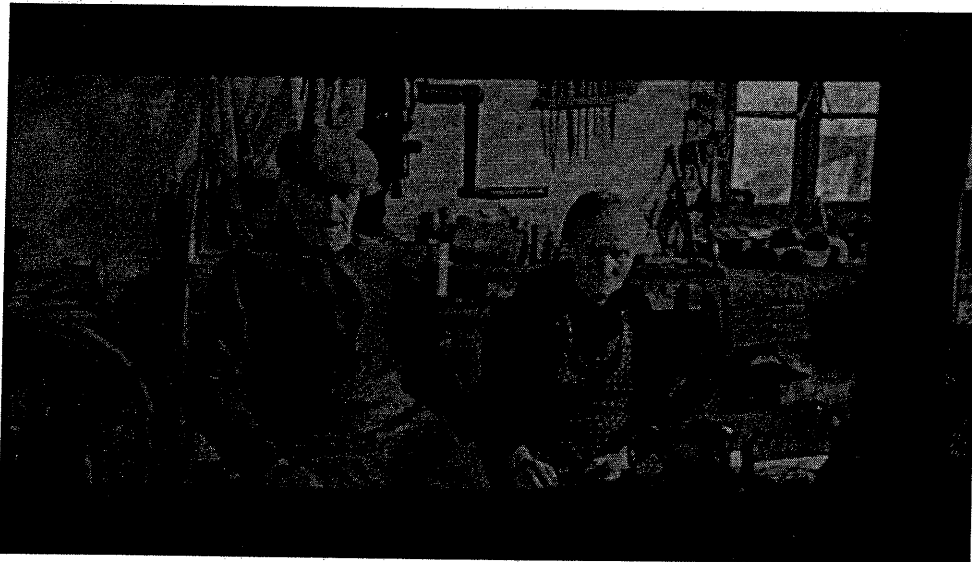


Monday, December 2, 2013

Film Review: 'Cousin Jules'

By Ronnie Scheib



Unreleased for 40 years, an award-winning documentary lyrically evokes a dying way of French country life.

Though it won the grand jury prize at Locarno in 1973, Dominique Benicheti's extraordinary documentary chronicling the everyday routines of an elderly blacksmith and his wife was never released, probably because not

enough arthouse cinemas were then equipped to project in CinemaScope with stereophonic sound. Aesthetically allied to fiction films of the time in the epic deliberation of its widescreen lensing and the assertive autonomy of its soundtrack, "Jules" also prefigures present-day observational documentary filmmaking at its starkly lyrical best. Beautifully restored by Arane/Gulliver Laboratories, this Cinema Guild release should lure discriminating arthouse auds.

The film unfolds in real-time segments synched to the highly attenuated rhythms of its elderly subjects. Jules Guitteaux, Benicheti's actual cousin, fires up his forge, heats an iron rod, splits one end and hammers each half into complementary curves, every laborious step in the process requiring multiple refirings, reheatings and rehammerings. These repetitive movements produce successive percussive sounds, amplified by the surrounding silence (the film is virtually dialogue-free), much like the soundtracks of "Sweetgrass" and "Leviathan," two recent documentaries out of the Harvard Sensory Ethnographic Lab. Perhaps not coincidentally, Benicheti (who died in 2011) taught documentary courses at Harvard at one stage or another during his innovative career.

In similar real-time intervals, Jules' wife, Felicie, methodically peels potatoes for their lunch and draws water from the well for their coffee. All the couple's movements are remarkably labor-intensive, even their machinery — the cranks and wheels that pump the bellows, rotate the grindstone or raise the well's bucket — necessitating tremendous expenditure of effort. This reaches its apogee when, after a series of water-fetching/transferring/heating operations and a slow, arduous grinding of beans, Felicie drinks her coffee teaspoon by teaspoon, digging out the liquid in a circular motion that also expends a maximum of energy. (Jules, meanwhile, serenely sips his.)

Variety, December 2, 2013, pg. 1/2

Although each sequence transpires in real time, the film was shot over a five-year period, and there is no indication of the hours, days, months or years that may have passed between scenes. In the total absence of any exposition or any explanation, it only gradually becomes clear that at some point Felicie has left the picture, her death signaled by her physical absence and by Jules' abandonment of the forge and systematic assumption of household chores, his movements even taking on some of Felicie's obsessive inefficiency (he moves the mirror from one wall to another and then back again in order to shave).

Cinematographer Pierre-William Glenn's tranquil sweeping pans over the lush Burgundy countryside around Jules' farm, dotted with slightly wispy trees of the sort that were prevalent in Gustave Courbet's painted landscapes, record seasonal changes that find little echo in Jules' repetitive, unvarying procedures. Yet even as the timelessness of the human activity on display seduces with its serenity, it evokes in modern viewers a definite impatience with the impracticality of traditional rites and rhythms, perhaps only enjoyable in 90-minute doses.

For the record, "Cousin Jules" was reviewed briefly by *Variety* at Locarno in 1973, described as "somewhat plodding and unclear in design ... the kind of film that keeps a distance (from its subjects), prettifies the grim look of their rural lives and does not let them say anything."

Film Review: 'Cousin Jules'

Reviewed at Film Forum, New York, Nov. 20, 2013. Running time: 91 MIN.

Production

(Documentary — France) A Cinema Guild (in U.S.) release of a Rythma Films production.

Crew

Directed, written by Dominique Benicheti. Camera (color, widescreen), Pierre-William Glenn; editor, Marie Genevieve Ripeau; sound (Dolby), Jean Rene Bouyer, Christian Bourquin, Roger Letellier; re-recording mixer, Jacques Maumont; 2k DCP restoration, Arane-Gilliver Labs.

With

Jules Guitteaux, Felicie Guitteaux.

THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

Cousin Jules: Film Review

by John DeFore

The Bottom Line

The quiet and beautifully simple doc captures a vanished age.

Opens:

Wednesday, November 27 (Cinema Guild)

Director-Screenwriter:

Dominique Benicheti

Cinema Guild unearths a document of French country life that has sat unreleased since 1973.

An almost wordless, wholly observational account of a blacksmith's routine in rural France, **Dominique Benicheti's** *Cousin Jules* enjoyed acclaim at festivals (including a jury prize at Locarno) after its completion in 1973 but never got distribution, even in its home country. Rescued from decay after the director's 2011 death and looking radiant in a 2K restoration, this quiet gem is a time capsule whose potential audience may be small, but will be transported.

Benicheti, who had a long career making films in boundary-pushing tech formats (he shot a 70mm, 3D doc in France's Chauvet Cave ten years before Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*), may have hindered his chances at distribution by shooting this intimate work in both CinemaScope and stereo. Even in a conventional format, it's easy to imagine distributors asking how many tickets they could possibly sell: The film's action (shot over five years, but edited to flow as if it were a single day of chores) consists of little more than a very old man working in his blacksmith shop, eating with his wife, tidying up around the house and so on; dialogue, on the rare occasions it occurs, rarely consists of more than a couple of succinct sentences.

But for the patient viewer, particularly one seeking respite from the modern world, this day-in-a-life may be an almost spiritual experience. Benicheti and his cinematographers frame scenes exquisitely, evidently going so far as to use a dolly for shots tracking movement from house to barn or shop. (Many contemporary docmakers working in observation-only mode would be well advised to pay even a quarter as much attention to aesthetics.)

The opening scenes offer particular pleasure, following Jules's morning work uninterrupted -- lighting kindling, working a wheezing bellows to stoke the flames, heating iron and pounding it into shape. As the day continues, the viewer's mind may occasionally wander in not-unpleasant ways, sinking into routines like shaving, peeling potatoes and sweeping the floor along with Jules and wife Felicie. (Felicie died during filming and is absent in evening scenes, giving the close of day a special poignancy.)

Many viewers will wish Jules would speak to the camera from time to time, or that we would see him and his wife partaking in some recreation beyond their silent coffee breaks. But Benicheti seems by the end to

suggest that the way Jules performs chores *is* his personality -- orderly, practical, humble. Sitting in his presence for an hour and a half is an experience worth fighting off restlessness for.

Production Company: Rythma Films

Director-Screenwriter: Dominique Benicheti

Directors of photography: Pierre William Glenn, Paul Launay

Editor: Marie Genevieve Ripeau

No rating, 91 minutes

FILM FORUM

209 West Houston Street, New York, NY 10014
Box Office: 212-727-8110

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE November 14, 2013
CONTACT - Mike Maggioro, 212-627-2035, mike@filmforum.org

COUSIN JULES: A Rediscovered Masterpiece, Set in Rural France: Documentary Has World Theatrical Premiere Wednesday, November 27 at Film Forum

Film Forum is pleased to present the world theatrical premiere of COUSIN JULES (1973); it is a recently unearthed documentary gem focusing on an elderly couple in a small village in Burgundy: a rare combination of sophisticated movie-making technique (shot in CinemaScope and recorded in stereo) and content that is a veritable ode to the beauty of rural France, the simplicity of daily peasant life, and the nearly wordless intimacy of a lifelong relationship. Recording over a 5-year period, director Dominique Benicheti and cinematographer Pierre William Glenn palpably capture the rhythms and rituals of blacksmith Jules Guiteaux and his wife Félicie as Jules dons wooden clogs and leather apron to work in his shop, while Félicie tends a vegetable garden and prepares their meals. Awarded the Jury Prize at the Locarno Film Festival in 1973 and widely acclaimed around the world, COUSIN JULES was presented in a new restoration at the 2012 New York Film Festival. Nevertheless, the film has remained unreleased theatrically (even in France) until now.

COUSIN JULES will have a 2-week engagement, November 27 – December 10, at Film Forum, West Houston Street, West of 6th Avenue with screenings daily at 1:00, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, 10:10.

COUSIN JULES never found a distributor in the 1970s – partly due to the expense of striking prints in Cinemascope and stereo, partly due to the fact that many arthouses were not equipped to screen films in CinemaScope *and* stereo sound – and Benicheti insisted that the film only be shown as it was originally intended. The filmmaker produced or directed over 30 films, taught documentary filmmaking at Harvard, and worked on creating 3-D and special format films before his death in 2011. COUSIN JULES is his only feature-length film.

“A stunning film. A steady succession of absolutely beautiful images to see and to hear. (The film is) an invitation to learn to hear again, to pay fresh attention to field birds, rooster crows, the ring of hammer on anvil, the sizzle of a blade against a grindstone... It is enormously affecting, partly because the European heritage belongs to so many of us, partly because the countryside and the life look not so different at all from the rural America many of us knew.”

– Charles Champlin, *Los Angeles Times* (reviewing from a 1974 screening at Filmex)

“An exquisite gem, a masterpiece of humanity.” – Dan Talbot, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas

COUSIN JULES (1973, 91 mins.) Writer and Director: Dominique Benicheti. Produced by Rythma Films. Director of Photography: Pierre William Glenn and Paul Launay. Editing: Marie Genevieve Ripeau. Sound: Roger Letellier and Rene Jean Bouyer. Cast: Jules and Felicie Guiteaux. France. In French with English subtitles. A Cinema Guild release.

Press screenings: Tuesday, November 19 at 11:00am
Wednesday, November 20 at 11:00am

Both screenings will be held at Film Forum.

