of your audience", he added a corollary: he said "for fifteen years", so he is implying – and imagine the music of course of John Cage which I am sure a lot of you are familiar with and if you are not familiar with it you're certainly associated with many of the ideas, some of these ideas now have become common practice in terms of cultural activity.

I don't know, have any of you seen *George* recently? This is a film that was made a long time ago, longer than 15 years, is anybody any more extraordinarily intimidated by that chart spinning joy, haven't we learnt the suspension of belief relative to the notions of technology of that film, we have learnt very very quickly to be able to break down all the notions of illusionism which seem to have excited and fascinated so many people all over the world.

What members in the audience have seen the first series of *Star Wars* and have seen the latter end of *Star Wars*, and isn't the latter end the more recent recapitulation of *Star Wars* incredibly disappointing compared to what it was to begin with.

And isn't this the result of the John Cagean notion that you have learnt very very quickly to catch up. But again, and I don't want to be in any way condescending, and it is particularly relevant I suppose in the certain painting culture of this particular city, most people in the world are just about caught up with post impressionism, and when faced with the barrier of cubism, find it very very difficult to jump their hurdle into the enormous excitements of 20th century painting. And that's not 15 years ago, it's about 150 years ago. So I sometimes think that maybe John Cage in certain ways was being incredibly optimistic.

There is a way I suppose the obligation of cultural activity indeed is to try and lead you by the nose to show and offer you new windows, new perspectives, new dorms, and the possibility of opening, in association with all the brand new tools we've got to even more greater and greater fascinations and capacities to empower your imagination.

So, if we can primarily engender this product, and I say we, as I am very largely associated here with a brilliant Dutch producer who finds all the wherewithall to make all these things happen, then I suppose we need to be certain of spreading the load, and one of the most fast growing and still very successful notions of the post-visual post-digital age is the interactive video game. And we also became involved in this and although I could say that though the films became great film festival specialists around the world they were almost a total disaster in your corner street cinema. But the interactive video games were an enormous success. We had something like a 160,000 hits a day.

Here is a trailer for that activity:

[*The Tulse Luper Suitcases*, 5' extract]

We created a time situation of 3 years to solve indeed 92 very complicated puzzles to be able to interchange information as indeed these video games work and to award the winner with a trip around the world to all those places with his or her partner that Tulse Luper visited. It took about seven months for the winner to go indeed all round the world because there are associated ventures of Tulse Luper in many places in America, in South America, all across central Europe and eastern Europe and then to the Far East, Macao, Honk-Kong, Manchuria and even Australia. The second prize was supposed to be a night with Isabella Rossellini, but it has not been reclaimed.

You can see, from the short episode of a film, and indeed the enormous amounts of material that are represented and suggested in terms of that trailer and also track your mind back to the methodology of *The Falls*, which like a series of Chinese boxes would tell you a tale within a tale within a tale and you could imagine the huge amounts of information that are contained in this. And it is no surprise of course even though maybe I have to wait another John Cagean 15 years for all you audiences to catch on, that the ability in notions of the video interactivity, how you can freeze and you can rewind and you can unpick and there are a lot of frames on frames on frames and when we manufacture the DVD you'll be able to take the frames off and examine what is underneath and re-cogitate and reorganize the information in a very contemporary interactive way.

Just to give you some idea about the enormity of information, Suitcase 46 – 2x46 makes 92, so it is right in the centre of the project and remember this is a project about the history of uranium in the 20th century which necessarily would involve all the activities very largely of the Second World War, think of dates 1945 to 1989 – Suitcase 46 contains ninety-two objects indeed. 92 on 92 on 92, every single suitcase contains either 92 ideas, 92 objects, 92 concepts. So Suitcase 46 contains 92 gold bars, these are gold bars retreaded down by the Third Reich from all its victims all over Europe from Dublin to Bagdad, from to Oslo to Casablanca. Hundreds and thousands and millions of people who were associated with the terror of the notions of the Third Reich, not just associated with Germany but certainly with all the Eastern European countries, for example Hungary, we don't need to necessarily underline all that activity again but certainly to indicate that the purveyance of the notion of wealth I suppose before we dropped - before the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, he or she who possessed gold possessed enormous amounts of power and maybe 1945 is a changing line – he or she who possessed uranium after that time in a sense, there was a new exchange of notions of a power base. So the idea of making the centre of the product Suitcase 46 to contain gold as opposed to the coming uranium has its own obviously metaphorical significance.

