



8½ Women

Peter Greenaway

UNITED KINGDOM/
THE NETHERLANDS/
GERMANY/LUXEMBOURG, 1999

121 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: **Movie Masters/
Woodline Productions/Continent
Films/Delux Productions**
Executive Producers: **Terry Glinwood,
Bob Hubar, Denis Wigman**
Producer: **Kees Kasander**
Screenplay: **Peter Greenaway**
Cinematographer: **Sacha Vierny**
Editor: **Elmer Leupen**
Production Designer: **Wilbert Van Dorp,
Emi Wada**
Sound: **Garth Marshall**
Principal Cast: **John Standing,
Matthew Delamere, Vivian Wu,
Amanda Plummer, Polly Walker,
Toni Collette**

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Exactly ten years after he shocked the world with *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, Peter Greenaway has returned with another caustic, keenly observed and very funny swipe at the haute bourgeoisie. Yet instead of expressing *Cook's* angry, gory disgust with Thatcherite economic vengefulness, *8½ Women* takes on the imitative decadence and disposability of fin-de-millennium culture. Like its predecessor, this film too will incite hostile reactions from those morally implicated by its contents.

This is also Greenaway's most purely cinematic work in some time. The painterly studies and superimposed literature which have informed his recent films give way to a playful rethinking of the sixties cinema of class conflict and decadence, especially Buñuel, Anderson and (of course) Fellini. Greenaway fans will also delight in his new approach to old themes, such as the mechanics of collecting things, and his irreverent way (after *The Pillow Book*) with contemporary Japanese culture.

Philip Emmenthal, a wealthy Geneva businessman, inherits eight and a half Pachinko parlours, the ubiquitous gambling/pinball-esque storefronts throughout Japan. His son, Storey, manages them and becomes enamored of all things Japanese. When Philip's wife and Storey's mother dies, the son comforts the father by introducing him to the women of Fellini's masterpiece, *8-½*. The father and son imagine a private bordello of their own making on their massive Geneva estate.

They begin collecting women at once in Storey's beloved Japan. But the subverted desires and complex agendas of their human acquisitions thwart their grandiose plans.

Greenaway always attracts top-drawer actors to his projects and *8½ Women* is no exception. Vivian Wu, Amanda Plummer, Polly Walker and Toni Collette are four of the women in question; the complexity of their performances creates even more complicated political readings in this unusually provocative film.

■ **Noah Cowan**



Peter Greenaway was born in London, England in 1942. He trained as a painter, first exhibiting his work in 1964. Starting in film as an editor, he began directing his own short films in 1966. Since then, he has continued to produce paintings, novels and illustrated books as well as films. Feature films: *The Falls* (80), *The Draughtman's Contract* (82), *A Zed and Two Noughts* (86), *The Belly of an Architect* (87), *Drowning by Numbers* (88), *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (89), *Prospero's Books* (91), *The Baby of Macon* (93), *The Pillow Book* (96) and *8½ Women* (99).

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