MoMA PRESENTS A RETROSPECTIVE OF FRENCH DIRECTOR JACQUES TATI, CINEMATIC COMEDIAN AND RADICAL MODERNIST

Exhibition Includes New 35mm Prints of Six Tati Feature Films and Three Rarely Screened Sketch Comedies

Jacques Tati
December 18, 2009–January 2, 2010
The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters

New York, November 20, 2009—The Museum of Modern Art presents a 10-film retrospective of the French screenwriter, director, and actor Jacques Tati (born Jacques Tatischeff, 1907-1982), in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters from December 18, 2009, through January 2, 2010. Jacques Tati features newly struck 35mm prints of his six feature films, including beautiful restorations of M. Hulot’s Holiday (1953), Mon Oncle (1958), and Playtime (1967); his long dreamed-of colorized version of Jour de fête (1949), the revelatory Traffic (1971), and the little seen Parade (1974); as well as three short sketch comedies. Complementing these is Claude Autant-Lara’s rarely screened wartime fantasy Sylvie et le fantôme (1945), in which Tati gives a charmingly spectral performance. The retrospective is organized by Joshua Siegel, Associate Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art.

One of cinema’s greatest comedians, Tati was also one of its most radical modernists. As a director, his experiments with sound, color, and image, and with language, design, and technology, are a fundamental, if often overlooked, bridge between the innovations of Buster Keaton and Max Linder in the silent era, those of his contemporaries Jean-Luc Godard, Marguerite Duras and Robert Bresson, and filmmakers today who owe much to his style and humor, from Roy Andersson to Wes Anderson, Otar Iosseliani to Elia Suleiman, Takeshi Kitano to Sylvain Chomet.

As many critics have observed, Tati the actor plays the straight man to an absurdly comical world. With his loping, springy gait, he plays a man, M. Hulot, who has no discernable ambitions, yet who always seems to be at the ready with his raincoat and his highwater trousers, his pipe and hat, and a fishing rod or umbrella in hand. And M. Hulot always seems to be alone in a crowd, whether at a seaside resort or in a steely modernist office building, stuck in a traffic jam or returning to his salad days of pantomime on the circus stage.

Tati’s mise-en-scène has been compared with that of a Breughel painting (Raoul Dufy is equally apt): through long-take, deep-focus, all-over tableaux, a Babel of languages, and the burbling eruptions of machines gone haywire, he creates an entire cosmos, a meticulously choreographed chaos in a Cartesian world, and a singularly new, transformative, and democratic way of experiencing the moving image. In this way, as in so many others, Tati celebrates the importance of being playful.
The opening night screening of *Playtime* on December 18 will be introduced by authors/theater directors Macha Makeïeff and Jérôme Deschamps, the founders of Les Films de Mon Oncle. The exhibition *Jacques Tati* is presented in association with the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, Les Films de Mon Oncle, Janus Films, and Culturesfrance.

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For downloadable images, please visit www.moma.org/press.

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**Public Information:** The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

**Hours:** Films are screened Wednesday-Monday. For screening schedules, please visit www.moma.org.

**Film Admission:** $10 adults; $8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. $6 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only.) The price of a film ticket may be applied toward the price of a Museum admission ticket when a film ticket stub is presented at the Lobby Information Desk within 30 days of the date on the stub (does not apply during Target Free Friday Nights, 4:00–8:00 p.m.). Admission is free for Museum members and for Museum ticketholders.

The public may call (212) 708-9400 for detailed Museum information. Visit us at www.moma.org

