



SCREENING

A DOOR AJAR

# PLAYTIME

Directed by Jacques Tati

THURSDAY APRIL 3 2014 | 7:30PM

PLAYTIME, DIRECTED BY JACQUES TATI,  
PARIS, FRANCE: SPECTRA FILMS, 1967

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*Playtime* is a hilarious and gloriously choreographed cinematic masterpiece about the modern city and the confusion it creates. Jacques Tati's final film, *Playtime* took three years to complete and famously bankrupted its director. The film follows Monsieur Hulot through a series of absurd scenarios that turn a critical eye on commercialism, entertainment, mass media, tourism, and modernist architecture. Shot in 70mm, Tati constructed a film set so elaborate that it became a facsimile of a functional city.

*Playtime* will be presented on an outdoor screen on the hill alongside the glass curtain wall of the EMPAC building.

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**Jacques Tati** began his career as a screenplay writer and actor. In 1949, he created the character of François in *Jour de Fête*, which won the prize for best screenplay at Venice. In *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*, he created the awkward and optimistic eponymous character for which he is best known. Tati directed six feature length films, and played the lead role of Monsieur Hulot in four of these. In 1958, *Mon Oncle* was awarded the Prix Méliès at the Festival de Cannes and an Academy Award for best foreign film. Over a decade later, Tati shot *Playtime*, a film that did not achieve the commercial success that was hoped for, despite eventually becoming a cult classic. In 1972, Tati directed *Traffic*, the fourth and last chapter in the Hulot series, followed by *Parade* in 1974.

Erika Vogt's Frieze Film commission *Darker Imposter* will be presented preceding *Playtime*.

## TO REACH A CONCLUSION

A man stands in front of a small opening in a temple's ancient stone wall; a blue haired woman sitting in a majestic empty theater whispers "silencio"; a girl looks directly at the camera, turning her head back and forth in the wind, while a narrator speaks of eternal things; an eyelid opens to reveal a murky eye, and stays open. These are the last images, the filmmakers' closing remarks, of four films that offer up more questions than answers.

In the continuous drive to create meaning from experience, a conclusion can constitute a promised respite from endless perceptual work. Why are we haunted by those stories that do not resolve neatly, that do not provide us with the answers to questions posed? A film series about endings, *A Door Ajar* presents films that frustrate our desire to create meaning. The enigmatic films presented break cinematic formulas, stymie sense-making, revel in the poetics of openness, and leave the door open for further interpretation.

A film's ending is frequently the site of meaning production. The narrative structures of traditional Hollywood films have often pivoted around the creation of closure, by setting up tensions that then find their resolution in the film's dénouement. The strategies for establishing closure have been refined over cinema's 125-year history, including, for example, the technique of bracketing, in which a film is bookended by the voice of the primary narrator, or by musical overtures and reprises. Such methods are used time and again in Hollywood film, following cinematic clichés that are all too easily read. The 1960s and 1970s poststructuralist approaches to narratives revealed a wariness of closure in narrative, eventually finding similarities "between narrative closure and virtually every 'conservative' impulse in Western culture. In varied contexts it is said to have de facto parallels with patriarchy...repressive law and order, dominant models of history, the Western capitalist system, and the workings of Ideology tout court."

The experience of open-ended narratives can be unsettling and uncomfortable. This discomfort is embedded in the word "ajar," which not only indicates something that is neither entirely open nor closed, occupying a suspended state where definitions are withheld, but also "at discord," "in contradiction to," and "at variance with," planting it firmly within the realm of otherness, akin to those jarring experiences which disrupt and irritate.

As a series about the desire for closure in sense-making, *A Door Ajar* begins with a reflection on perception through the short film, *Film*, directed by Alan Schneider. Written by the famed modernist playwright Samuel Beckett, *Film* issues from Berkley's pronouncement *esse est percipi*, "to be is to be perceived." Beckett once summarized *Film* in the following manner: "It's a movie about the perceiving eye, about the perceived and the perceiver—two aspects of the same man. The perceiver desires like mad to perceive and the perceived tries desperately to hide."

A door left slightly open is a classic horror trope, an image exploited throughout Nobuhiko Obayashi's 1977 experimental film *House (Hausu)*. The script for *House* was created under the advisement of Obayashi's teenage daughter, with a resulting plot that so radically disobeys logic that its very structure might be called psychotic.