RSVP: Adam Walker, adam@filmforum.org, (212) 627-2035

For downloadable photos and press notes, go to: www.filmforum.org/press

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COUSIN JULES

(1973, 91 mins.) Writer and Director: Dominique Benicheti. Produced by Rythma Films. Director of Photography: Pierre William Glenn and Paul Launay. Editing: Marie Genevieve Ripeau. Sound: Roger Letellier and Rene Jean Bouyer. Cast: Jules and Félicie Guitteaux. France. In French with English subtitles. A Cinema Guild release.

November 27 – December 10, 2013
Screenings daily at 1:00, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, 10:10

On sale at the concession: COUSIN JULES poster - \$20

Film Forum is pleased to present the world theatrical premiere of COUSIN JULES (1973), a recently unearthed documentary gem focusing on an elderly couple in a small village in Burgundy. Filmmaker Dominique Benicheti uses a rare combination of sophisticated movie-making technique (shot in CinemaScope and recorded in stereo) to craft a veritable ode to the beauty of rural France, the simplicity of daily peasant life, and the nearly wordless intimacy of a lifelong relationship. Recording over a 5-year period, Benicheti and cinematographer Pierre William Glenn palpably capture the rhythms and rituals of blacksmith Jules Guitteaux and his wife Félicie as he dons wooden clogs and leather apron to work in his shop, while she tends a vegetable garden and prepares their meals. Awarded the Jury Prize at the Locarno Film Festival in 1973 and widely acclaimed around the world, COUSIN JULES was presented in a new restoration at the 2012 New York Film Festival. Nevertheless, the film has remained unreleased theatrically (even in France) until now.

COUSIN JULES never found a distributor in the 1970s – partly due to the expense of striking prints in CinemaScope and stereo and the fact that many arthouses were not equipped to screen films in CinemaScope and stereo sound. Benicheti insisted that this is the only way it could be shown. The filmmaker produced or directed over 30 films, taught documentary filmmaking at Harvard, and worked on creating 3-D and special format films before his death in 2011. COUSIN JULES is his only feature-length film.

Excerpted from Kristin M. Jones's November 26 feature in *The Wall Street Journal*

Having attended to chores around his farm, an elderly man wearing mended eyeglasses and a worn but neat corduroy jacket reads a newspaper alone in a modest farmhouse, while his cat dozes on a chair once occupied by his late wife. It's an unadorned but profoundly moving scene from the recently restored and rediscovered documentary COUSIN JULES ("Le cousin Jules," 1973) by Dominique Benicheti. A quiet jewel—free of narration and almost entirely without dialogue—it was shot in CinemaScope and recorded in stereo, creating an indelibly immersive experience...

During the 1970s it didn't find a distributor despite being critically acclaimed. It was an unusual documentary, requiring patient engagement from viewers, and CinemaScope prints were expensive to strike. Many art theaters were also not equipped to screen it properly, and Benicheti preferred to have it shown in the intended format.

In COUSIN JULES Benicheti's innovation is inseparable from his artistry. Luminous and exquisitely framed, his patient shots of rural vistas often recall 19th-century French painting. One thinks of Vincent van Gogh's radiant fields, Jean-François Millet's laboring peasants and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot's precise but poetic landscapes. And yet COUSIN JULES will also speak to many who have spent time in rural America. Combining objectivity with beauty, unsentimentality with warmth, it's ultimately a tribute to life itself.

Holiday Movies

COUSIN JULES A prizewinner at the Locarno film festival in 1973 but being released for the first time in the United States, Dominique Benicheti's documentary covers five years in the life of a French blacksmith and his wife, depicting a traditional peasant culture that has since largely disappeared.

TIMEOUT.COM/NEWYORK November 21-27, 2013

Film Forum 209 W Houston St between Sixth Ave and Varick St (212-727-8110, filmforum.org). Subway: 1 to Houston St. \$12.50, seniors (Mon-Fri before 5pm) and members \$7.

*•Thu-Wed 27 at 1, 3:45, 6:40, 9:20pm **Faust** Dir. Aleksandr Sokurov. 2011. 135mins. See Now Playing.

•Thu-Tue 1, 3:15, 5:40, 7:50, 10pm **Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Enter Here** Dir. Aram Wallach. 2013. 103mins. See Now Playing.

*•Fri, Sat, Tue, Wed 27 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30pm; Sun 1:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30pm; Mon 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 9:50pm **Sandra** Dir. Luchino Visconti. 1965. 105mins. See Reviews.

*•Sun 11am **Miracle on 34th Street** Dir. George Seaton. 1947. 96mins. Today, the miracle would be getting past the Manhattan mall at midafternoon without 40 strangers jostling your elbows.

•Sun 3:30pm **John F. Kennedy: Years of Lightning, Day of Drums** Dir. Bruce Herschensohn. 1965. 85mins. Highlights of President Kennedy's tenure are intercut with the day of his funeral in this little-seen documentary portrait.

*•Mon 7:30pm **Nightmare Alley** Dir. Edmund Goulding. 1947. 111mins. Carny films don't get much creepier than this tawdry tale, in which Tyrone Power works a sideshow scam with Joan Blondell.

•Wed 27 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, 10:10pm **Cousin Jules** Dir. Dominique Benicheti. 1973. 91mins. Benicheti shot this doc over the course of five years, chronicling the daily rituals of a country blacksmith.

Bruce Weber

*•Thu 2, 4:30, 9pm **Let's Get Lost** 1989. 119mins. Weber's black-and-white documentary on the James Dean of the '50s jazz scene juxtaposes archival footage with a poignant look at the man during the final years of his life.

•Thu 7pm **A Letter to True** 2004. 78mins. It's a valentine to Weber's late, beloved golden retriever, though this documentary touches on a number of famous people and their pets.



The Family Jules

Cousin Jules (1973)

Directed by Dominique Benicheti
Opens November 27 at Film Forum

Observing a day-to-day that has long since bound two people to a place—and more tightly still to each other—this nonfiction film presents a patient record of purposeful gestures. Director Benicheti followed the subjects of his first feature from 1968 to 1973, shooting in crisp CinemaScope and documenting a kind of comfortable austerity as it's taken shape over the years in a bucolic corner of Burgundy: the elderly blacksmith Jules shuffles over to his workshop, where he peaceably wields the tools of his trade—hammer, vise, massive leather bellows, etc.—his day's industry carried out without a movement wasted; his wife, Felicie, tends house and garden, stoking a fire of her own to boil some potatoes. There are few words spoken between the couple, but they often appear lightly bemused by the presence of the camera, never more so here than when they afford themselves a minute to stop and think during an afternoon coffee break.

Cousin Jules, recently restored and only now receiving its first commercial release, itself feels admirably workmanlike in its approach, its observations long-haul, providing startling evidence of the years' toll. A ways into the film, Benicheti surveys the winter landscape before cutting to a view of the local cemetery, where a gravedigger commences his task after a resounding clap of his hands. When we pick back up with Jules, he's engaged in a widower's abbreviated housekeeping, moving items (a shaving mirror, a large pillow) from one part of the room to another as the task at hand demands. There appears to be a drag on the man's movements as he mends his leather apron, but he otherwise doesn't seem to flinch much from the drawn-out silence, a black cat sitting beside him as he peruses a tradesman's newsletter through his reading glasses. Jules's workshop may no longer stand today, but thankfully this remarkable document, at once becalming and bleak, does.

Benjamin Mercer

PHOTO COURTESY FILM FORUM

A Quiet Life Restored

Cousin Jules

Film Forum
Nov. 27 through Dec. 10

By KRISTIN M. JONES

New York
Having attended to chores around his farm, an elderly man wearing mended eyeglasses and a worn but neat corduroy jacket reads a newspaper alone in a modest farmhouse, while his cat dozes on a chair once occupied by his late wife. It's an unadorned but profoundly moving scene from the recently restored and rediscovered documentary "Cousin Jules" ("Le cousin Jules," 1973) by Dominique Benicheti. A quiet jewel—free of narration and almost entirely without dialogue—it was shot in CinemaScope and recorded in stereo, creating an indelibly immersive experience.

Four decades after it had its premiere at the Locarno Film Festival, where it was awarded the Special Jury Prize, "Cousin Jules" will be released theatrically for the first time on Wednesday, having its debut at New York's Film Forum before a national rollout. During the 1970s it didn't find a distributor despite being critically acclaimed. It was an unusual documentary, requiring patient engagement from viewers, and CinemaScope prints were expensive to strike. Many art theaters were also not equipped to screen it properly, and Benicheti preferred to have it shown in the intended format.

Richard Peña, a Columbia University professor of film

studies and the former program director of the Film Society of Lincoln Center, who screened the restoration at last year's New York Film Festival, recalled in an email: "I first saw 'Cousin Jules' in 1977, at Harvard University, where I was a teaching fellow and Dominique was a visiting professor teaching film production. I didn't know his work, and one day he told me that he was going to screen one of his films for a few friends. That turned out to be 'Cousin Jules,' and I was completely blown away by it. Boston-Cambridge had a very intense documentary scene back then, and there were lots of debates and discussions. 'Cousin Jules' was a fascinating intervention into those discussions."

Over time the original negative and existing copies deteriorated, although Benicheti had begun restoration work before he died in 2011. After his death a mutual friend who was closer to the filmmaker asked Mr. Peña whether he would consider screening "Cousin Jules" at Lincoln Center and he immediately agreed. When it was discovered that there were no existing prints, money was raised to complete the digital restoration, and it was finished in time for the 2012 New York Film Festival.

Taking five years to complete, the film was a labor of love as well as an impressive technical achievement. In 1968 Benicheti began filming his relative Jules Guiteaux, who was then a blacksmith, and Jules's wife, Félicie, on their farm in Burgundy. The cinematography was done by Paul Launay, his camera instructor

at the Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies, and by Pierre William Glenn, who has shot films for directors such as François Truffaut and Bertrand Tavernier.

"Cousin Jules" opens with gliding shots of Jules's tools in his workshop. (The workshop also appears at the end, though seeing it at the conclusion is a very different experience.) Emerging from the house, Jules dons his clogs and apron, and

unbearable weight. In the second half, Jules no longer works as a blacksmith. He shaves, attends to chores about the farm, cooks, mends his clothing by the stove. Although most of the film unfolds during daylight, at the elegiac conclusion we see him eating dinner alone after dark, first seen close up, then from outside the house, through a glowing window.

Benicheti directed and produced more than 30 movies, including scientific, institutional and animated films, as well as documentaries; he also worked as a consultant on 3-D, large-format and panoramic films. "Dominique had an astoundingly quick and wildly innovative mind," Mr. Peña said. "He was really full of ideas and eager to find ways to realize them. For me, he was a filmmaker who was fascinated with pushing the envelope of cinema in every conceivable direction."

