



FRAMES OF MIND: THE FILMS OF PETER GREENAWAY

A Zed & Two Noughts

Twin zoologists, grieving the death of their wives in a collision involving a car and a swan, gradually form a bond with the woman who was driving the vehicle that caused their spouses' demise. The brothers become obsessed with death and decay in animals, creating time-lapse films to further their understanding. Rich in imagery, this visually stunning early feature by Greenaway remains one of the filmmaker's boldest challenges to conventional cinema.

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Peter Greenaway on 'A Zed & Two Noughts'

I thought of making a film about zoos many years ago. Obviously they're microcosms, and I like playing with microcosms. I was particularly interested in doing something with the Muybridge catalogue of Animal Locomotion, but it never really took off. In the closing stages of *The Falls*, I used some zoo books: pictures of birds in apocryphal European zoos. There were two scripts between *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *A Zed & Two Noughts: Drowning by Numbers* and *Johnson and Jones*. There was also the opera that I'm supposed to be doing with Michael Nyman, *The Death of Webern*. I think *Drowning by Numbers* is basically a very optimistic script, despite its tragic subject matter, and when I failed to get it off the ground, some of my pessimism probably began to seep back. That perhaps accounts for the background to *A Zed & Two Noughts*, and some of the negative feelings in the film.

A Zed & Two Noughts has innumerable undercurrents, but I hope it can be appreciated on the entertainment level as being about a couple of guys who are severely depressed – not to say unutterably bereaved – by the death of their wives. They happen to be natural historians, and it's through their knowledge, their work, that they come to terms with their particular predicament.

Peter Greenaway interviewed by Tony Rayns in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, December 1985

A contemporary review

Peter Greenaway is a character who should have been invented by Conan Doyle as one of his Masters of Disguise. From *A Walk through H* (which first brought him to substantial critical attention at the 1979 London Film Festival) to his extraordinary expositions of avant-garde music/performance in *Four American Composers* (made for Channel 4 in 1983), Greenaway has worked in several related disguises: taxonomist; mad librarian; statistician; structural filmmaker; natural historian; architectural historian; historian of ideas. Now, with *A Zed & Two Noughts*, he emerges as the Eadweard Muybridge of narrative cinema – instead of horses galloping endlessly (motionlessly) across paper, we are presented with a thousand fragments of storytelling, all running in some complex mesh of coincidence and repetition whose *raison d'être* is hidden elsewhere. A subtle and ghostly machine; which is why a catalogue of allusions, themes and styles from *A Zed & Two Noughts* only gives us a sense

of tonal choice, rather than the usual converging graph of influences and inspirations which define a filmmaker.

But first it must be said (straight) that *A Zed & Two Noughts* is funny and sexy and stylish to a degree which the current English cinema doesn't really deserve. Made for less than a million pounds (and lit by master cinematographer Sacha Vierny), the strictly technical quality of the film bears perfect comparison with Kubrick or Fellini when they have been let loose with unlimited crew and shooting time at Elstree or Cinecittà. Lavishly inspired by Vermeer within the frame, this is, however, a cinema of a thousand cuts – each shot rigorously composed and edited as tightly as possible, as though in the same semi-desperate haste as Michael Nyman's music.

But in narrative terms, Greenaway is a man with a head full of shaggy-dog stories. Sometimes the inspiration is Borges (Venus recounts the tale of a legless prostitute who was given artificial limbs after death so that she would fit her conventionally sized coffin). Sometimes it is Buñuel (as we cut from a sumptuous interior to a dark exterior in which a herd of curators advances nervously with a small net on a very large rhinoceros). Often it is Fellini (from the billowing extravagance of Alba Bewick's bedrooms to an extraordinary point-of-view in which we gaze, with Alba, down her solitary thigh as she instructs her two lovers to kiss it adoringly from either side). And hovering over all these gags is the urbanely ironic sensibility of the Englishman who is really setting the traps.

David Attenborough, wild-life hero to millions of household viewers, supplies the voice-over which accompanies a lengthy digest of evolutionary history. (And evolution itself soon gets short shrift, as 'a dreary fiction'). The whimsy that threatened to become parochial in earlier Greenaway films has gone multicultural here: Alba Bewick (read: Buick) is driving a Ford Galaxy along Swan's Way when the fatal accident occurs in the opening frames of the film. The mythology of twinning and kinship (and duplicity) swings effortlessly from the Christian world of Noah's Ark or the Garden of Eden to the classical world inhabited by Venus De Milo (another amputee!), to the cinematic japes of Greenaway's own mythology (with Van Hoyten, the longstanding Moriarty in Greenaway's fiction, trying to eliminate black-and-white culture in the zoo).

