



Overshoot
Best Performance by a Freight Elevator
in a Leading Role
Sarah Graham and Marc Angéllil

For the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale, *Fundamentals*, architect *cum* director Rem Koolhaas and his team examined 15 essential elements of architecture that are typically used in buildings. A group of unsung heroes, as it were, they included floor, wall, ceiling, roof, door, window, façade, balcony, corridor, fireplace, toilet, stair, escalator, ramp, and elevator.

For the first time, these hard working, time honored characters were ascribed with “cultural preferences, forgotten symbolism, technological advances, mutations triggered by intensifying global exchange, climatic adaptations, political calculations, regulatory requirements, new digital regimes, and, somewhere in the mix – the ideas of the architect that constitute the practice of architecture today.”

One can only imagine the excitement among the elements themselves – finally recognized for their significant contributions! While a few of these pieces have achieved important historical significance, such as the Spanish Steps in Rome in the stair category, or the curtain wall of the Barcelona Pavilion in the window category, throughout history most have had to endure their plight as mere supporting performers in the bigger picture of architecture.

Enter Karin Sander, a remarkable artist who frequently works with the ordinary stuff of everyday life. Karin sees the potential beauty, humor, and dignity of things ranging from office supplies to packaging to dirt, elevating and celebrating such lowly materials, creating works of art that startle, amuse, and entice us.

In her “Kunst am Bau” competition project for the roof of the Art University building in Linz, Austria, Karin met the freight elevator within the existing industrial building that makes up the art department. She noted in her competition entry: “The goods lift (Lastenaufzug) is very important for an artistic production site. He (the elevator in German is a guy) drives through all the floors of the building and transports people and works of art. First and foremost, however, he transports the material required for studying, testing, and working. The freight elevator is thus a central tool for an art university and is used by everyone from the first moment of entering the university. Always up and down he passes through the levels, ceilings and floors of the building.”

But this hard working performer who spends his entire career just moving up and down, up and down, in endless Sisyphean repetition, required a bit of dressing up in his new role as a leading actor. So Karin gave him a new suit of glass as he overshoots his habitual destination through the roof of the building. She endowed him with exceptional height – always a desired characteristic for a leading man – emerging not just one story but two as

he proudly surveys his kingdom, gazing over the campus, the city and the landscape beyond. When humans occupy the elevator, they share the stage with him, both seeing and being seen in glimpses through glass doors on each floor of the building and then emerge fully exposed on the rooftop, viewed from as far as they themselves can see. Sometimes, loaded with art materials destined for the studios within the Art University, the elevator resumes a more backstage supporting role. On occasion, he also doubles as a stage set for art exhibits that are housed within the moving capsule itself.

In his 1957 essay "The Eiffel Tower," Roland Barthes recalled that "Maupassant often lunched at the restaurant in the tower, though he didn't care much for the food: 'It's the only place in Paris,' he used to say, 'where I don't have to see it.' And it's true that you must take endless precautions, in Paris, not to see the Eiffel Tower; whatever the season, through mist and cloud, on overcast days or in sunshine, in rain – wherever you are, whatever the landscape of roofs, domes, or branches separating you from it, *the Tower is there* (...). The Tower looks at Paris. To visit the Tower is to get oneself up onto the balcony in order to perceive, comprehend, and savor a certain essence of Paris." Does Karin's elevator play a similar role in Linz? Both the Eiffel Tower and Karin's elevator are viewing machines, performing as actors in an open work. Both have altered the skylines and offer as voyeurs a filmic experience of their respective cities.

Let's not forget that elevators are no strangers to the film industry. They have set the stage for all genres over time. To note but a few: In *My Favorite Wife*, (1940) Cary Grant and Irene Dunn invoke the good life in a swank hotel elevator attended by doormen and upscale shopping purchases. Michelangelo Antonioni's *La Notte* (1961) opens with the credits foretelling a deteriorating relationship with reflections of the city of Milan from an elevator descending down into hell. In *Playtime* (1967), director Jacques Tati plays Monsieur Hulot, a befuddled Frenchman overwhelmed by the fruits of "modernity." Keanu Reeves in *Speed* (1994) holds his finger on the elevator button, holding the audience anticipating chase scenes crashing through the city of Los Angeles. In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005), Johnny Depp careens around vertically, horizontally, and diagonally in a magic elevator made of light. *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), referred to by Karin Sander in her competition entry, includes in its outlandish interiors a spectacularly tall, glossy red elevator.