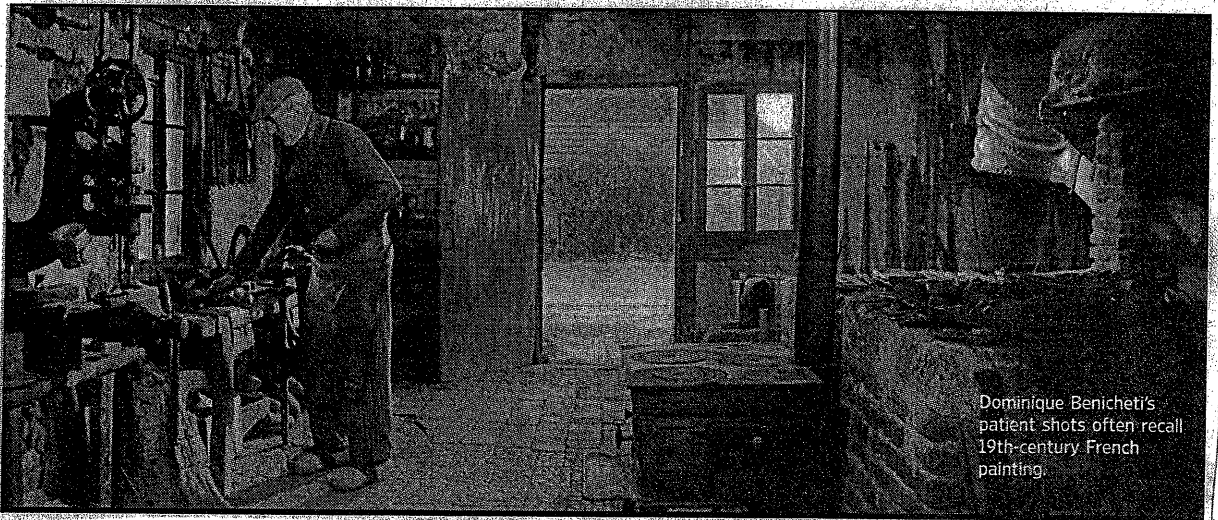
In "Cousin Jules" Benicheti's innovation is inseparable from his artistry. Luminous and exquisitely framed, his patient shots of rural vistas often recall 19th-century French painting. One thinks of Vincent van Gogh's radiant fields, Jean-François Millet's laboring peasants and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot's precise but poetic landscapes. And yet "Cousin Jules" will also speak to many who have spent time in rural America. Combining objectivity with beauty, unsentimentality with warmth, it's ultimately a tribute to life itself.

Ms. Jones writes about film for the Journal.

Four decades after its premiere, this unusual documentary will be released theatrically for the first time.

soon the breathlike bellows, the fire's pulsing glow on his face and the echoing clang of his hammer become hypnotic. Throughout the film, the magnificently recorded soundscape also weaves its own spell: roosters, songbirds and rustling leaves lend an almost musical rhythm to the couple's days. Félicie peels potatoes in the sunshine; a finger on one of her gnarled hands is missing. She brings water from the well to Jules's workshop, where she grinds and brews coffee, and he stops work so they can savor it quietly together. They eat meals in comfortable near silence.

Midway through filming, Félicie died, an event that is only discreetly acknowledged but bifurcates the film and gives its tenderness almost



Dominique Benicheti's patient shots often recall 19th-century French painting.

Film Forum 209 W Houston St between Sixth Ave and Varick St (212-727-8110, filmforum.org). Subway: 1 to Houston St. \$12.50, seniors (Mon–Fri before 5pm) and members \$7.

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*●Thu–Wed 4 at 1, 3:45, 6:40, 9:20pm **Faust** Dir. Alexander Sokurov. 2011. 135mins. See Now Playing.

*●Thu 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30pm **Sandra** Dir. Luchino Visconti. 1965. 105mins. Visconti and Claudia Cardinale...what more do you need to know?

*●Fri–Wed 4 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, 9:40pm **Mauvais Sang** Dir.

Léos Carax. 1986. 119mins. See Reviews.

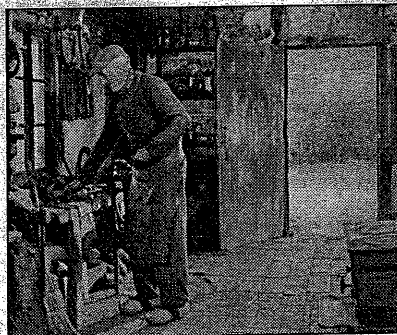
New York Post, Wednesday, November 27, 2013

'Jules' strikes while the iron is hot

COUSIN JULES ★★★½

MAKING its New York debut 40 years after it was made is this film about the daily lives of a rural Burgundy couple. "Cousin Jules" received plenty of festival acclaim when it was originally shown in 1973, but this scoreless, nearly dialogue-free movie did not exactly burst with mainstream potential. And director Dominique Benichetti's refusal to let his film be screened in anything other than CinemaScope and stereo meant most art houses couldn't accommodate it.

It's readily apparent why "Cousin Jules" never found a distributor, but it's also obvious that this is a uniquely



Jules Guiteaux is a man of few words in the documentary "Cousin Jules."

rewarding movie. In long, lovely takes, Benichetti and cinematographers Pierre-William Glenn and Paul Launay

show how the blacksmith Jules and his wife, Félicie, go about their daily business on this seemingly remote farm. The film takes in the couple's silent ways of communication, the unspoiled countryside, the casual way Jules handles red-hot metal and his wife's hands — one missing an index finger — as she prepares their meals.

It only seems plotless. Momentous things happen, one of them telegraphed in a single heartbreaking shot. The sense of time and place is so intense that Jules' way of life seems to be disappearing even as we watch him.

In French, with English subtitles. Running time: 91 minutes. Not rated (nothing offensive). At the Film Forum, Houston and Varick streets.

— Farran Smith Nehme



Sit happens Jules takes a break from his daily chores.

Cousin Jules

★★★★

Dir. Dominique Benicheti. 1972. N/R. 91mins. In French, with subtitles. Documentary.

Despite wowing viewers and winning an award at the 1973 Locarno International Film Festival, Dominique Benicheti's you-are-there chronicle of French blacksmith Jules Guiteaux and his wife, Félicie, going about their

daily business seemed destined for eternal obscurity. The documentarian insisted that his labor of love be shown only in CinemaScope and with stereo sound, exactly as he shot it; distributors balked. So there Benicheti's poetic ode to a bygone rural world sat, wasting away, until fans funded a digital restoration of the movie.

Vive the peasant-life procedural! *Cousin Jules* doesn't seek to

elevate its elderly subjects so much as capture them in a state of being: I hit the red-hot metal and peel potatoes (paging Jeanne Dielman!), therefore I am. For 91 minutes, the pleasure of the Guiteauxes' company is ours. We are ultimately the richer for it. (Now playing; Film Forum.)—David Fear

THE BOTTOM LINE A long-neglected look at a rural French couple finally gets its due.

TIMEOUT.COM/NEWYORK November 28–December 4, 2013

Film

THE NEW YORKER, DECEMBER 2, 2013

Cousin Jules

Dominique Benicheti's tender and accomplished documentary, from 1973, about his real-life cousin, Jules Guiteaux, a blacksmith in rural Burgundy, is, above all, a record of premodern industrial and domestic crafts—a cinematographic Colonial Williamsburg. Jules fans a furnace with a groaning leather bellows, ringingly hammers a red-glowing tip of iron, drills holes with a huge flywheel-driven contraption. To make his cup of coffee, Jules's wife, Félicie (who died midway through the five-year shoot), draws water from a well with a hand-cranked bucket; he hand-rolls a cigarette to enjoy with it. Shooting in color and widescreen, Benicheti makes images that are as poised and attentive as are his subjects. Each new activity that he reveals offers surprises that are fraught with the passing of time and the burden of labor; the wear on every handle and surface seems to embody a vast history in silence. Yet that silence is also an artifice; Benicheti's observations don't offer much depth or insight—what happened there during the war? How do they make their money? What's in that newspaper that Jules reads at lunch? The movie is resolutely non-analytical, but it may leave a viewer hyper-alert to his own routine gestures and sounds. In French.—R.B. (Film Forum; Nov. 27-Dec. 10.)

Critics' picks

COUSIN JULES

Neglected for decades, this recently restored epic documentary on an elderly rural blacksmith finally gets a theatrical release—and the credit it's due. ► Film Forum; now playing

Cousin Jules

Written and directed by Dominique Benicheti. Cinema Guild
Opens November 27, Film Forum

Formally ambitious on the grandest scale, Dominique Benicheti's 1973 documentary *Cousin Jules* earns an oft-trotted-out maxim: This film is unlike any other you will see all year. Well, one exception: *Cousin Jules* is an antecedent to *Leviathan*, the fishing doc rightly billed as a work of sensory ethnography. Like *Leviathan*, which doesn't tell a story but rather relates the sensuous immediacy of its subjects' lives through raw, visceral images presented without narrative context, *Cousin Jules* concerns the essence inherent in actions, the way quotidian existence can be suffused with poetic peacefulness—and overwhelming sadness. Benicheti's subjects are an elderly blacksmith (Benicheti's cousin) and his wife. As we observe their daily routines—Jules working with his tools, his wife preparing meals—this almost wordless doc sinks us into a tranquil rhythm that may feel somnambulant to some stimulus-addled urbanites. The effect on those who are willing to exert a little patience will be entirely different. Benicheti's commitment to his formalism, to the unstinting excavation of a time and place in the hopes of creating overwhelming verisimilitude, is practically monklike in its dedication (and indeed, another film descendant is Philip Gröning's *Into Great Silence*); through his commitment, we begin to experience the film as a kind of mindfulness in action, the viewing of the picture as an immersion in a meditative state. Thoroughly transporting, the peacefulness and clarity of *Cousin Jules* can't help but reveal, by contrast, the restlessness and agitation too common to life today. ZACHARY WIGON

VILLAGE VOICE NOVEMBER 27–DECEMBER 3, 2013

FESTIVALS & REVIVALS

MANHATTAN

FILM FORUM
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filmforum.org

Cousin Jules. Filmmaker Dominique Benicheti spends five years recording the daily lives of two French farmers. Today-Tuesday 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, 10:10.

The Purchase Price. A nightclub singer on the run becomes a Midwestern farmer's mail-order bride. Tuesday 1, 4:10, 7:20, 10:30.

Ladies They Talk About. A woman sent to San Quentin becomes an inmate boss and plans an escape. Monday 1, 4:30, 8.

Double Indemnity. An insurance man helps a platinum blonde kill her husband, but all does not go as planned. Tomorrow 1:30, 5:30, 9:30.

The Bitter Tea of General Yen. A U.S. missionary is gradually seduced by a courtly warlord holding her in Shanghai. Today 1, 4:40, 8:20.

Monkey Business. Four shipboard stowaways involved with gangsters. Sunday 11.

The Lady Eve. Father-daughter cardsharps fleece a rich man's son on a cruise ship. Tomorrow 3:40, 7:40.

Meet John Doe. A reporter pays a bum to pose as her popular but made-up spokesman, John Doe. Sunday 1.

The Miracle Woman. A faith healer backed by a con man is redeemed by her love for a blind ex-pilot. Today 2:50, 6:30, 8:20, 10:10.

So Big. A woman dreams that her son will become an architect. Tuesday 2:30, 5:40, 7:20, 8:50.

Ladies of Leisure. A Broadway gold digger meets her target's mother. Monday 2:30, 6, 9:30.

Baby Face. An out-of-town working girl rises in a New York bank by using her power over men. Sunday 3:30, 6:50, 9:50.

Night Nurse. Two private nurses figure out a trust-fund murder scheme. Sunday 5:20, 8:20.