**SCREENING SCHEDULE**

*Jacques Tati*

**December 18, 2009–January 2, 2010**

**Friday, December 18**

8:00 *Playtime*. 1967. France/Italy. Screenplay by Tati, with the artistic collaboration of Jacques Lagrange. With Tati, Barbara Dennek, Jacqueline Lecomte. Tati’s towering achievement, a triumph of widescreen space, color, design, and stereophonic sound, has been painstakingly restored by a consortium of French institutions to the director’s original full-length vision. Set in Tativille, a grand project of glass-and-steel modernism that Tati built out of the wasteland of the Parisian periphery (and a glorious and ruinous folly that forced him to divest the rights to all his films), *Playtime* is a gentle, absurdist satire of modern life as homogenized, mechanized, sterilized, commodified, and voyeuristic. Even so, Tati celebrates the pleasures to be discovered in places usually spent wasting time: the airport lounge, the office vestibule, the traffic roundabout, or the grand opening of a swank restaurant where the food never comes. Nöel Burch has astutely observed that *Playtime* is “the first film in the history of cinema that not only must be seen several times, but [also from] different distances from the screen.” In a Babel of languages (French, English, German, all manner of gadgetry), without need of subtitles. 126 min. *Introduced by authors/theater directors Macha Makeïeff and Jérôme Deschamps, the founders of Les Films de Mon Oncle.*

**Saturday, December 19**

5:00 *Jour de fête (Holiday/The Big Day)*. 1949. France. Screenplay by Tati, Henri Marquet, René Wheeler. With Tati, Paul Frankeur. In his first masterpiece, Tati plays a bumbling, self-important postman with a reverse Midas touch, seeking to bring streamlined American efficiency to the delivery of the day’s
mail but instead bringing chaos (and hornets) to his sleepy village. The film was shot—in neorealist style, according to Jean-Luc Godard—in Saint-Sévère-sur-Indre, a picture postcard of a town in the heart of France where Tati had lived toward the end of the war ("Less than three years before the shoot began," his biographer David Bellos observes, "the Gestapo still had an office on the main square"). As he would throughout his career, Tati contrasts the lyrical rhythms of pastoral life with modern-day agitations and urgencies. To his great chagrin, Jour de fête was released in black and white due to a failed new color process; this new colorized version, overseen by his daughter Sophie Tatischeff and cameraman François Ede, painstakingly and triumphantly restores Tati's original, stunningly vibrant vision. 90 min.

and


This charming sketch film was a test run for Tati's first feature, Jour de fête, with Tati playing an overeager postman who cycles and jitterbugs his way toward bringing good-old American know-how to the provinces—with madcap results, of course. 18 min.

8:00  


Vacationers at a Brittany seaside resort get down to the business of having fun, only to have the unfailingly well-mannered and well-intentioned M. Hulot show up and make a fine mess of things. In his first runaway success, Tati, a lifelong sportsman, creates wonderful set pieces out of fishing, tennis, and canoeing, along with ingenious gags involving a paint can, a funeral wreath, a gust of wind, and a Pavlovian bell that announces dinner—all in celebration of life’s gentle rhythms, its fleeting, paradisiacal moments, and even its daily monotonies. Citing Tati’s “non-narrative” and “innocent” way of seeing, critic Dave Kehr calls Les Vacances "one of the most radical films ever made…. [Without it] there would be no Jean-Luc Godard, no Jean-Marie Straub, no Marguerite Duras—no modernist cinema.” This newly restored version incorporates Tati’s 1960s re-edits, as well as his 1978 addition of a scene that sends up Steven Spielberg’s Jaws. Restored by Technicolor Creative Services (Thomson) in Los Angeles. This restoration has been fully funded and managed by Thomson Foundation for Film Heritage and Groupama Gan Foundation for Cinema, with les Films de Mon Oncle and with the support of La Cinémathèque française. 88 min.

Sunday, December 20

2:30  


Winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and the Jury Prize at Cannes, Tati’s most ingeniously comical film follows M. Hulot, the bohemian uncle of young Gerard Arpel, as he grapples (and wreaks havoc) with the ultramodern, ultra-hygienic "conveniences" of the Arpels’ automated home. Famously dubbed a "scatterbrained angel" by the critic André Bazin, Hulot liberates his nephew from the soulless, stifling, and regimented trappings of modern life—though purely by accident, like everything else he does. Mon Oncle is a brilliant sendup of petit-bourgeois aspirations and affectations; a film beloved by architects and designers, it is, in a sense, a parody of MoMA Design itself—of modernism’s utopian promise of better living through technology—even as it paradoxically makes that world seem utterly sensuous and seductive. Tati simultaneously shot two versions of Mon Oncle, one in English (the one shown in this retrospective) and the other in French, and considered them distinct works with differing mise-en-scène. 116 min.