Each gold bar then represents the gold stolen, purveyed, coerced, taken, however you want to play it, from the Third Reich's victims. So you might get one gold bar to be retreaded from all the gold trinkets that associate with Anne Frank's family in Amsterdam. You might even get another gold bar which is reformulated from all the wedding rings taken from Polish widows in 1940 when the Germans crossed the Polish border. Another gold bar might be retreaded from all the associated gold coins in a collection of Russian bankers in Rostov. So the embrace in a sense is that each gold bar represents an extraordinary story in its own line, if you like a feature-length film. So we could say there are 92 feature-length films alone in Suitcase 46 and there are another 91 suitcases.

Let me show you an example, maybe relative to this notion of Suitcase 46. I told you that there was a library. We still haven't completed it yet, but it will end up of course with 92 books in it, and we have written certainly one of them, which is related to all the stories of the 92 gold bars in Suitcase 46. There is another piece of opportunism here which I suppose is relative to what a lot of the film says. With the coming down of the Berlin wall, there was an enormous collapse in the cartoon industries of

all the ex-East European countries. You know, places likes Czechoslovakia and Hungary and Poland had enormous amounts of animation technology, rather primitive concerning ourselves with our position now with new tools, but these abilities of cartoonists to make extraordinary films about dancing matchsticks and manoeuvring serviettes and all the common materials that they might find on the dining table, to a very great body of work. Now all of these people after 1989 went out of work. There was no way again that their activities with matchsticks and table napkins were in any way going to impinge in the capitalistic world, their subsidies totally collapsed.

We got to know by making various, multiple co-productions in Europe a great many of these cartoonists, but especially in Budapest and here is a collaboration between myself and a Hungarian animator who is learning the tricks of all the new technologies, a man called Istvan Horkay, and it is indeed an attempt also – or another huge area of activity which fascinates me again is the true position of narrative. How do you explore narrative, how do you dramatize narrative or on the other hand, how do you not dramatize narrative?

I always think probably the best way of telling stories is to tell bedtime stories to children. You have a totally committed audience but you obviously have to still use discipline to make sure that they are completely fascinated and entertained.

So when you look at this, it is not only relative to the business of these gold bars in suitcase 46, it is relative to the actual filmic cinematic way of how to tell a story.

[*The Tulse Luper Suitcases*, 8' extract]

OK, you can again see the methodology and that is only of course one story and we are hard at work making all 92. I think we've done a tenth now and you can see the various ways that they can of course be marketed, not of course shown in places like this, but promoted on various forms of DVD and all DVD successors. So, the idea of the film, let me repeat, as being a manifest useful object in the cinema has indeed not been successful and I have a sneaking happenence about that to say: "ah ah… that proves a whole series of propositions which I am very much keen to continue to fascinate". And it is going to be very much related to all cinema's relatives, cousins as all forms of visual literacy which are going to go carrying on the banner into an association for some proto meta cinema of the future.

One of the other things which we have now become engaged in although it was never particularly predicted was the whole phenomenon of the VJ: video jocking: to do with pictures what DJs for at least 25 years have been doing with sound. We have indeed to much my great surprise had enormous success with this activity and we have had now I suppose about maybe 50 VJ shows around the world and we have a calendar of about another 20 or 30 already lined up for the next 18 months. And I am sure you are familiar with the activity if only by hearing about it as opposed to actually experiencing it. It is a new sort of art which is related of course primarily with the ideas of the discotheque but we have taken these VJ shows into all sorts of extraordinary places.

Let me show you some stills.

We have taken it as you can see here to Milan, those towers in the back and these extraordinary towers by Anselm Kiefer who just accidentally happened to be there but gave us the most magnificent backdrop.

Here is again just outside Milan.

Here is in Cracow, in Poland, where we did it in the city square on front of about 5000 people.

Here is in Bari in Italy where again we had 27 screens arranged as you can see with a rather interesting piece of rigging.

Here in Florence in open air, a popular festival with 3000 spectators.

Here in Italy in an old Greek theatre.

Here maybe more conventionally in a small opera house in Sevilla, Spain

Here in a fashionable discotheque in Amsterdam called "Club 11".

Here in the biggest screen in Europe, as of course the legend says, an Imax theatre on the South Bank in London.

Here in Poggibonsi in Italy again, in a concert hall.

Here again in the Gas Gallery in Moscow in Russia.

The activity again for those of you who were here yesterday is related to a purpose-built unique touch-screen where I can push and pull as many as 3000 loops onto as many screens as the o under these circumstances is to make a 360 degree band so let's say the screens are above your head and round the back of the room and ideally again there should be no seats and we certainly encourage

people to dance. That is not always possible again, because I suppose a lot of the places we go to do not necessarily have the disciplines and organisations wvenue organizers can arrange for it. One of the things I particularly liked to dith what is familiar in discotheques. If you do this in the Albert Hall, it is a little difficult to get the audience to dance. But no matter, there is a way in which the strategies are elastic enough to be able to be adjustable to all sorts of different audiences.