Cousin Jules ★★★★★ *Dir. Dominique Benicheti. 1972. N/R. 91mins.*

Documentary. Benicheti's you-are-there chronicle of French blacksmith Jules Guiteaux and his wife, Félicie, going about their daily business seemed destined for eternal obscurity. The documentarian insisted that his labor of love be shown only in CinemaScope and with stereo sound, exactly as he shot it; distributors balked. So there Benicheti's poetic ode to a bygone rural world sat, wasting away, until fans funded a digital restoration of the movie. Vive the peasant-life procedural!—DF

***Cousin Jules** *Dir. Dominique Benicheti. 1973. 91mins.* Benicheti shot this doc over the course of five years, chronicling the daily rituals of blacksmith Jules Guiteaux and his wife, Félicie. *Film Forum; Thu-Tue 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, 10:10pm; \$7-\$12.50.*

Critics' picks



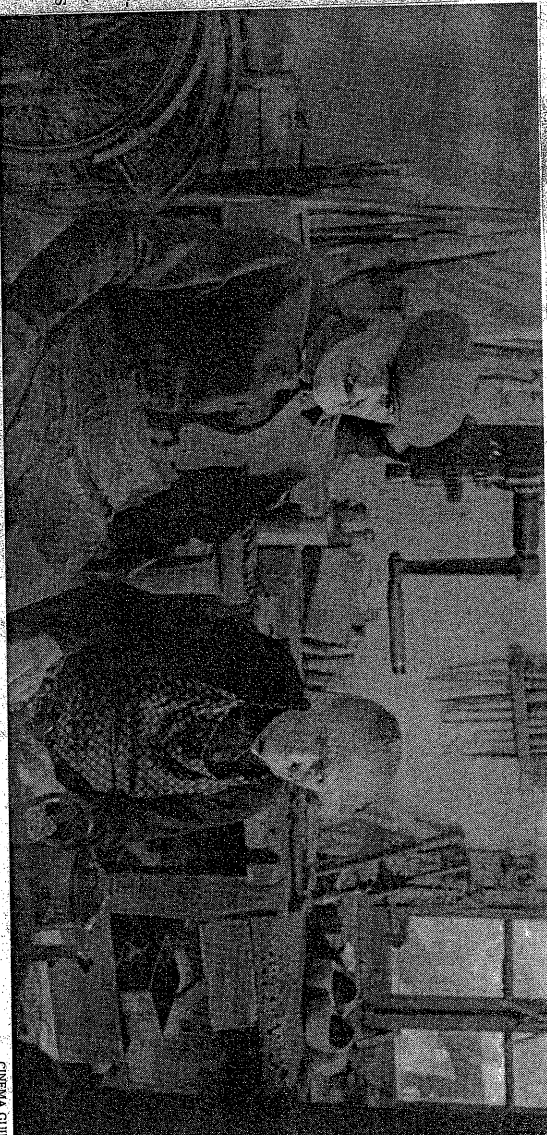
COUSIN JULES

Neglected for decades, this recently restored epic documentary on an elderly rural blacksmith finally gets a theatrical release—and the credit it's due. ▶ Film Forum; now playing

A Couple Living In a State Of Nostalgia

Modern documentary filmmaking has been often defined by speed and portability. That was true in the late '50s and early '60s, when lightweight machinery helped give birth to the cinema vérité and direct cinema movements, and it is certainly true today, when smartphones and tiny digital cameras turn everyday life into a collective

FILM REVIEW But there have always been anomalies: films that use slower, more cumbersome methods to contemplate reality. One of these is "Cousin Jules," Dominique Benichet's slow and quiet study of French rural life, shot from 1968 to 1973 in a sumptuous wide-screen format with stereo sound. "Cousin Jules" played at a few North American festivals shortly after it was completed, but its technical demands were beyond what most art-house theaters could handle. The digital restoration opening on Wednesday at the Film Forum — the movie's first American commercial release — conveys the rich



CINEMA GUILD

Jules Guitreaux and his wife, Felicie, in the first American commercial release of "Cousin Jules," made 40 years ago.

images and subtle sounds that Mr. Benichet and his crew captured during their visits to a rugged farmstead in the hills of Burgundy, the home of Jules and Felicie Guitreaux.

Both were born in 1891, but they represent a way of life that is much older. Jules, a blacksmith, works with a hand-cranked bellows and a battered metal stove, hammering out hasps and hinges with an ease and precision that represent generations of handed-down know-

how. His labor has an almost musical quality, enhanced by Mr. Benichet's sharp and subtle sound design.

The first part of "Cousin Jules" follows the couple through a day that is most likely the composite of many such days: chores punctuated by lunch in the kitchen and afternoon coffee in the barn. Jules and Felicie are residents of what is sometimes called "la France profonde," a steadfast agricultural domain that has existed in parallel, and

sometimes in opposition, to the industry and cosmopolitanism of Paris and other French cities.

There is a palpable nostalgia in this 40-year-old film (comparable with what can be found in Raymond Depardon's 2008 documentary "Modern Life"), but it may also resonate among 21st-century devotees of the agrarian and the artisanal. With their hand-rolled cigarettes, free-range chickens and pour-over coffee, Jules and Felicie would be the cool-

Cousin Jules
Opens on Wednesday in Manhattan.

Written and directed by Dominique Benichet; directors of photography, Pierre William Glenn and Paul Lamy; edited by Marie Genevieve Ripart; released by Cinema Guild. At the Film Forum, 209 West Houston Street, west of Avenue of the Americas, South Village. In French, with English subtitles. Running time: 1 hour 31 minutes. This film is not rated.

est kids in Brooklyn.

Mr. Benichet, who died in 2011, was in his 20s when he began working on "Cousin Jules," and in spite of the age of its subjects, it is full of the ambition and passion of youth. It is also hemmed in by its formal conceits. There is almost no dialogue, and it is hard to tell whether the narrowness of the couple's existence is being observed by the filmmaker or imposed by the editing process. It is clear that they are taciturn, practical people, but the film's insistence on their self-reliance, and their isolation from modernity, feels exaggerated after a while, especially when a significant death goes unmentioned.

Do they have friends? Any other families? Political opinions? Religious beliefs? In suspending such questions, and in subordinating the reality of their lives to what is in effect an art project, the filmmaker's treat Jules and Felicie as exotic specimens rather than fellow citizens. There is no doubt that this condescension is unintentional, but it is also hard to miss. "Cousin Jules" is in many ways a wonder to see and hear, but there is less to it than meets the eye.

Cousin Jules

Dominique Benicheti's tender and accomplished documentary, from 1973, about his real-life cousin, Jules Guiteaux, a blacksmith in rural Burgundy, is, above all, a record of premodern industrial and domestic crafts—a cinematographic Colonial Williamsburg. Jules fans a furnace with a groaning leather bellows, ringingly hammers a red-glowing tip of iron, drills holes with a huge flywheel-driven contraption. To make coffee, Jules's wife, Félicie (who died midway through the five-year shoot), draws water from a well with a hand-cranked pulley and bucket; he hand-rolls a cigarette to enjoy with it. Shooting in color and widescreen, Benicheti makes images that are as poised and attentive as his subjects. Each new activity that he reveals is fraught with the passing of time and the burden of labor; the wear on every handle and surface seems to embody a vast history in silence. Yet that silence is also an artifice; Benicheti's observations don't offer much depth or insight: How do they make their money? What's in that newspaper that Jules reads at lunch? The movie is resolutely non-analytical, but it may leave a viewer hyper-alert to his own routine gestures and sounds. In French.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; Dec. 4-10.)

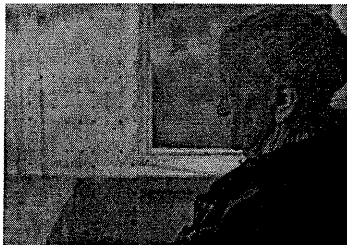
Sunday, December 8, 2013

Review: 'Cousin Jules' A Beautifully Restored, Innovative Portrait Of Country Life

By Diana Drumm



Taking five years to shoot and forty years to get across the Atlantic, **Dominique Benicheti's "Cousin Jules"** is a stunning living portrait of the director's country cousin Jules and his wife Felicie. Having originally premiered in 1972, spending some time on the festival circuit (picking up a few awards along the way, including the grand prize at **Locarno**), the film was unable to pick up distribution initially and only reached American shores last year at the 2012 **New York Film Festival**. Nearly lost to the annals of cinema, the film had been mostly regarded as a footnote in Benicheti's career and as but a precursor to his more prominent work with 3D technology. But now, with the film screening currently at New York's **Film Forum** and being distributed by the **Cinema Guild**, a larger audience is able to appreciate this real masterpiece and have their breath taken away by its beautiful restoration (thanks to Arane Gulliver Laboratories).



Shot in CinemaScope and stereophonic sound, "Cousin Jules" has a lush cinematic quality not common in documentaries (even less so in the 1960s/1970s, with New Waves springing up all around the world, utilizing low budgets and cinema verite style). With cinematographer **Pierre-William Glenn** ("**Day For Night**," "**Small Change**") in tow, the film radiates like an oil painting, a classic French pastoral brought to life, albeit with more visibly aged subjects and in not such green surroundings. With its wood stoves and the daily manual labor of its subjects, this documentary could have easily been mistaken for a "day in the life of" narrative film set in an entirely different, much earlier era. Seeming to have eluded the Trente Glorieuses, the couple lead an isolated, self-sustaining existence markedly lacking in material goods and as such, subvert the modern image of an over-commercialized, postwar France (both purported and criticized by the French New Wave).

From a current day perspective, in which we shrug boiling a kettle in favor of hopping over to Starbucks or Argo Tea, it's incredible to watch the time and effort it takes Felicie to make coffee. From getting cranking the water bucket up the well to grinding the beans, she puts most twenty-somethings to shame. For his part, Jules labors away in his metal workshop and also on the farm. At one point, he grazes his reddish, sausage-like fingers in his forge's flames and he doesn't blink, let alone flinch, focusing on the work at hand. Utilizing elegant pans around the farm and well-framed close-ups (his years-scorched hands, her haggard ones—including a half forefinger—preparing meals; their granite-like, stoic faces pausing in profile; their black cat gnawing at a piece of meat; and more), Benicheti showcases the poetical mundanity of rural life and all of its contradictions: slow-paced but busy, unexciting but eventful, etc.

As for the sound, a near-lyrical rhythm emerges from the couple's daily routine (reminiscent of **Alberto Cavalcanti's** work for **John Grierson's** GPO Unit—e.g. "**Coalface**," "**Night Mail**") from Jules's

hammering to Felicie's peeling potatoes with the only pause being their afternoon coffee, and even then, Felicie drinks her coffee an evenly paced spoonful at a time. Similarly, Jules maintains this beat while eating lunch, slicing his bread in an almost mechanical fashion. Both clearly worn, the couple's physical activity speaks to decades of routine and instinctive muscle memory. It's this rhythm that transcends the film from a standard documentary to art and makes it all the more important to see in this current restoration and in a theater. Both are necessary to fully appreciate not only the couple but their story, which features a development illustrated so poignantly that it will stay with you long after the end credits.

