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Playtime

My all-time favorite movie, this 1967 French comedy by actor-director Jacques Tati almost certainly has the most intricately designed mise en scene in all of cinema. Dave Kehr had it right: "Tati attempted nothing less than a complete reworking of the conventional notions of montage and, amazingly, he succeeded. Instead of cutting within scenes, Tati creates comic tableaux of such detail that, as Noel Burch has said, the film has to be seen not only several times, but from several different points in the theater to be appreciated fully. Within the film's three large movements, Tati's M. Hulot goes from fear of his ultramodern, glass-towered environment to a poetic transcendence of it." This restored 70-millimeter version, with four-track DTS sound, expands the possibilities of becoming creatively lost in Tati's vast frames and then finding one's way again. His studio-constructed vision of Paris begins in daytime with nightmarishly regimented straight

lines and right angles and proceeds to night with accidental yet celebratory curves of people instinctively coming together. It peaks in an extraordinary sequence, set in a gradually disintegrating restaurant, that comprises almost half the film: once various musicians start to perform, the viewer's gaze inevitably follows the customers in a kind of improvised dance, collecting and juxtaposing simultaneous comic events and details. Even after all these years the film still teaches me how to live in cities—specifically, how to read disconnected visual and aural signals in clusters that are counterbalanced and comically orchestrated. In this alienating landscape everyone is a tourist, but Tati suggests that once we can find one another, we all belong. In English, French, and German, without subtitles—but you won't need them. 125 min. Music Box.

—Jonathan Rosenbaum