What I find is particularly exciting is this notion again, by no means original, the idea of the loop, the circular serpent eating its own tail, which creates a sort of mantra activity which is incredibly exciting as a well-wrought unit. Every single loop has been extracted from the full bulk of the material of the feature films, and certainly contains music, dialogue and effects.

Let me show you what I mean. Here is a selection of the loops and remember there are nearly 2,000 of these but this shows again the range of information, the range of language, television language often, and certainly to do with postproduction and sophisticated editing. And for those of you who we had a discussion with this morning, please take witness of how text is often used in many many of these examples.

[Loops, 10']

So you can see how each particular loop which certainly for me has this sort of mantra fascination of repetition, of making of the sound effects and the dialogue a certain sort of almost religious litany creates a nugget of information, a nugget of information which is existing orally and certainly visually. And in essence of course it is hinting at all sorts of fracturing of narrative. And I can use this by continually re-operating and re-working all these items – remember you could see maybe 6 or 9 of them all at the self same time, so it is an extension of notions of Eisenstein's montage theory, looking at image 1 is ok by itself but then looking at images 1 and 2 together predicates other sorts of meanings, and then looking at images 1, 2 and 3 together and so on creates a multiplicity of connections. But not only is the loop itself extremely rich in information, when you start putting a combination of the images together you can understand the multiplicity of associations that can be made.

I work as close as well with a DJ. There is a way in which often we have many collaborators, often relative to the countries we visit, so the input again of the fracturing of the music and the way that the DJ uses the music adds another level of excitement and fascination to the whole business of notions… I suppose it is sheer visual fascination but again a fragmentation of narrative. Every time you do a VJ show of course it is always completely different, it is almost impossible for me, manipulating all these images, ever to repeat a performance. Each performance lasts I suppose about the length of a short feature film, we normally make sure it is no more than 50, maybe 50 or 60 minutes long. And it is a pursuit, and I feel rather bogus about the notion of being describing myself as a VJ, but it is an attempt for me to make approaches to what I would call generally a present tense – this is a present tense live event, a present tense non-narrative cinema. I know that will arise all sorts of hackles in you, especially you dear old nostalgics who come to the cinema to be told a Napoleon story. But we're living in an information age with huge amounts of information on our fingertips, and the ability to think laterally now, and not linearly and to make great empowerment in the notion of the word "browse" rather than "read". If we can make some equivalent, I don't think anybody picks up tomorrow morning's newspaper and starts reading it on the top left hand corner of page 1 and works steadily through the newspaper to the last page. I don't think we treat encyclopaedias like that. We are having different ways, consider again, those Borgesean stories of tackling information and using it in new ways. And I believe of course that we must need to push and pull this extraordinary new potential for visual literacy into all sorts of new shapes and areas.

I mentioned to you a collaboration with the East European cartoonist. We are now building a second VJ show which I want to call "Once Upon a Time" and I want to do that particularly because I want to make a reference to the major European pagan stories, you know how they go… *Cinderella*, *Princess of the Pea*, *Snow White* etc… And I deliberately want to use stories which are, I suppose, profoundly embedded, certainly as all good Europeans, in a notion of narrativity. So in a way it is not… you don't want to be told a story anew because you know the story, it is more about how to tell the story rather than to tell it as it were from fresh.

We are still in work process here but let me show you some of the loops we have already made, in anticipation of another sort of narrativity in the cinema.

[Loops, 7']

The language for you, for some of you, was in fact Hungarian, I don't know if anybody recognized that, and there is a particular reason for that because as a work in progress we opened the Berlin Film Festival Association with the Hungarian movies in that festival, with this as a big projection VJ in cultural buildings in Berlin. But you can see it is a way again of tackling some familiar problems from a different point of view, giving me the opportunity to play games with the narrativity, to change it around, to repeat it, to make associations across all the common characteristics that are associated with the ideas of the European tradition of narrative.

I will now come all the way back again to these four tyrannies. You remember those four tyrannies: the tyranny of the frame, the tyranny of the text, the tyranny of the actor and the tyranny of the camera. And here is a piece of film: it is a selection from the *Tulse Luper Suitcases*, which for me is the most perfect piece of film making that I have ever made. Now that is a big confession in front of you, but it seems to me to be the perfect idea for the sort of cinema that I would be looking for, if indeed we need to be able to push and pull cinema into new areas related to new ideas and new philosophies about visual literacy.