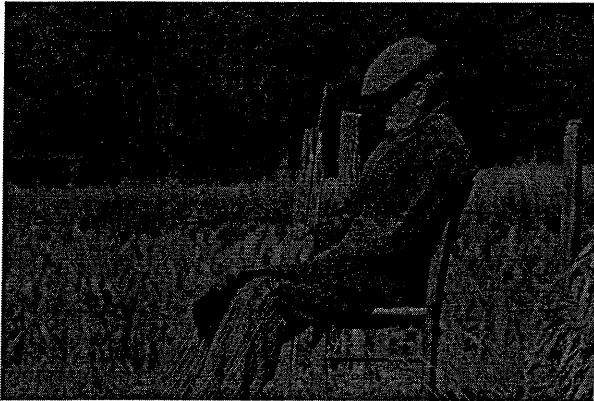


Now before you pack up the whole family to see "Cousin Jules" this mid-holiday weekend, here's some fair warning: with scarce dialogue, the film is not for the faint of heart. That being said, it is a must-see for any cinephile, especially ones who didn't just have to Google the Cavalcanti reference. After years of being a long-lost gem, "Cousin Jules" has finally been found and is receiving its due as an innovative, meditative case study of rural life.[A-]



Cousin Jules: movie review

Mon Nov 25
David Fear



It's always a sad state of affairs when a good film doesn't get an audience; it's an outright tragedy when an audience doesn't get the chance to see a genuinely extraordinary work of art. Despite wowing viewers and winning an award at the 1973 Locarno International Film Festival, Dominique Benicheti's you-are-there

chronicle of French blacksmith Jules Guiteaux and his wife, Félicie, going about their daily business seemed destined for eternal obscurity. The documentarian insisted that his labor of love be shown only in CinemaScope and with stereo sound, exactly as he shot it; distributors balked at the notion of shelling out extra dough to make prints that many theaters, sans the proper equipment, wouldn't be able to show. So there Benicheti's poetic ode to a bygone rural world sat, wasting away, until fans funded a digital restoration of the movie, the New York Film Festival gave the DCP a belated American screening in 2012—and Cinema Guild and Film Forum picked up the ball for a full theatrical run.

Vive the peasant-life procedural! Rising phoenixlike from the ashes of neglect, *Cousin Jules* doesn't seek to elevate its elderly subjects so much as capture them in a state of being: I hit the red-hot metal, I grind coffee and peel potatoes (paging Jeanne Dielman!), and I sharpen my straight razor on a whetstone, therefore I am. Long takes let viewers luxuriate in a fetishistic attention to country-life detail; the fact that this spiffed-up version lends a visual hyperreality to every greased gear and green blade of grass only heightens the hypnotic pull. Whether endless scenes of labor rendered as a widescreen, surround-sound epic strike you as *vérité* bliss or some exercise in urban-Zen wish-fulfillment (should one man's toil serve as another's techno-transcendental experience?) is a subjective question. For 91 minutes, the pleasure of the Guiteauxes' company is ours. We are ultimately the richer for it.



MOVIES

DECEMBER 2, 2013

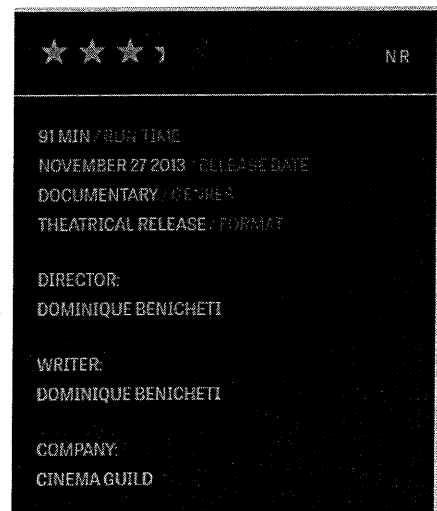
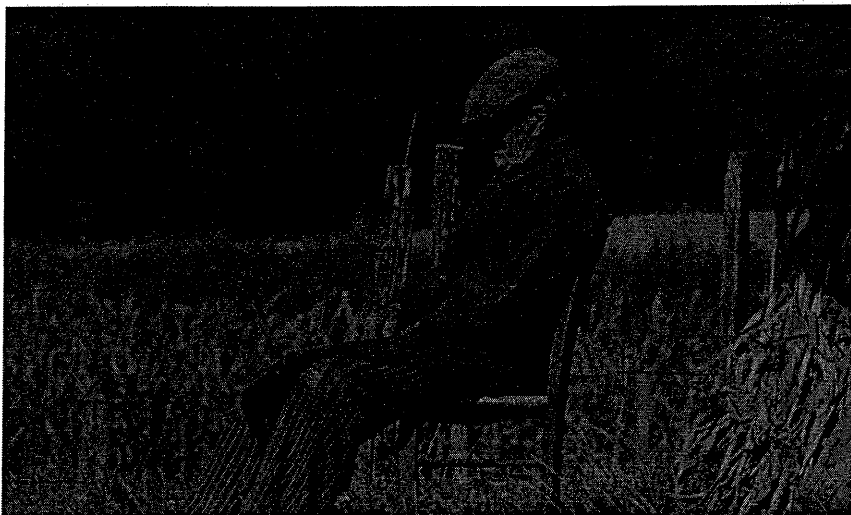
COUSIN JULES

Dominique Benicheti's tender and accomplished documentary, from 1973, about his real-life cousin, Jules Guiteaux, a blacksmith in rural Burgundy, is, above all, a record of premodern industrial and domestic crafts—a cinematographic Colonial Williamsburg. Jules fans a furnace with a groaning leather bellows, ringingly hammers a red-glowing tip of iron, drills holes with a huge flywheel-driven contraption. To make his cup of coffee, Jules's wife, Félicie (who died midway through the five-year shoot), draws water from a well with a hand-cranked bucket; he hand-rolls a cigarette to enjoy with it. Shooting in color and widescreen, Benicheti makes images that are as poised and attentive as are his subjects. Each new activity that he reveals offers surprises that are fraught with the passing of time and the burden of labor; the wear on every handle and surface seems to embody a vast history in silence. Yet that silence is also an artifice; Benicheti's observations don't offer much depth or insight—what happened there during the war? How do they make their money? What's in that newspaper that Jules reads at lunch? The movie is resolutely non-analytical, but it may leave a viewer hyper-alert to his own routine gestures and sounds. In French.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; Nov. 27-Dec. 10.)

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

Cousin Jules

By Scott Tobias



The 1973 documentary *Cousin Jules*—rediscovered and released theatrically for the first time in all its CinemaScope glory—recalls that wellspring of all documentaries, Robert Flaherty’s 1922 silent movie *Nanook Of The North*, with its observational spirit and its ethnographic commitment to showing the longstanding traditions of an isolated people. Where *Nanook Of The North* took viewers to the frozen wilds of northern Quebec, *Cousin Jules* settles on an elderly couple in rural France, living in the early 1970s as their agrarian ancestors must have lived centuries before. As director Dominique Benicheti invites the audience to contemplate this way of life—and that’s *all* the film seeks to accomplish, which is plenty—he reveals the virtues of simplicity, routine, and quietly communing with the natural world.

Benicheti’s decision to shoot *Cousin Jules* in CinemaScope, with sound recorded in stereo, is key to understanding its purpose. It’s an experiential documentary above all, seeking to transport audiences to a small farm in Burgundy and leave them to marinate in the sights and sounds of the countryside. He doesn’t impose a narrative—if the film has a major flaw, it’s the seeming arbitrariness of its construction—but rather offers painterly shots of the fields at low fog, or the morning cacophony of the rooster pen. His subjects are Jules Guiteaux, a blacksmith who clomps around in wooden clogs, and his wife Félicie, who tends the greens that infuse their meals. But Benicheti doesn’t even provide their names on the screen, and little conversation passes between them. What’s there to talk about?

Yet for as often as Benicheti steps back and watches rituals like Jules forging and drawing metal with fire, hammer, and anvil, *Cousin Jules* could not be described as fly-on-the-wall by any means. There are tracking shots, multiple camera angles, and other indicators that Benicheti “staged” reality in much the same way Flaherty did in *Nanook Of The North*. In that sense, the film is sculpted into a highly specific impression of Jules and Félicie’s life together, whittled down to the barest essentials of daily chores,

absent the context of family or any other form of encroachment from the outside world. It's a deliberately limited perspective, but carried out with extraordinary rigor and sensuality.

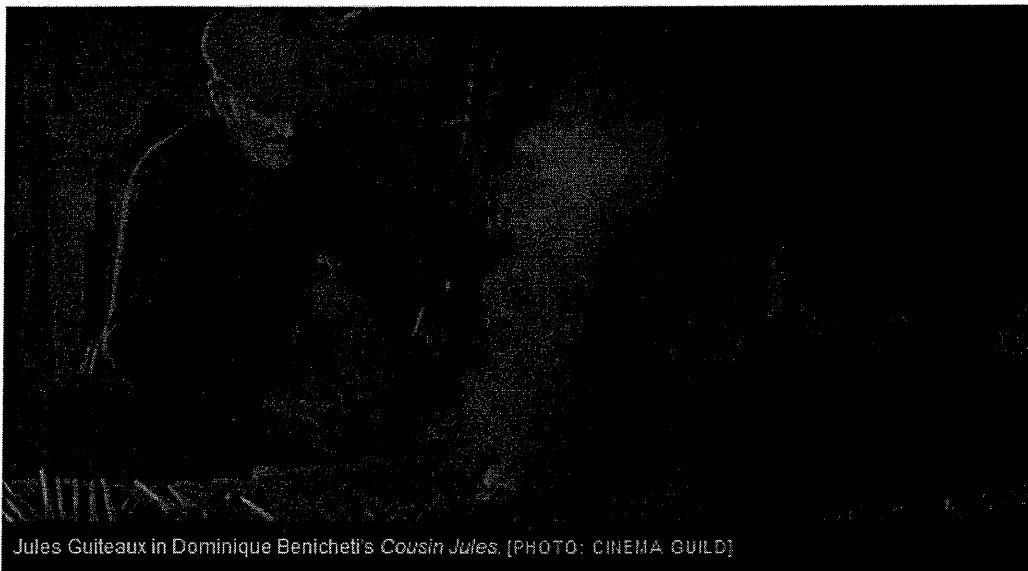
An unabashed ode to the French countryside, *Cousin Jules* immerses the audience in mundane tasks that are transformed into unaccountably pleasing, tranquil ones. There's something beautiful about the certainty of Jules' hands as he strikes iron with the same rhythmic beats, or those times during the day when he and Félicie pause to share a quiet cup of coffee together. The further the trappings of the modern world take people away from the rituals of those unaffected by the times, the more *Cousin Jules* will gain in appeal. More than ever, it's a travelogue to alien ground.

SLANT

Monday, November 25, 2013

Cousin Jules ★★★★★

By Jess Cataldo



A blacksmith, husband, and small-plot farmer, Jules Guiteaux lives a life of clockwork regularity, narrowed down to a defined set of everyday tasks. This, at least, is how Dominique Benicheti presents him, and the documentarian's precise portrait of his country cousin attains a storybook simplicity, with Jules's daily

routine incorporating years of ingrained experience, boiled down to practiced, elegant motion. Shot over five years, *Cousin Jules* feels similarly condensed, and its approach reflects that focus, abandoning chronological storytelling or exploration of social issues for a rhythmic fixation on one small life, shot in a way that accounts for both its august beauty and its innate difficulties.