Wong Kar Wai's *In the Mood for Love* is a film that relies on a poetic openness, in which plot lines are never resolved, much like life itself. Telling a tale of infidelity and unfulfilled relationships, the film creates an open dance between its characters in which little is said and much is felt. As film critic Roger Ebert forecasted, "in the Hollywood version, there'd be a happy ending. That would kind of miss the point and release the tension, I think; the thrust of Wong's film is that paths cross but intentions rarely do."

Frequently described as cryptic, David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) has incited confusion since its premiere. A. O. Scott of *The New York Times* wrote that "while some might consider the plot an offense against narrative order... the film is an intoxicating liberation from sense, with moments of feeling all the more powerful for seeming to emerge from the murky night world of the unconscious."

Each of the films presented as part of *A Door Ajar* employs a domestic structure as a key symbol in the narrative. In Beckett's *Film* the home serves as a metaphor for a man's memory; the house in Obayashi's *House* takes on the role of the lead antagonist; the abutting apartments of Mrs. Chan and Mr. Chow reflect the binary of partnership that unpins the plot for *In the Mood for Love*; and an apartment brings together the two main characters in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*.

—Emily Zimmerman

# STAFF

Erika Vogt lives and works in Los Angeles. Vogt employs both 16mm film and video to explore the intersection of science and the supernatural. She has been included in major international shows including at the Whitney Museum, New York; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; SFMOMA; and a recent solo show at the New Museum, New York.

Curated and produced in collaboration with Frieze Foundation curator Nicola Lees, Frieze Film is a series of new short-form moving image works by Petra Cortright, Peter Gidal, Patricia Lennox-Boyd, Oraib Toukan, and Erika Vogt produced for television. Petra Cortright, Patricia Lennox-Boyd, and Erika Vogt's Frieze Films were all produced during artist residencies at EMPAC in fall 2013. The works are broadcast on Channel 4 (UK) as part of Random Acts.

Johannes Goebel / Director

Geoff Abbas / Director for Stage Technologies

Eric Ameres / Senior Research Engineer

S. Argeo Ascani / Associate Curator, Music

Eileen Baumgartner / Graphic Designer

David Bebb / Senior System Administrator

Peter Bellamy / Senior Systems Programmer

Michael Bello / Video Engineer

Victoria Brooks / Curator, Time-Based Visual Arts

Eric Brucker / Lead Video Engineer

Ash Bulayev / Curator, Dance + Theater

Michele Cassaro / Guest Services Coordinator

John Cook / Box Office Manager

David DeLaRosa / Production Technician

Zhenelle Falk / Artist Services Administrator

William Fritz / Master Carpenter

Kimberly Gardner / Manager, Administrative Operations

Ian Hamelin / Project Manager

Katie Hammon / Administrative Specialist

Ryan Jenkins / Event Technician

Shannon Johnson / Design Director

Pamela Keenan / Production Technician

CathyJo Kile / Business Manager

Carl Lewandowski / Production Technician

Eric Chi-Yeh Lin / Lead Stage Technician

Stephen McLaughlin / Event Technician

Candice Sherman / Business Coordinator

Avery Stempel / Front of House Manager

Kim Strosahl / Acting Production Administrative Coordinator

Jeffrey Svatek / Audio Engineer

Dan Swalec / Master Electrician

Todd Vos / Lead Audio Engineer

Pete Wargo / Manager, Information Systems

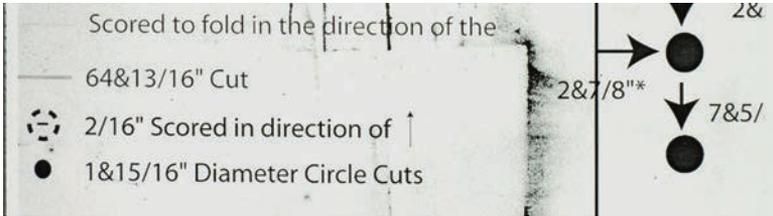
Michael Wells / Production Technician

Emily Zimmerman / Assistant Curator



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# SOMETHING SIMILAR



PERFORMANCE

## THE ARTIST THEATER PROGRAM

Erika Vogt

An exhibition of visual art, moving image, performance, and music that responds to the potential of the theater as a space of production, exhibition, and experience.

APRIL 11 8PM

# A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENT



PERFORMANCE

## PRODUCT OF CIRCUMSTANCES

Xavier Le Roy

Product of Circumstances is a performance—a space of philosophical investigations where performed micro-actions create a subtle subversion of hierarchical organizational forms.

APRIL 26 8PM