If you examine… let us take the first tyranny, the tyranny of the text, OK, if you want text I am going to give you text, if we believe that cinema indeed is a textual phenomenon, then let's play the text as image. Let's play with the dichotomy of meaning of what the image is giving you and what the text is giving you. Let's really prioritize the notion that cinema originates from the notion of a text base. Let us take the idea of a frame, and I am sure you have seen this already, Abel Gance was playing with multiple frames way back in 1926, with movies like *Napoleon*. But his technology was deeply deeply limited because it is extremely difficult to synchronize three huge 35-mm celluloid-based projectors, let alone cameras, and I suppose he created the potential of something very exciting indeed but he could not follow it up and neither could anybody else because the technology was so incredibly cumbersome. So we have to wait till now when the notion of manipulating image on image on image has become remarkably easy. It is I suppose predicated by essentially notions of cubism. I can give you both sides of a wall at the same time. I can give you the past, the present and the future all at the same time, I can give you the wide shot, the medium shot and the close-up all at the same time, I can give you the landscape, the portrait and the still life all at the same time. And between all those possibilities, there is a way that we can notionally somehow create ideas of our actual experience as we walked along a street to this cinema, tonight, in the ways that the singularity of the single frame cannot be able to give you. For the moment we still have cinemas that are arranged like this. Walt Disney and others of course are now making 360° sense around environmental cinemas and that will certainly be the future.

These don't exist for me to partake in that sort of excitement as of yet, though we are of course associated with all sorts of commissioning with things like Omnimax and such like experiments which are happening in public places of entertainment. The sad thing though about these activities like Omnimax is they are so expensive, they can only deal I suppose in very popular subject matter that are profoundly entertainments. And I suppose that's the way that my two favourite subject matters, which are sex and death, cannot really find a true and profound place under those sorts of circumstances, though we live in hope.

Let's take the third notion and I am running through this very quickly – we could spend days talking about this fascinating subject – is the uses of actor. Just think how many actors in the cinema have played Hitler, think how many actors have played Napoleon, there is a way who did it best. Did Laurence Oliver do it best, did Marlon Brando do it best, why do we have to separate that potentiality, why cannot we put it all together? Why cannot we make a drama where indeed, since we are all different people to our lovers and grandmothers and dogs and our doctors, also find a way to make that work in terms of acting. I believe, and I am holding up my hands now because I am holding the microphone, that the potentiality of actors in the cinema is this wide, but actors are only used for a few centimetres of that space. Let me repeat again, cinema was not invented to be a playground for Sharon Stone, it is not Sharon Stone's fault, it's the cinema's fault. And there is a way that cinema desperately under-uses the potentiality of an actor. In order to do that, and to be able to promote that notion, and I think some of the imagery you've already seen shows how we use many many actors to play the same part and also the reversal of all that. And sometimes we would repeat the dialogue pathetically, melodramatically, furiously, to play the notion again of the multiplicity of performance, of the shades of meaning. One of the saddest things about my appreciation of understanding and comprehension of cinema is you know that it is very possible and very likely that I'll make maybe four takes, five takes, six takes, seven takes of a piece of action primarily to get it in terms of what I would say would be

right, but you are never made aware of all the takes that get rejected. Let's imagine the cinema, because it is absolutely fascinating to watch rushes, the varieties, the subtle differences between performances and activities and camera movements. So let's find a way to be able to give you all those excitements, that I would experience daily in the manufacture of film.

Fourth tyranny: the camera; the notion of the tyranny of the camera. The illusionism of the idea of the camera that is invented too high up the Richter scale. We should come in at ground zero. But the camera always makes us come in at about ground five or ground six. What are we going to do about that? Well, the first thing we ought to do is to break down all the genres. Let us put the documentary inside the feature film, let us put the feature film inside the documentary. Let us use animation, let us go back to that CNN phenomenon of light pictures and notions of, shall we say, a diagrammatic Brechtian use of a picture landscape. Let us do it in a very pre-Raphaelite concern for minute detail or notions of seeing every leaf on every tree, every blade of grass in the field. The different modes of expression again, now in an age when certainly painters have told us appropriation is perfectly legitimate and honourable, to see if we can find a way of getting away from the single dominance of one particular use of the notion of the camera. But most of all remember the key figure in all this, and I repeatedly said this, this is that narrativity is the figure of Sheherazade – I have to be your Sheherazade, otherwise "off with his head".

So consider all those situations, and also we could retrace some of the things we talked about this morning at the University, about the notion of translation. There is no such thing as translation, there is only negotiation. And here we have predicated the problems in a Russian English context with, if anything, the translator, as often happens, is making things far worse than he is supposed to. Watch this. It is a section that takes place when Luper is moved to a bridge imprisonment in East-West Germany.

[*The Tulse Luper Suitcases*, 20' extract]