Wednesday, December 23

8:00  

Mon Oncle. 1958. (See Sunday, December 20, 2:30.)
Thursday, December 24

4:30  *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot (M. Hulot’s Holiday).* 1953. (See Saturday, December 19, 8:00.)

Saturday, December 26

4:00  *Parade.* 1974. Sweden/France. Written and directed by Tati.
A joyous and touching swan song, made for Swedish television (and shot by Gunnar Fischer, Ingmar Bergman’s cameraman, and Jean Badal), in which Tati returns to his music-hall roots by saluting that most popular and democratic of art forms: the circus, where the spectacle of life in the crowd, and in the center ring, become one and the same. The film offers a delightful chance to see Tati performing his legendary “Sporting Impressions”—Colette wrote in 1936 of his equestrian routine that “Jacques Tati, the horse and rider conjoined, will show all of Paris the living image of that legendary creature: the centaur.” Anthony Lane in *The New Yorker* observes, “[We] gain a touching sense, as with Buster Keaton, of skills learned and burnished with such graceful application in an artist’s springy youth that, like his best friends, they remain in service through the fall and winter of his career; the habits of the body are thankfully more ingrained than any ideas concocted by the mind, and always, in some mysterious way, more telling than the motions of the soul. The great cycle of life, for Jacques Tati, was not so much a matter of cosmic truth as something that you pedaled into a hedge. Both, of course, could be a pain in the ass.” 75 min.

and  
In this comic diversion, made on the set of *Playtime*, Tati offers a master class of pantomime to a group of overly earnest students. 30 min.

7:30  *Jour de fête (Holiday/The Big Day).* 1949.  
and  
*L’École des facteurs (The School for Postmen).* 1947. (See Saturday, December 19, 5:00.)

Sunday, December 27

2:00  *Trafic (Traffic).* 1971. France. Screenplay by Tati, with the artistic collaboration of Jacques Lagrange, Bert Haanstra. With Tati, Maria Kimberley.  
People get nowhere fast in Tati’s unjustly neglected but hilarious *Traffic*—perhaps the real revelation of this retrospective (imagine Jean-Luc Godard’s savage polemic *Weekend* with a much sunnier disposition...). M. Hulot takes his final bow as a Parisian automotive designer who tricks out his new, Rube Goldberg-like Camping Car with all the latest gadgets and modern conveniences—naturally, with calamitous results. Accompanied by a go-go girl of an American publicist, he attempts to transport the car to an international auto show in Amsterdam, only to be thwarted by breakdowns and pileups, wrong-way signs and run-ins with the police. Tati’s lifelong fascination with things that move—the spindly bicycle in *Jour de fête*, the jalopy in *M. Hulot’s Holiday*, and the tour bus on the carousel roundabout in *Playtime*—reaches its apogee in this farcical look at modern life coming to a screeching halt. The film’s soundtrack is a tour-de-force *musique concrète* of crushed metal and claxon, barbaric yawp and electronic burble. 100 min.

Tuesday, December 29

and  
*Cours du soir (Night Class).* 1966. (See Saturday, December 26, 4:00.)
8:00  Playtime. 1967. (See Friday, December 18, 8:00.)

Thursday, December 30

Young Tati, a passionate sportsman and a master of pantomime, co-wrote and starred in this early sketch film that plays on a classic routine of silent-era comedians like Mack Sennett, Charles Chaplin, and Max Linder: the underdog in the boxing ring. 20 min.
and
With spectral shades of Joseph Mankiewicz's The Ghost and Mrs. Muir and William Dieterle's Portrait of Jennie, both made a few years later, Autant-Lara’s lovely and sadly forgotten wartime fantasy stars Joyeux as a beautiful teenage heiress who falls in love with the ghost of her dead grandmother’s lover, charmingly and touchingly played by Tati in a rare appearance in another director’s film. Print courtesy Archives françaises du film and SNC. 90 min.

Friday, January 1

4:00  Soigne ton gauche. 1936.
and
Sylvie et le fantôme. 1945. (See Thursday, December 30, 4:30.)

Saturday, January 2

8:00  Trafic (Traffic). 1971. (See Sunday, December 27, 2:00.)