After the events of May '68, many French activists and intellectuals looked toward the past for hints of how to construct a future. Finding inspiration in the prudent self-sufficiency of the country's rural breadbasket, a new crop of rustic films emerged, exploring the possibility of heading back to the land. The best of these—the workaday pragmatism of Georges Roquier's *Biquefarre* and the rigorous self-assessment of Alain Tanner's *Jonah, Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000*—pushed past wishful thinking toward real considerations of the mechanics of agricultural settings. Benicheti's film feels just as concerned with future issues interpreted through a traditional lens, turning what could have been a straightforward document into an almost Marxist disquisition on a man who operates within his own discrete economic arrangement, while functioning as part of a larger system of intertwined pastoral tradition.

Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* imagines time as divided into two distinct sectors: our modern chronology, defined by rigid schedules and calendars, and a mythic pre-industrial pastoral reckoning, where the movement of seasons was the only indicator of passing time, thus granting life a more elliptical, less progress-oriented quality. That same pastoral time seems to be in effect here, in lives defined by the

Slant Magazine, November 25, 2013, pg. 1/2

repeating occurrence of familiar chores. Dropping out of the rat race to engage in the supposedly soul-cleansing simplicity of such basic work was likely an enticing fantasy in the fallout of the early '70s, and has become one again, at a time when our lives feel more circumscribed by outside forces than ever. What makes *Cousin Jules* notable is that it manages to explore this once-again-relevant fantasy without fetishizing these lives or scrimping on their harsh, dehumanizing realities.

The fact remains that the winnowing of existence down to the completion of an endless series of repetitive tasks has the adverse result of stunting expression, something the film portrays by favoring procedure over communication. Jules and his wife discuss a few small matters over a meal, and then spend the rest of it in silence, a detail that can be ascribed to either to the sort of perfect attunement that requires no conversation, or the basic fact that these people have no real interior lives beyond their work. A bond clearly exists between the two partners, presented via small moments, as when Félicie brings in coffee to be boiled on Jules's workshop stove, but their inarticulate plainness is also presented as its own prison, and by dispelling vestigial illusions about rural labor *Cousin Jules* communicates a strong prevailing idea: We're all beholden to some imposed system of behavior, the tenor of our work dominating and largely defining the circumstances of our reality.

Approaching his lifestyle with ambivalence, the film still accords Jules enormous respect, showing an almost holy appreciation for the beautiful process of his blacksmithing work. Of all of Benicheti's interesting choices, the boldest is the surprising use of impressive widescreen visuals, creating compositions which, in the dazzling restoration being shown at Film Forum, depict the fine details of their work while shrinking them down to yet another facet of an expansive natural world. In these broad tableaux, which alternatively magnify Jules and diminish him amid his acreage, we see the Jules through a split lens of adulation and despair, he becomes an iconic figure whose simple status both illuminates and imprisons him. It's a bit reductive in terms of a personal portrait, but this is a film that's not concerned with telling the story of a man, instead making him a representative symbol of a mostly bygone way of life, a reminder of both the fleeting nature of individual experience and the steady patterns of a broader human existence.

Director(s): Dominique Benicheti Cast: Jules Guiteaux, Félicie Guiteaux Distributor: Cinema Guild
Runtime: 91 min Rating: NR Year: 1973

Friday, November 29, 2013

‘Cousin Jules’ Review

By Daniel Walber



About midway through *Cousin Jules* there is a moment of absolute tranquility. A long shot of a stream shows a group of birds, presumably ducks, drifting along in the pale light of morning. Here, in the rural farmlands of France, we have come to find peace, quiet and natural beauty. Then a shot rings out, quite unexpectedly. There were no hunters in the frame, only the pristine landscape. None of the ducks appear to have been killed by that one bullet, which for all we know may have been pointed in an entirely different direction, but they all scatter

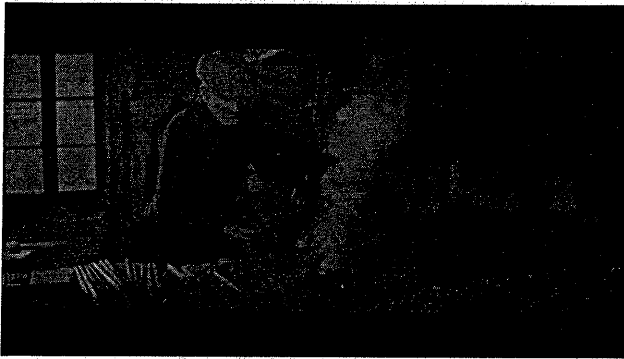
anyway. Where was once silence there is now rushed clamor.

In a single scene, that is the spirit of **Dominique Benicheti**'s 1973 film. It has in it everything you might expect from a simple, *vérité* documentary of rural life, with its humble breezes and slowly changing seasons. Its aged central couple, Jules and Félicie Guiteaux, barely speak. One wonders if what little conversation they do have is but for the sake of the camera. After decades of marriage, they live in the same rhythmic patterns, knowing each other instinctively. Speech seems practically unnecessary. Benicheti shows their silence in the context of their love, and of nature itself. *Cousin Jules* possesses the gorgeous pastoral hush that characterizes so many great films of the countryside, fiction or otherwise.

Yet is also a profoundly noisy film. Jules and Félicie are not quiet people. He's a blacksmith, an occupation basically made up of clanging metal things against other metal things. There's obviously much more skill and experience involved, which Benicheti makes sure to highlight. For a contemporary, urban audience the process of metallurgy can seem almost magical, and it certainly does here. Yet Benicheti is also clearly fascinated by the sonic elements of this profession, the sharply pitched dings of iron being hammered into shape and the hissing of water on hot metal. All of these sounds are expertly rendered in the new restoration of the film, immersing the audience in a long-forgotten forge.

Félicie also gets plenty opportunity to liven up the soundtrack. Benicheti pays close attention to every vegetable she chops, collecting the crunches of home-grown, colorful produce. Farming, cooking, and eating are all rich aural experiences, perhaps because Benicheti knows that he can't access his audience's senses of smell and taste with a film. Yet there's another dimension to this almost constant, often loud presence of physical activity.

Cousin Jules is not a monument to the natural quality of farmers. Many films, many images in general have looked at rural life and seen a seamless integration with the environment. While it is true that Jules and Félicie are closer to the natural world than those of us that live in urban apartments, they're still



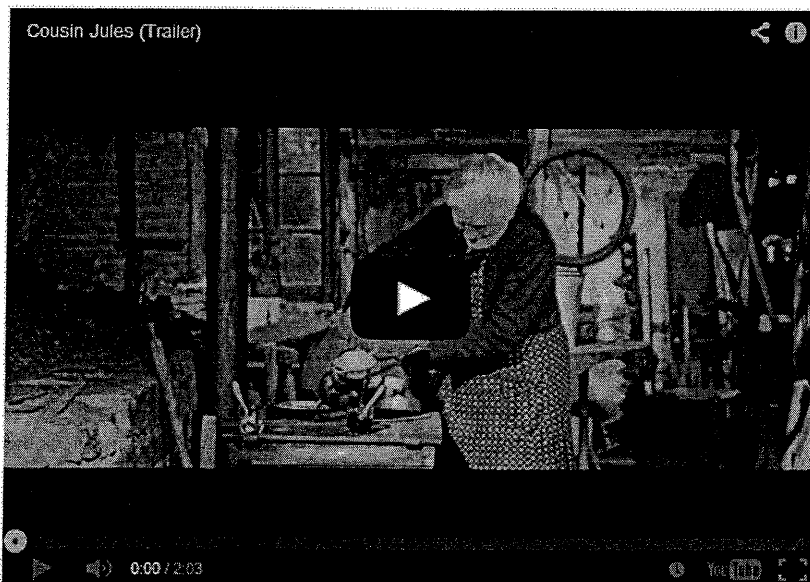
human beings exerting a very active sort of control. The noise is an expression of this positive, boisterous presence. Jules and Félicie are people, not part of the landscape.

Benicheti spent five years in this village, filming and building a narrative. This dedication and the resulting footage allow him to make one final gesture, raising up *Cousin Jules* to a final degree of universality. It suffices to say that the film has just as much in

common with *Amour* as it does with *Sweetgrass*, if not much more so. Perhaps to be expected in a work about old age, there is indeed the specter of death and dying, entirely appropriate in the context of constantly renewing farmland. The cycle of life is not unique to rural France, or rural anywhere, and its emotional weight is front and center in Benicheti's film.

This blending of genres, a nonfiction feature about an aging relationship mixed with a soundscape of rural life, may have been part of why *Cousin Jules* wasn't able to secure U.S. distribution back in 1973. Now, however, is another moment in which we are attuned to the potential of nonfiction film to break away from strict ideas of style and form. *Cousin Jules* feels like a spiritual forebear to *These Birds Walk* and *Sweetgrass*, even if the filmmakers involved had no opportunity to see it. It's also a lot better than many of these newer films, frankly, which makes this a unique opportunity to induct a forgotten classic into the canon for documentary filmmakers and fans alike.

***Cousin Jules* is now playing in New York City.**



'Cousin Jules' Review

Our Rating ★★★★★5

SUMMARY

'Cousin Jules' is one of the wisest, most confident films about rural life, old age, love and humanity's relationship with the natural world, nonfiction or otherwise. Had it been managed to get a US release in 1973, everyone would already know that.

Indiewire®

Exclusive: Watch the Trailer for Dominique Benicheti's Lost 1973 Doc 'Cousin Jules'

BY INDIEWIRE
OCTOBER 8, 2013

Awarded the jury prize at the Locarno Film Festival in 1973, Dominique Benicheti's beloved documentary "Cousin Jules" has remained unreleased in the U.S. until now. Ahead of its first stateside theatrical run at New York's Film Forum, Indiewire is pleased to exclusively premiere the trailer for the unreleased film.

The documentary is the result of five years of painstaking work by Benichetti and cinematographer Pierre-William Glenn, who over that period tracked the daily lives of Jules (the filmmaker's cousin) and his wife, French farmers living alone in the countryside.

Watch the trailer below. "Cousin Jules" opens at Film Forum on November 27th.



Tuesday, November 26, 2013

Film Review: Cousin Jules

By Doris Toumarkine



Gorgeously restored, often mesmerizing decades-old documentary about an elderly peasant blacksmith/farmer eking out a very bare existence in rural Burgundy provides the ultimate in counterprogramming for those who might appreciate a near-halting change of pace from fussier big-screen fare.

Shot from 1968 to 1973, *Cousin Jules* falls into a subgenre of documentaries and dramas that, lacking a name, are minimalistic and soothing, sometimes to the point of being soporific. Bela Tarr's *The Turin Horse* and Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le Quattro Volte* and the doc *Sweetgrass* come to mind, as these also lull the brain. But among the most successful of these was a real sleeper, Zeitgeist Films' *Into Great Silence*, about a strict monastery, which won over critics and viewers alike.

What sets *Cousin Jules* apart, aside from the fact that it is among the more interesting in this group, is that it was originally shot in 35mm Cinemascope and recorded in stereo sound—unusual for a documentary—and has been beautifully brought to life for contemporary audiences (especially those appreciative of the big screen) with a 2K DCP (digital cinema package) restoration.

The viewing experience is immersive and magical, as the late filmmaker Dominique Benicheti, a film academic who had taught at Harvard and had a deep interest in technical advances for cinema, insisted upon his work being seen under maximum conditions. So until now, *Cousin Jules* never got distribution because Benicheti wanted the film projected in Cinemascope with stereo sound, rarities considering how documentaries were customarily filmed.

