

MIT Student

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Film Notes: *Play Time*

The director of the film is Jacques Tati and it was released in 1967. It is set in the near future as imagined in 1960s Paris. The film was shot on an elaborate set known as Tativille.

Five adjectives or phrases to describe the sense of the city portrayed in the film: over the course of the day, city life became more and more hectic until it reaches an apotheosis at the Royal Garden restaurant. Gray and cool blue color scheme. The construction of the city space appears to purposefully deceive its inhabitants with its labyrinthine quality, until evening approaches and it becomes more socially acceptable for the “wilder” people of the city who lack self-awareness and interact with the space to mold it to their own standard of habitability (but the feeling of chaos persists throughout the film, first due to the city itself and then later due to the wildness of the restaurant-goers). Repetitious, in architecture and visual human gags. There was something still balletic about the choreography of the film, though, but less *Swan Lake* and more *Rite of Spring*. The choreography was less of a device and more of an element that could be deconstructed by the presence of the characters – especially given that we have a main character to focus on in *Play Time* whose main purpose appears to be to mess with the rhythm a little bit; to turn it less classical, more jazz.

I could understand the audience appeal of Tati’s Monsieur Hulot, because there is an odd sense of displacement with his performance. He is simultaneously baffled by and comfortable with the chaos that surrounds him, always on the periphery of the city’s awareness yet vital to its spirit of the benign oddball of the city, an observer caught up in the action.

One remarkable scene in the film was when Barbara was trying to take a picture of the old lady florist after they get off the bus. She’s trying to construct the perfect picture, but other residents keep getting in her way and ruin the picturesque, idealized version of Paris she has in her head that she’s trying to match in the photo. (I especially like the dialogue, “Well, *that’s* Paris!” but tells the two Parisian women with flowers in their hats who are standing next to the flower stand: “Do you mind [getting yourselves out of my frame]?”) But it seems the travel agency exploits this naiveté, since they put up all these posters advertising different cities but all the posters are the same and portray the nondescript rectangular building Barbara is standing in front of when she gets off the bus.

Two questions: why is the dialogue dubbed? Was it for practical purposes or was the disjointedness of vocals and movement intentional; if so, why? Is it intentional that Tati keeps the audience outside as Hulot walks around his friend’s apartment? Is it to purposefully make us feel like voyeurs or to show us that there’s really nothing worth looking at?

Playtime reminds me of *Berlin*, but it appears to deconstruct the lull that the Berlin residents appeared to operate by. The people of Tati’s Paris must coexist with the city despite occasionally being at odds with its modernity and complexity.

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