

MIT Student

Playtime Notes (1967) Jacques Tati

The City: Paris, and it looks like it could be Neuilly (even though it is a set) which is the richest of all the areas of Paris.

It is interesting that the film is spent half between Monsieur Hurlot and half between Barbara and her American tourist friends. It causes the lens on the city to be that of a tourist or a native, but a slightly out-of-place native. Hurlot bumping into old friends and seeming lost in the “high tech surroundings” make him often seem as much a tourist in his own city as Barbara.

Throughout the film, there was a sense that everyone had a role to play, a certain job, that they would do no matter what was happening around them (which is probably the most French thing about this film). This was most clear in the Royal Garden where not only did everyone have a role to play, but the whole place started falling apart when people stopped doing those jobs.

- When the French man in the office with the blue folder needs to give the figures to the American man, he pulls a card with the information out of the files in cubicle the American man in standing in, walks all the way back to his cubicle, then dictates the figures back so the secretary can hastily copy down (on assumedly another small card) the same information the American man could have taken ten steps to get himself. It's not efficient, but everyone does their job and order is maintained.
- The Doorman at the Royal garden continues to hold the doorknob to the shattered door to let the patrons in and out, even though there is no door. But he is the doorman, so he opens doors.

The giant glass windows play as a gag (like when Hurlot thinks the man with the blue folder is in the other building where he sees his reflection, or when that same man breaks his nose walking into one) but are a motif that bring out the theme of living in the city.

- For instance, no apartment would have such giant windows on street level, it would be like living in a fishbowl, and the film makes a gag out of this too where it seems like the families are little side shows on the street side, or from the viewer's point of view like plays for each other. But in the city there is sometimes the sense you have no privacy, that the people in the city around you can see everything you do, whether you have giant windows or not.
- It is also possible that the giant apartment windows look like storefront windows because that city life is something often sold to people who come to cities. Their apartments do not look unlike the stalls at the expo, selling things you didn't even know you needed.

We also see that the city is a commercial place. Every scene involves a business of some sort, something is being sold and it's hectic and a little ridiculous.

- The touring women are babbling about the “economy tour”
- The entire expo, crowded with businessmen, tourists, and some vagabond looking people
 - Also everyone as the same black chairs

- The American in the Royal Garden “buys his own section” and makes his own business inside the completely falling apart restaurant and still turns people away
- After the apartment scene, we bounce back and forth until the end from the Royal Garden to the little convenience store the next morning.
- It ends, with the covered market where Hurlot quickly buys Barbara some souvenirs. Oddly enough, this seems to be the most regulated place in the entire film
- Even the traffic circle carnival ride, the traffic goes so slowly a guy can sell ice cream out of the back of a car (making use of the congestion to make money)
 - I was reminded of something I saw on Top Gear, where they drive through the capital of Uganda (and sit in traffic for many hours) and the locals know people sit in traffic for hours on end so they come around with food to sell at the drivers’ windows

I’ve thought of this song a few times throughout the course, but since we have film in Paris, I thought I’d bring this one up now; there’s a French song from 1968 called “Il est cinq heures, Paris s’éveille,” “Its 5 AM, Paris is waking up” that goes through all the different places and people in Paris at 5 AM

“I am the dauphin of Place Dauphine
 And Place Blanche looks off-color
 The trucks are full of milk
 And the sweepers have their brooms

It’s five AM
 I haven’t any rest

Transvestites will shave their hair
 The strippers have something to wear
 The pillows are crushed
 And the lovers are bushed

The coffee is in the cups
 The cafés clean their fronts
 On Boulevard Montparnasse,
 The train station isn’t a carcass

The suburban dwellers wait at the tracks
 At La Villette meat is packed
 “Paris by Night” brings back the cars
 The bakers make bâtards (baguettes)

The newspapers left the presses
 The factory workers are depressed
 The people waking up are bullied
 It’s the hour I’m going to bed

It’s five AM
 Paris awakes

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11.139 / 11.239 The City in Film
Spring 2015

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