Taken as an artistic statement, *A Zed & Two Noughts* is more yielding than the equally arch *Draughtsman's Contract*, and unsurprisingly humanist (except to those who have taken Greenaway to be a structuralist in the past). Its world view encompasses a fundamental faith in nature (but a terrible distrust of post-Darwinian science), and a tolerance of perversity (two legs may be usual, but one leg may be exciting and no legs may be bliss). Above all, it puts human ambition and perceptions in a mocking frame: as the Deuce twins lie dead in a hopeless attempt to 'scientise' their own grief, dawn comes up, the power breaks down, and we realise that we are witnessing the scene from a snail's-eye point of view. There are moments when Greenaway's film may seem to lack warmth. But at a time when the cinema is often either grossly sentimental or inhumanly mechanised, *A Zed & Two Noughts* works (probably despite itself) as a plea for sense. The swift cutting, barbed dialogue and perfectly stylised performances may seem to be reducing the dramatic temperature, but they are in fact dragging our attention back to the real dramas of philosophy, rhetoric and the cinema today.

Chris Auty, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, December 1985

A ZED & TWO NOUGHTS

Director: Peter Greenaway
Production Companies: British Film Institute Production Board, Artificial Eye Productions, Film Four International, Allarts Enterprises
Producers: Peter Sainsbury, Kees Kasander
Production Co-ordinator: Karin Spiegel
Production Manager: Denis Wigman
Location Manager: Muike Leeuwenberg
Production Assistants: Evelien Jansen, Luke Redgrave
Assistant Directors: Gerrit Martijn, Marietta de Vries
Screenplay: Peter Greenaway
Director of Photography: Sacha Vierny
Additional Photography: Mike Coles
Natural History Photography: Survival Anglia
Time Lapse Photography: David Spears
Camera Operator: David Claessen
Editor: John Wilson
Production Designers: Ben van Os, Jan Roelfs
Set Dresser: Constance de Vos
Costumes: Patricia Lim
Wardrobe: Dien van Straalen
Make-up: Sara Meerman, Nicole Mora
Titles: Frameline
Opticals: General Screen Enterprises
Music Performance: Sarah Leonard, Michael Nyman, Elisabeth Perry, Alexander Balanescu, Gerard Bouwhuis, Arno Bons, John Helstone, Gerrit Oloeman, Sofia Kiss, Beverly Lund, Jorn Schroeder, Rob Hageman, Marien van Staalen, Lene te Voortwis, Pieter Gouderjaan, Jan Jansen, Bas Dekker,

Wim Steinmann, Jelle Schouten, Henk Leether, Leo van Oostrom, Peter Stan, Adrian van Velsen, Frans Vreugdenhil, Peter Veenhuizen, Gerbrand Westveen
Music Performer on Soundtrack: Michael Nyman
Sound Recording: Garth Marshall
Sound Re-recording: Tony Anscombe
Sound Editor: Charles Ware
Dialogue editor: Matthew Whiteman
Sound Effects Editor: Jo Ann Kaplan

Cast

Andréa Ferréol (Alba Bewick)
Brian Deacon (Oswald Deuce)
Eric Deacon (Oliver Deuce)
Frances Barber (Venus De Milo)
Joss Ackland (Van Hoyten)
Jim Davidson (Joshua Plate)
Agnes Brulet (Beta Bewick)
Guusje van Tiborgh (Caterina Bolnes)
Gerard Thoolen (Van Meegeren)
Ken Campbell (Stephen Pipe)
Wolf Kahler (Felipe Arc-en-Ciel)
Geoffrey Palmer (Fallast)
David Attenborough (narrator of wild-life footage)

UK/Netherlands 1985
117 mins

FRAMES OF MIND: THE FILMS OF PETER GREENAWAY

A Zed & Two Noughts
Tue 18 Oct 18:10; Sat 5 Nov 17:40; Sat 12 Nov 17:40; Mon 21 Nov 20:40; Sun 27 Nov 12:15
Peter Greenaway: Frames of Mind Season Introduction
Wed 19 Oct 18:10
The Belly of an Architect
Wed 19 Oct 20:30; Fri 18 Nov 18:20; Tue 22 Nov 18:10; Sat 26 Nov 15:30
The Falls
Sat 22 Oct 13:50; Sun 6 Nov 14:40
The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover
Sun 23 Oct 15:30 (+ intro by Justin Johnson, Lead Programmer); Sat 12 Nov 14:55; Mon 28 Nov 17:50
Drowning by Numbers
Sun 23 Oct 18:00; Sat 19 Nov 14:30; Sun 27 Nov 18:00
Peter Greenaway Shorts Programme 1
Mon 24 Oct 18:10; Thu 10 Nov 20:40

Experimental Sound and Vision: Found Sounds, Lyrical Loops and Landscapes
Thu 27 Oct 18:15; Thu 17 Nov 18:15 (+ intro by author and musician David Toop)
Prospero’s Books
Tue 1 Nov 17:40; Sun 20 Nov 18:00
Peter Greenaway: Pioneer of Cinema
Sat 5 Nov 12:00-17:00
The Unreliable Narrator: Adventures in Storytelling, Documentary and Misinformation
Sun 6 Nov 12:40; Fri 25 Nov 21:00
A TV Dante: Cantos 1-8
Tue 15 Nov 18:20
The Baby of Mâcon
Wed 16 Nov 20:30; Fri 25 Nov 18:00; Mon 28 Nov 20:30
The Pillow Book
Fri 18 Nov 20:30; Thu 24 Nov 20:30; Tue 29 Nov 17:40
8½ Women
Sun 20 Nov 12:50; Wed 30 Nov 20:35

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