With veteran French cinematographer Pierre William Glenn (along with Paul Launay) behind the camera, *Cousin Jules* is breathtakingly beautiful and the stereo sound (natural, ambient sounds as dialogue is sparse and moot) is equally memorable. While tech qualities are to the max, content could hardly be more minimal as the film focuses on peasant Jules Giteaux who, somewhere in his 80s, lives and works on a simple farm of a few small structures. His tasks include feeding the chickens and a cat, tending a small garden, gathering eggs, packing bundles of branches and hauling them by horse-driven cart. Much time is spent with Jules in his crude workroom where he forges metal. The objects he fires and hammers are somewhat of a mystery, as they don't look like horseshoes.

Little is seen of wife Félicie except for her helping her husband with gathering wood, making him coffee or sharing with him an occasional, largely silent meal in the room where he sleeps and eats, usually alone. On the menu is a simple vegetable soup that Jules makes by throwing carrots, potatoes, leeks, whatever into a boiling pot. And the inevitable wine, bottled at home.

Besides the few small wood structures, the meager mini-estate is also characterized by lots of piled wood

for the fireplaces and stoves, a well, and a simple outhouse. Many pastoral, often misty exteriors are shot like stills. A lovely shot of a duck pond is brutally interrupted by the loud pop of gunshots.

Presented without music, *Cousin Jules* is also practically devoid of dialogue, except for a few almost indistinguishable words, like those from a van driver in the distance selling Jules butter and other basics.

A kind of reductionist spin on the decades-old book and documentary *Village in the Vaucluse*, *Cousin Jules* makes its impact as an often fascinating ethnographic study of peasant survival and a pastoral life long gone. When it is not mesmerizing as audiovisual spectacle of a most unexpected kind, the film is also a reminder that—as embodied by Jules himself and his dark, calloused hands—less is more, especially when it has to be.

Wednesday, November 27, 2013

COUSIN JULES: Lost and Found

By Steven Erickson

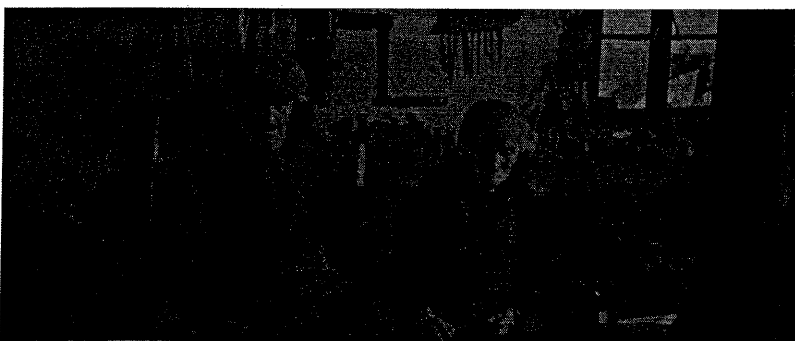


The 1973 documentary now playing Film Forum is a technologically advanced portrait of people living in conditions that barely qualify as modern.

Some “lost classics” aren’t really lost, just misplaced for a while. Jean-Pierre Melville’s 1969 *Army of Shadows* may not have been released in the U.S. until 2006, but it was fleetingly available to American audiences before that in Melville retrospectives. French director

Dominique Benicheti’s sole feature-length film, the 1973 documentary *Cousin Jules*, really is a lost treasure. Its two-week run at New York’s Film Forum marks its theatrical premiere anywhere in the world.

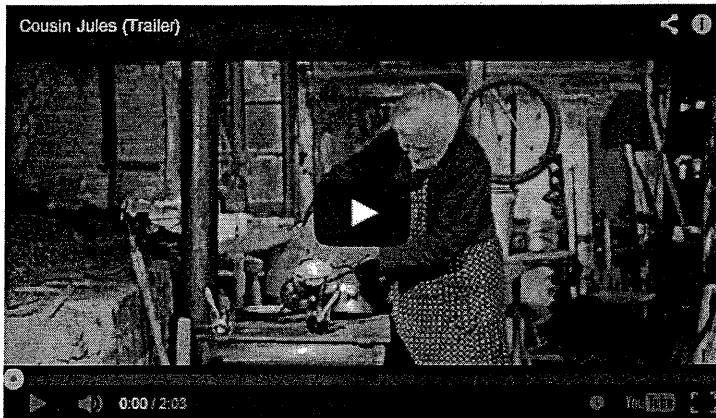
Ironically, *Cousin Jules* was a victim of its own technological innovation. Benicheti didn’t settle for the black-and-white 16mm of many documentaries of the sixties and early seventies. Instead he worked in color, CinemaScope and Dolby stereo. Most arthouses of the time weren’t equipped to show such a film, so it never found distribution in the U.S. or France (despite touring the festival circuit in 1973 and 1974 and winning a prize at Locarno.) Some of Benicheti’s subsequent shorts would experiment with 3D and 70mm.



Paradoxically, *Cousin Jules* is a technologically advanced portrait of people living in conditions that barely qualify as modern. It depicts the everyday lives of Benicheti’s cousins Jules and Felicie Guitteaux, an elderly couple living in the countryside near Burgundy. Jules works as a blacksmith, while Felicie tended to a garden. It’s never clear if the couple has running water, as Felicie has

to draw water by a hand pump from a well for their morning coffee. Jules shaves with a straight razor. There’s no food market in the village where they live; instead, Jules buys bread and sugar from a man out of the back of a truck.

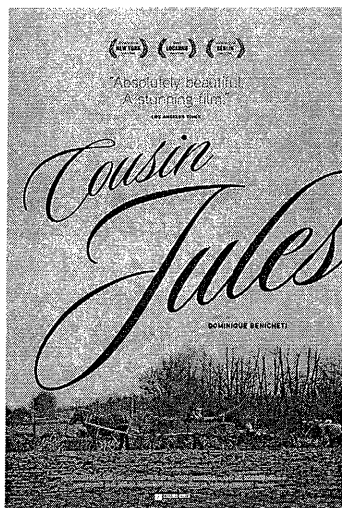
Benicheti’s images have a plainspoken beauty, but it’s hard to make a film that features no less than three scenes of vegetables being prepared for the table sound interesting. Yet *Cousin Jules* is quite fascinating and manages to make such chores more compelling to watch than they probably were for Jules and Felicie to perform.



clashing with metal. According to the closing credits, no less than three soundmen worked on the film.



seamless. Felicie died in 1971, but only in the closing credits do we learn of her passing. Jules doesn't visibly age on-screen. Even the weather often looks much the same throughout the film. The farm's colors are a wintry pastel.



Compared to other French films of the period, including documentaries, *Cousin Jules* seems like a whatsit. Filming began in April 1968, a month before the protests of May '68, but they may as well have taken place on another continent. During the time Benicheti patiently worked on his film, Jean Rouch was busy filming in Africa. Chris Marker toiled away semi-anonymously as part of a collective making politically radical films. Marcel Ophüls assembled footage for his indictment of France's behavior during World War II, *The Sorrow and the Pity*. Only Jean Eustache's documentaries about rural life in France bear much resemblance to *Cousin Jules*, but they're much rougher.

As for French narrative cinema landmarks of the period like Jacques Rivette's *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, Maurice Pialat's *We Won't Grow Old Together* and Eustache's *The Mother and the Whore*, Benicheti's film has nothing whatsoever in common with them. That's part of what makes it so fascinating in 2013. It depicts a way of life that probably hadn't varied in decades, but was likely to undergo some major changes thanks to the technology that Benicheti so enthusiastically embraced. The final scene, which shows Jules' empty workshop, evokes Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* in a far more modest manner. Without ever editorializing, *Cousin Jules* suggest that Jules may be the last of his kind.

BLOUINARTINFO

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

MOVIE JOURNAL: J. Hoberman on movies and movie-related things

Time is the Essence in “Cousin Jules”

By J. Hoberman



Jules and Félicie in a still from Dominique Benicheti's "Cousin Jules"

A documentary classic that slipped through the cracks, the late **Dominique Benicheti**'s 1973 Locarno prize winner “Cousin Jules” gets its belated US theatrical premiere at Film Forum in a new 2K digital restoration.

Shot over a five-year period, “Cousin Jules” documents—or rather contemplates—the daily routine of two weathered peasants, blacksmith Jules Guiteaux and his wife Félicie, on their rural farm. What sets the movie apart from other exercises in observational cinema is not so much the emphasis on real time and process, whether repairing a hinge, shaving one's face,

mending a shirt or making soup, as the fact that Benicheti is recording his subjects in color, CinemaScope and stereo sound. Indeed, while dialogue is minimal, sound and image are coequal. The filmmaker holds a close-up of the hammer that Jules has just employed and placed by his anvil until the tool stops vibrating; another scene is a kind of duet for Félicie's coffee grinder and Jules's bellows.

The framed monotony of this dailiness show is transfixing. Everything on the Guiteaux farm has its place—“Cousin Jules” portrays a completely ordered rational life, which although loosely structured as a single (mainly autumn) day, is quietly ruptured by the gradual awareness of absence. Jules has his solitary meal with the clock ticking and a cat perched on the other chair.

Darkness falls although the movie ends with a montage of formerly seen, now empty locations. “Cousin Jules” not only evokes **André Bazin** in its use of duration and pure recording but another mid 20th century French philosopher **Gaston Bachelard**, in documenting the lived experience of domestic space and the “poetics of space.”

“Cousin Jules” is at Film Forum, November 27 through December 10.

filmcomment

Monday, December 2, 2013

Rep Diary: Cousin Jules

By David Gregory Lawson



Dominique Benicheti's *Cousin Jules*, recently restored after decades of languishing in obscurity, is a vigorously materialist examination of daily life in rural France. The slow and steady drip of quotidian moments, turned into spectacle by Benicheti's use of CinemaScope and Surround Sound, are all but etched onto the screen. Blacksmith Jules and his wife Félicie are archetypal country folk, old age creasing their faces, the endlessly repeated rituals of work and domesticity marked by a dignified simplicity. There is little dialogue and only the narrative progression afforded by

making beds, mending clothes, and so on, with the emphasis on the actions of these routines, the time they take to perform, and the environment they belong to.

An innovator in cinema exhibition and an engineer, Benicheti (1943-2011) once made a film about the Normandy landing designed to be exhibited on a site-specific 360-degree screen, and a 3D musical about wine production. In *Cousin Jules*, he creates a vibrant and minutely detailed soundscape that is at times orchestral in its use of ambient noise and the precisely textured clatter of Jules's metalworking. Shots are often held for a beat or two after an action has completed or a subject has left the frame, the syncopated clangs of an anvil or crunching of clogs on gravel replaced once more by quiet and stillness, but never by silence: insects hum, the wind whispers through the trees, animals cluck and huff in the distance. It is also the rare documentary that, although observational almost in the mode of a scientist in the field, unfolds in fluidly choreographed tracking shots that function as rhymes to or intensifications of the actions on screen. As Félicie cranks a bucket down into a well, her arms moving steadily up and down in a circular motion, Benicheti's camera tracks in a 180-degree curve around her into a profile shot, an arc describing an arc.