As one of the fundamental elements of architecture, Karin's elevator has historic roots, celebrated in a collage of film clips of famous movies at the Venice Biennale by Rem Koolhaas, himself a former scriptwriter. In Linz, as in cinema, Karin transforms an ordinary working guy into a tall, handsome star, an actor commanding his stage. She convinces us to change our perception of this working class character as we now note – with the self-confidence of the recognized film critic – that

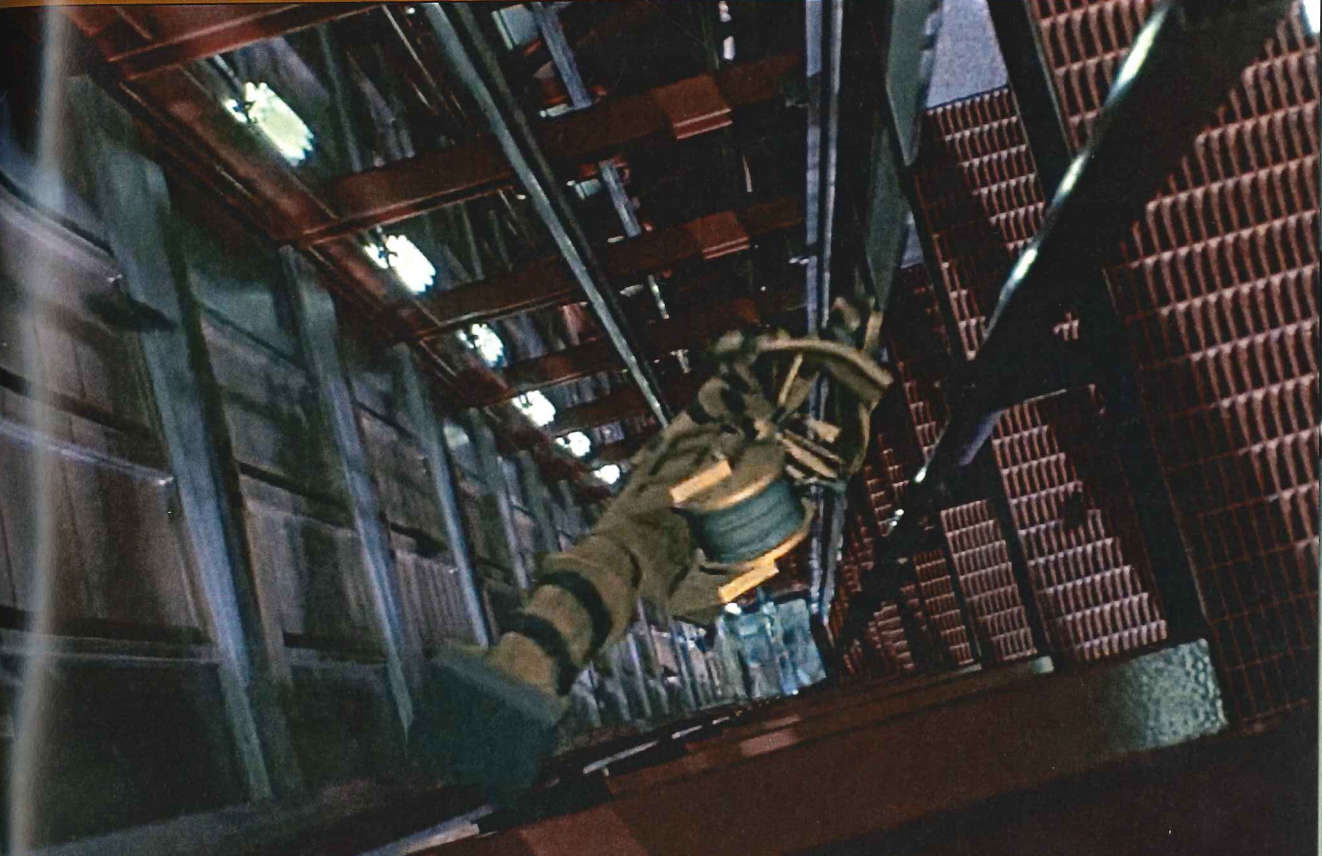
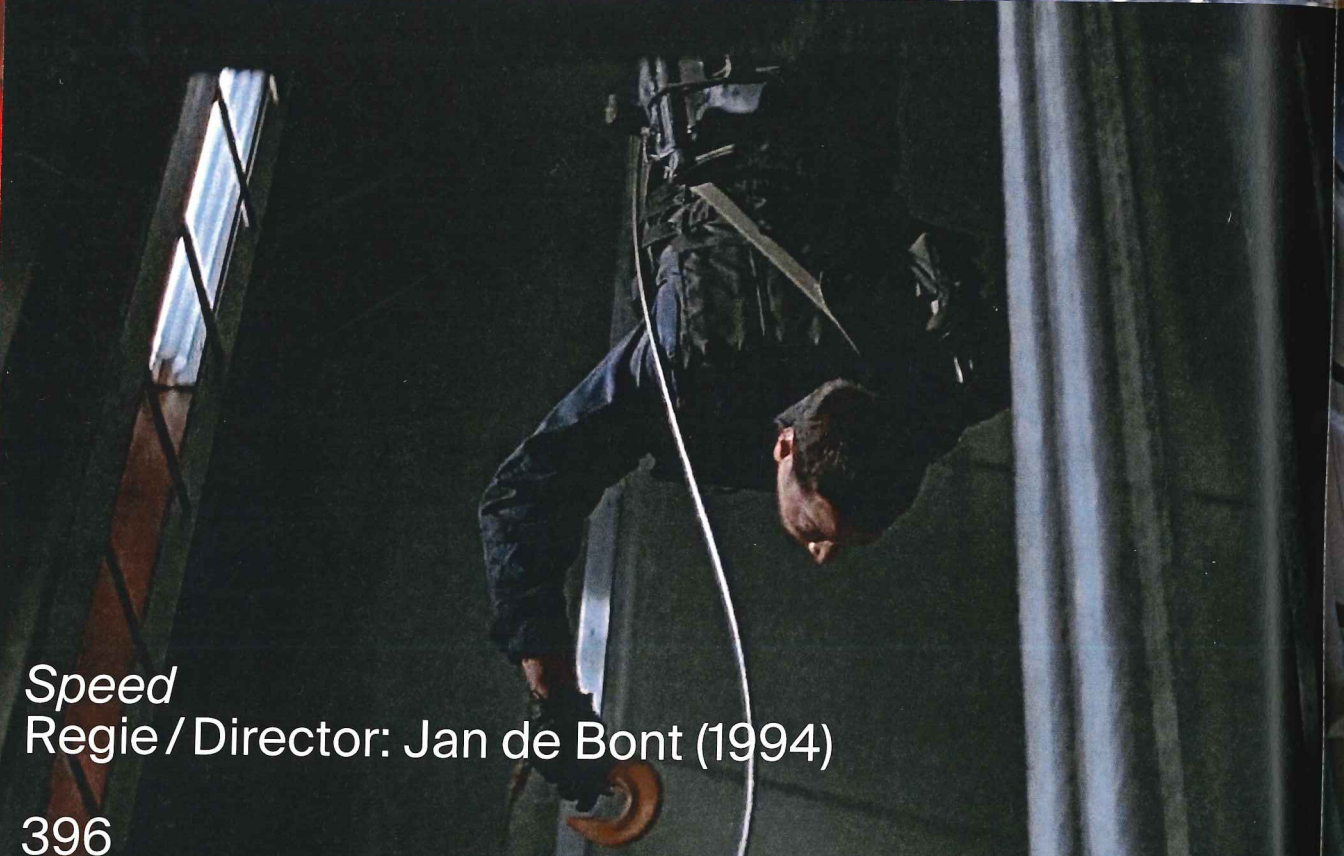
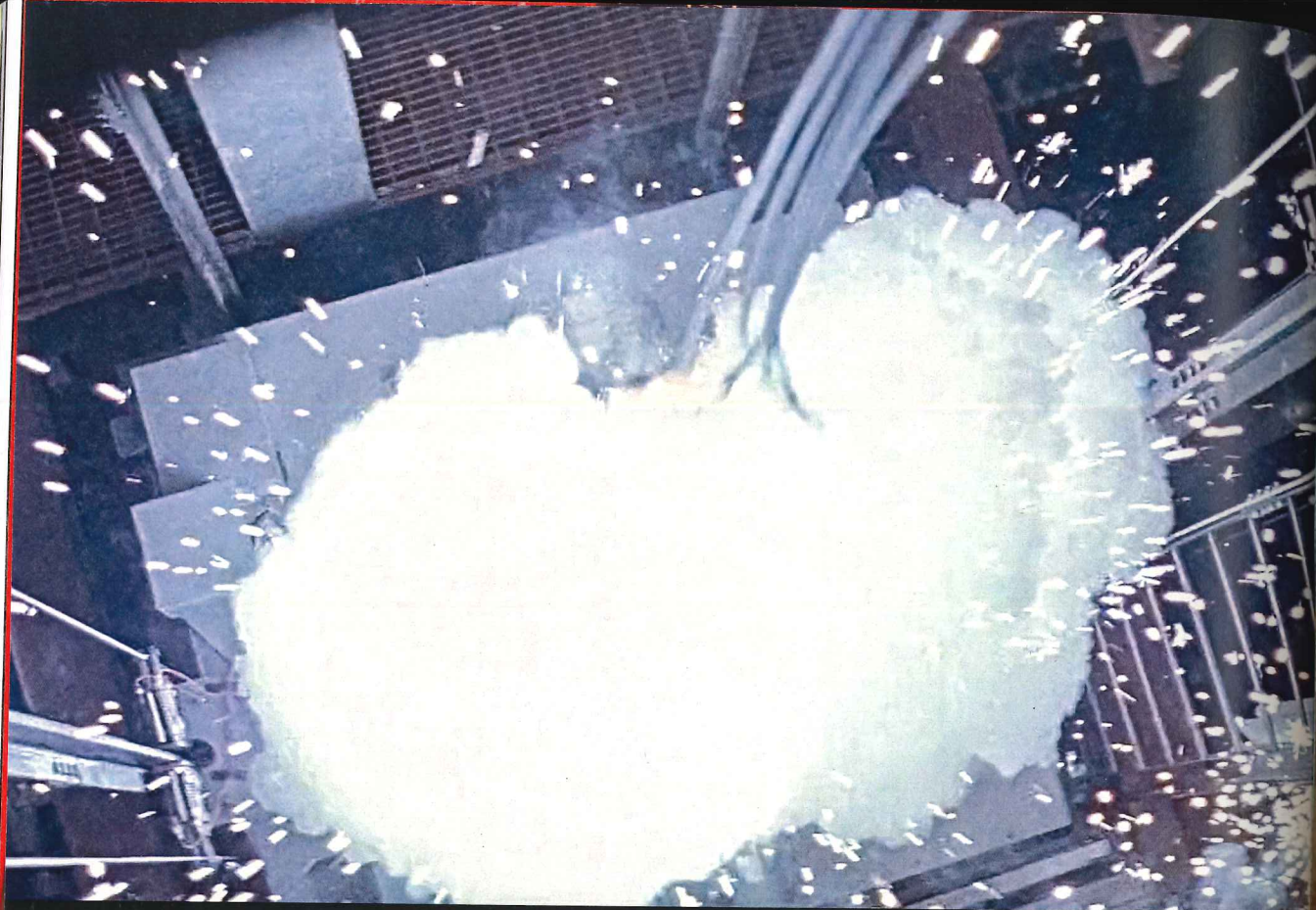
his pedigree includes moments of cinematic brilliance. We ascribe to him humor and poise and elegance. In accordance with the rules set by Hollywood's magnificently named Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Linz Art University lift has earned "Best Performance by a Freight Elevator in a Leading Role."



