

Mon oncle post modernism



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Jacques Tati was a French filmmaker, actor, and director in the twentieth century. He has released six feature films, the most successful of which is “ Mon Oncle. ” It is a guided tour of the effects and experiences of post modernism on a world which is not quite ready for it. Tati himself stars as Monsieur Hulot the protagonist, an adventurous and quirky role model for the sheltered and squelched Gerard. Gerard lives with his chic, yet traditionally robotic materialist parents on the Villa Arpel.

The Villa Arpel is the antithesis of a home, although it serves as a place of residence it is fashioned superficially, sacrificing every function of a home for its cold aesthetics. Tati uses “ Mon Oncle” to address post modernism and define as well as critique its effects on all society, whether that part of society is contributing or not. The widespread changes to the experience of everyday life that have occurred in the last fifty years have been reflected in the American culture various ways.

The political, technological, and social changes of this time period are representations of how major cultural products have altered their aesthetics due to the rise of postmodernism. Therefore, postmodernism can be undoubtedly seen as a widespread movement linked to the political and economic extremities of everyday cultures and not only a shift in cultural nature. Postmodernism can be expressed as an ideology fueled by post World War II American consumerism that separates the modern man from his ancestors.

Even cultures who do not engage in consumerist practices as egregiously as American’s still feel the impact and are thus impacted by the postmodern

experience. Tati's film has as an underlying theme of an exploration of the links between an economic system which is idealized to produce profit incorporating a structural hierarchy and the lives and routines of everyday people coexisting in a community. Tati mounts a criticism of an environment subdued to the crippling effects of postmodernism, alienating social classes and families.

He uses the depiction of distinctly modernist architecture in contrast with the functioning world of the working class to emphasize its impacts. In "Mon Oncle", the audience commonly observes this contrast in real time between Uncle Hulot and the Arpels. One of the most direct differences between the two is their respective places of residence. The Villa Arpel is a home which is centered on materialistic views, social hierarchy, and consumerist products. These notions create an environment that is highly impractical and downright ridiculous to the average human being.

The Villa Arpel's construction is to show a contemporary facade of the newest technology rather than being efficient and realistic to the daily routines of the Arpels. "Mon Oncle's" most entertaining moments are of the Arpels struggling to safely exist at home amidst fashionable aluminum and plastic chairs that can't be used for sitting and uncommon, frustrating appliances that they struggle to control. Tati uses one scene of the Villa Arpel at night where the couple's silhouette through two front windows leaves them as the eyes for a giant robot head to describe their death of humanity.

Tati uses the Arpels' superficial and unrealistic structure of a home as a representation for the Arpels themselves. Tati feels that the Arpels have

traded their humanity for a social status and physical possessions; he uses them as an example for the impacts of consumerism and its potential damage to the human spirit. Tati conveys his themes of the unconventional Arpel lifestyle as well as Mr. Arpel's workplace for the audience with grayscale shades and tones along with opalescent weather.

This somewhat indirect approach to critiquing postmodernism is very effective, especially when combined with "Mon Oncle's" montage like visual style. The filming in itself is very reminiscent to postmodernism and an effective visual representation of the experience Tati is trying to convey. For example as the camera focuses on the Brand name fixed to the hood of Mr. Arple's car it indicates that Mr. Arple is very involved with the outward appearance of his possessions and is a large contributor to the consumerist way of life.

Tati is not entirely critical of postmodernism: while the films depict the difficulties of life in a postmodern age, they also emphasize some of the strategies by which individuals resist the emotional disconnection which tends to be a result of the Arples postmodern world. For example, the next shot reveals Mr. Arple to exist as just one out of many cars on the road, all of which are strikingly similar. While he is concerned with the brand and aesthetics of his own vehicle, Tati shows that no one else even notices.

He even hints at the similarities between two types of reaction to postmodernism within people. One man not caring about possessions in general, his included, and thus not care about the possessions of the people surrounding him. The other person is so engulfed in their own possessions

that they as well don't notice the objects of surrounding people. These are both reactions to the postmodern experience. The sense of emptiness in the Arples' world is used to give feeling for their attitude and show how self-inflicted their situation is.

The way in which Mr. Arple perceives the cityscape in the introduction scene where he drives to work affects the viewer. Since the viewer is a sort of temporal tourist within "Mon Oncle's" world the emptiness evoked is not so much a sense of abandonment as of a failure to connect. That is until the audience sees the city from the eyes of someone or something else. Even the dogs provide more of a connection than either of the Arples, and they serve as an example for the first kind of reaction to postmodernism.

Tati uses shots of building facades to identify with Mr. Arple, as architecture seems a perfect medium to emphasize his monotonous, repetitive nature. Such architecture also figures strongly in suggesting his emotional disconnection, like the gray buildings which seem to stare down on the dogs, indifferent to their plight. Shots like these are later repeated with the frame completely empty of relatable action to enhance the juxtaposition of Mr. Arple to his brother in law and ultimately Gerard. In contrast, Uncle Hulot is vastly aware of the environment he is living in.

He moves throughout this world with charm and glitter in his step, giving the viewer the realization that he is truly content with his life and does not need materials and a social status to define him. This difference in personality between Hulot and the Arpels is shown evident at the social gathering in the Villa Arpel. Hulot is unable to coexist with such technology and complexity as

he is just a simplistic man. The clashing of Hulot's persona and the ideology of a social hierarchy has the viewer see that without knowledge of the newest technology or fad, one cannot progress in this world that has been taken over by modernism.

Hulot is the epitome of a world lost in translation and without direction, but he shows that sometimes it is best to be happy with little rather than frustrated with a lot. Tati's work is centered on relationships, the differences and similarities of lifestyles and how they interlock and overlap. He explores social and economic inequalities while using a technique that brings a compressed narrative which shows two parallel worlds between the wealthy and hardworking middleclass. Tati criticizes from a distance yet keeps his commentary light enough to allow the humor of his composition to filter through.