The first part of the film appears to occur over a single morning and afternoon: Jules hammering away in his workshop, deep in concentration, Félicie peeling potatoes in the yard, one of her fingers visibly missing. Later they drink black coffee in the workshop, Félicie constantly stirring her cup, Jules smoking a cigarette. Right then, with the two of them sitting together, Jules lifts his head to look directly into the camera, and there's a freeze frame—but the sound track continues. Félicie died midway through the five-year period in which the film was shot, and this is the last we see of her. The second part of the film covers the winter, with Jules now a widower, but before that there is a brief and mournful interlude of landscape shots, cows grazing, the sun setting behind barren trees, a gravedigger shoveling dirt under towering headstones.



The camera gives panoramic consideration to Jules's single-room house, workshop, and the surrounding farmland. Benicheti seems to be continually reorganizing and reappraising these spaces, covering them from as many varied, interlocking perspectives as possible, the proliferation of set-ups applying a cartographic scrutiny to Jules's existence. The soundtrack and compositions operate in a mutually stimulating back and forth, tightening focus on an action or scene—a sound-image system whereby the meaning of each shot is redoubled moment to moment. The ruffling of a newspaper, for example,

re-sensitizes our understanding of the room's quiet, or the thought of the feel of it in Jules's hands.

Benicheti's strict sense of causality offers another instance of his materialist rigor. A close-up of a stove fire is promptly followed by a shot of smoke billowing from the chimney, and the preparation of Jules's meals is chronicled so meticulously that one can imagine a Cousin Jules cooking show. All objects, be they hot iron or corn, are observed with minute attention to their physicality, an investigation of each thing as that thing—we can distinguish the sound of carrots being peeled from that of shallots being cut. Benicheti presents each object as a fresh encounter with the material certainties of Jules's life, in its essence.



The overwhelming sensation here is that of the world spinning in its constant, inexorable activity, and singing to itself—man with his habits surrounded by sights and sounds listening to and revealing one another, in conversation, as when Jules sharpens his razor against a wet stone, or a flock of birds are scattered by two off-screen gunshots. In one especially vivid scene, a man identified in the credits as “the peasant” rides a cart, followed by a woman (“his wife”) walking behind. At first the cart moves laterally across the frame, the horse's hooves pounding the dirt road louder and

louder. As the cart approaches close enough for its rickety jostling from side to side to become noticeable, Benicheti cuts to a shot of it heading directly for the camera, its rumbling along growing thunderous as it passes by, almost shaking the viewer in her seat.

The film closes with Jules eating alone, the night enveloping his cottage, dogs barking somewhere far off. With a cut to the next morning, we return to the workshop in broad daylight, dogs still barking on the soundtrack, camera fixed on the empty room, the muted anvil, the absence of work, all of it waiting to be awoken with purpose and noise. This attentive parsing of mundane documentary reality, implicitly subjective in its expertly tuned sensorial vibrancy, suggests the work of Francis Ponge, an essayist, poet and metaphysician who found his muse in contemplating the everyday. As Ponge once wrote: “The object is always more important, more interesting, more capable (full of rights): it has no duty whatsoever toward me, it is I who am obliged to it.”

ARTFORUM

Tuesday, December 03, 2013

Larger than Life

By Amy Taubin



Dominique Benicheti, *Cousin Jules*, 1973, 35 mm, color, sound, 91 minutes. Jules Guiteaux.

DOMINIQUE BENICHETI'S 1973 *Cousin Jules* might have been a documentary game-changer, had it not gone virtually unseen for forty years. In 1968, Benicheti began shooting a portrait of his seventy-seven-year-old distant

relative Jules Guiteaux, a blacksmith who lived with his wife of the same age on a small farm in rural France. Barely out of film school in Paris, but already committed to the large-format film technology with which, along with 3D, he would work for his entire career, Benicheti made *Cousin Jules* in 35-mm Cinemascope with a stereophonic sound track composed entirely of concrete, synchronously recorded audio.

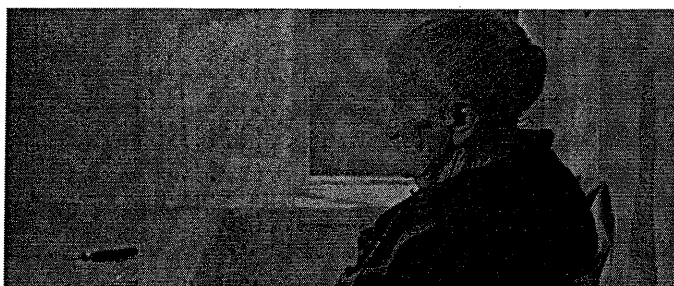
Given that 1968 was a moment when the 16-mm handheld “direct” or “verité” style was the signature of serious documentary, the choice was daring. In an interview with *Film Quarterly's* Lee Atwell in 1975, after *Cousin Jules* had won praise in festivals from Moscow to Los Angeles's Filmex, Benicheti said that using 'scope was his only way of competing with television (the same logic Hollywood had used in the 1950s). And why shouldn't an artisanal lifestyle on the verge of extinction, practiced unquestioningly by two people for their entire adult lives, be rendered in a scale comparable to the fictional *Lawrence of Arabia*? Comprising exquisitely composed, almost entirely static shots of fairly long duration, *Cousin Jules* gives one time to mull over such questions as well as to contemplate what is inside the frame and what is left unseen and unspoken. Which is to say that Benicheti, in collaboration with his cinematographer Pierre William Glenn (a French New Wave stalwart), produced images at once fragile and monumental—the visually expressive correlative of his taciturn, hardworking subjects and the Burgundy countryside where they lived.

Cousin Jules opens in darkness with the sound of a rooster crowing. Soon we see a man's feet encased in worn clogs, then hands swinging by the sides of a worn jacket, and finally a weather-beaten, sharply-boned face. Cousin Jules is on his way from the house to the large shed that contains his anvil, grindstone, and furnace. A barely glimpsed group of passersby hails him from the road beyond the yard. It is one of three occasions in the film, which was shot over five years, when we see him interact with anyone besides Félicie, whom he married when they were both twenty-two-years old.

Who knows what instructions Benicheti gave Jules and Félicie? Most likely he told them to behave as they ordinarily did and to try not to look directly at him or at the camera. But at one point, we see Jules, who is standing at the edge of the wide-angled frame, glance directly at the lens, and the mischief in his

eyes tells us something about his character's independence that we might not have otherwise understood. This is a man who enjoys putting rules to the test.

In sustained sequences, Benicheti shows Jules at work, heating the iron rods he bends and shapes on his anvil (the clang of the hammer reverberating over the sound of the birds and insects outside). Farming tools, kitchen wares, and machine replacement parts hang on the wall of the shed. One wonders how much demand there is for these handmade implements. We also see Félicie feeding the chickens, drawing water from the well, peeling potatoes. The two come together for a meal—potatoes mashed with bread



and a bit of meat, accompanied by a glass of wine. "It's good," says Jules. And a bit later, "Why aren't you eating?" "Too hot," Félicie replies. I am immediately worried. Félicie is stouter than Jules, but she also seems frailer than her husband, who has the erect spine of a man in his fifties.

Dominique Benicheti, *Cousin Jules*, 1973, 35 mm, color, sound, 91 minutes. Félicie Guiteaux.

It turns out my concern was founded. Midway through the film we see Jules alone in a graveyard, digging a fresh plot. He could have taken on a part-time job, I reasoned, hoping against hope. But no, in the following scenes, Jules is shown doing the tasks that once were Félicie's: feeding the chickens, making the bed, preparing the meals and the coffee which he now takes alone, while reading a newspaper. Is it the local pennysaver? Does it mention the political unrest of 1968 and after? We never know and what's more, Jules's way of life is so distant from that of the contemporary unionized French working class that it's doubtful he would have any reason to care.

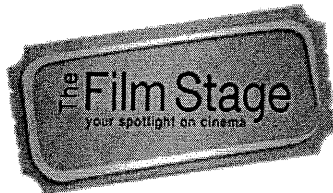
Jules also seems to have stopped working at his blacksmith trade. We see him carting firewood with the assistance of a neighbor and also buying the provisions the farm doesn't produce—coffee, oranges, bread, butter—from a grocery van, the only scene where money is exchanged. In the final moments, we see him eating at the kitchen table. At first, the camera is with him inside the house; then suddenly it is outside in the yard, looking at him through the window, the glow of the kitchen lamp the only illumination, a dog barking in the distance the only sound. A last look at the now disused shed, its walls still lined with Jules's handiwork, and the film is over. *Cousin Jules* is history.

The film would fall into the ethnographic genre of documentary, except that there is no ethnographic film which delivers images of comparable beauty. The adjective "painterly" is often applied to movies, but *Cousin Jules* earns it with every shot. Like its subjects, the film is invested in the traditions of late nineteenth-century France, represented in the realism of Millet and Corot at the moment that it gave way to the lyricism of Monet and the early Impressionists. Outside the wide doorway of Jules's smoky workshop is the garden—lushly green and purple in the soft, misty light of summer mornings, yellow and brown under the snow-filled winter skies. (How difficult it must have been to balance the dark interior with the bright exterior with those slow, wide-angle lenses.) If not for these images and the landscape shots of fields that seem to stretch to the horizon, we might read the film—as some critics did at its release—as taking place within a single day or week. But the earth turns, the seasons come and go, and the changes in the light, the comings and goings of things that fly and crawl, the movements of cats and dogs toward the warmth of the fire in winter and the heat of the sun in summer, seem to have little effect on Jules and Félicie's daily routine. They mark their time in the natural world to which they are connected in a way that we who watch the film probably do not. If nothing else, *Cousin Jules* might affect the way in which you see and hear—at least for as long as the film is on the screen.

After *Cousin Jules* played the international festival circuit in 1973–74, it disappeared. Benicheti insisted that the film be screened in 'scope with stereo sound, and few art theaters or film clubs were equipped to do that. When the director died suddenly in 2011, he was working on restoring the original picture and soundtrack, which were in danger of disintegrating. Arane-Gulliver Labs, where Benicheti was working on the film, completed an exceptionally delicate and rich visual and sonic restoration in 2K digital, which Cinema Guild is distributing. Needless to say, try to see it on the big screen.

— **Amy Taubin**

Cousin Jules plays at Film Forum through December 10.



NYC Weekend Watch: 'Mauvais Sang,' 'The Spirit of the Beehive,' 'Taxi Driver' & More

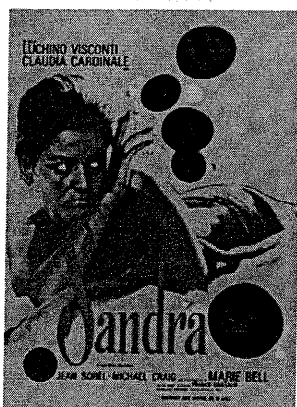
Written by Nick Newman, on November 29, 2013



Since any New York City cinephile has a nearly suffocating wealth of theatrical options, we figured it'd be best to compile some of the more worthwhile repertory showings into one handy list. Displayed below are a few of the city's most reliable theaters and links to screenings of their weekend offerings — films you're not likely to see in a theater again anytime soon, and many of which are, also, on 35mm. If you have a

chance to attend any of these, we're of the mind that it's time extremely well-spent.

Film Forum



Leos Carax's *Mauvais Sang*, newly restored, is screening through this week, as will the unreleased 1973 work ***Cousin Jules***.

Visconti's *Sandra* will continue playing.

On 35mm, the **Shirley Temple-led *Poor Little Rich Girl*** will play Sunday (12/1) before noon.