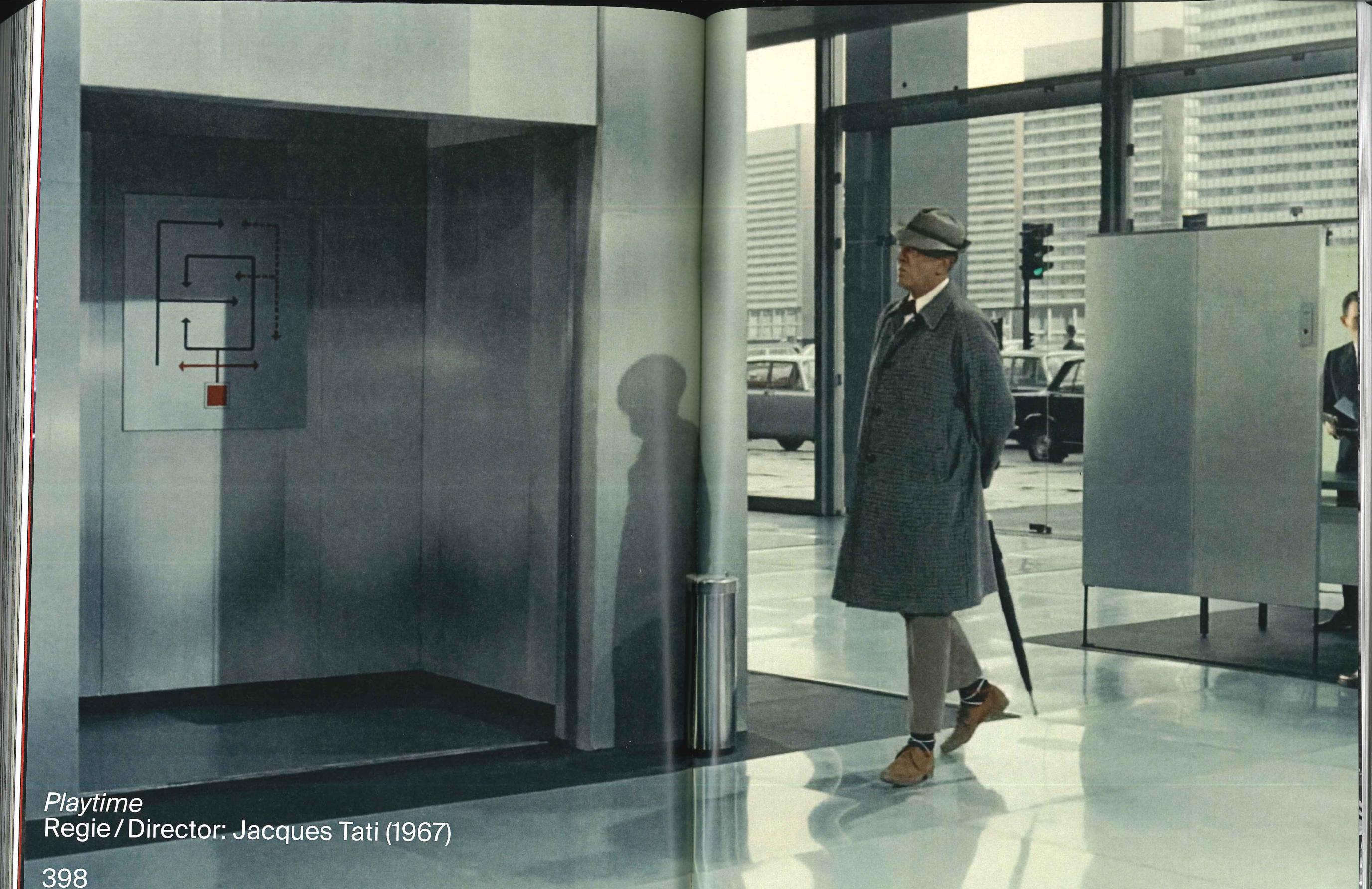
My Favorite Wife
Regie / Director: Garson Kanin (1940)



The Grand Budapest Hotel
Regie / Director: Wes Anderson (2014)



Speed
Regie / Director: Jan de Bont (1994)



Playtime
Regie / Director: Jacques Tati (1967)



Un film di

**MICHELANGELO
ANTONIONI**

con

**MARCELLO
MASTROIANNI**

La Notte

Regie / Director: Michelangelo Antonioni (1961)

400

LA NOTTE

e
BERNHARD WICKI