

SOMETHING SIMILAR



PERFORMANCE

STRANGE CLOAK-SUB-FLIGHT INFINITY

Sabisha Friedberg

Explorations into sound by way of levitation, suspension, and low-end thresholds.

MARCH 21 8PM

A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENT



PERFORMANCE

ROBERTS / WOOLEY Mariel Roberts + Nate Wooley

Fearless technical prowess and expectation-defying music from Mariel Roberts (cello) and Nate Wooley (trumpet).

FEBRUARY 12 7:30PM

EMPAC

 Rensselaer

SCREENING

A DOOR AJAR

EXISTENZ

Directed by David Cronenberg

THURSDAY JANUARY 30 2014 | 7:30PM



EXISTENZ. DIRECTED BY DAVID CRONENBERG.
NEW YORK, NY: DIMENSION FILMS, 1999

SCREENING

A DOOR AJAR

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Released on the eve of the millennium, David Cronenberg's sci-fi thriller *eXistenZ* delves deep into our fears and techno-fetishistic desires about the future of virtual reality gaming, and explores a world where players can physically connect their bodies to games via bio-ports, outlets surgically inserted into their spines. *eXistenZ* presents an eerily organic and dystopic vision of technology, where reality becomes increasingly indistinguishable from the manipulated construction of it. Starring Jennifer Jason Leigh and Jude Law, the film also features Willem Dafoe in a darkly humorous supporting role.

Canadian filmmaker **David Cronenberg** is credited as one of the originators of body horror genre, which focuses on fears of infection, mutilation, and disembodiment. Drawing from William Burroughs and Vladimir Nabokov, Cronenberg's best-known early films focus on the role of media in society, including *Scanners* (1981) and *Videodrome* (1983). Cronenberg focused on the mutation of the human body with technology through the iconic films *The Dead Zone* (1983) and *The Fly* (1986). These acclaimed films were followed by *Dead Ringers* (1988), *Naked Lunch* (1991), *Crash* (1996), and *eXistenZ* (1999). In *Spider* (2002) and *A History of Violence* (2005), Cronenberg delves into a psychological exploration of human idiosyncrasies.

Petra Cortright's Frieze Film commission *Bridal Shower* will be presented preceding *eXistenZ*.

TO REACH A CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— Emily Zimmerman

STAFF

Produced during her residency at EMPAC in fall 2013, **Petra Cortright's** *Bridal Shower* moves beyond her past Internet-based experiments to test new production values associated with broadcasting. Cortright is a member of the Nasty Nets Internet Surfing Club, Loshadka Internet Surfing Club, and Computers Club, making videos that intuitively play with online language, including representation of the physical body within the computer screen. DIY aesthetics characterize Cortright's practice, which embraces and subverts the home user's attitude toward social media and technologies.

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

Johannes Goebel / Director

Geoff Abbas / Director for Stage Technologies

Eric Ameres / Senior Research Engineer

S. Argeo Ascani / Associate Curator, Music

Eileen Baumgartner / Graphic Designer

David Bebb / Senior System Administrator

Peter Bellamy / Senior Systems Programmer

Michael Bello / Video Engineer

Victoria Brooks / Curator, Time-Based Visual Arts

Eric Brucker / Lead Video Engineer

Ash Bulayev / Curator, Dance + Theater

Michele Cassaro / Guest Services Coordinator

John Cook / Box Office Manager

David DeLaRosa / Production Technician

Zhenelle Falk / Artist Services Administrator

William Fritz / Master Carpenter

Kimberly Gardner / Manager, Administrative Operations

Ian Hamelin / Project Manager

Katie Hammon / Administrative Specialist

Ryan Jenkins / Event Technician

Shannon Johnson / Design Director

Pamela Keenan / Production Technician

CathyJo Kile / Business Manager

Carl Lewandowski / Production Technician

Eric Chi-Yeh Lin / Lead Stage Technician

Stephen McLaughlin / Event Technician

Candice Sherman / Business Coordinator

Avery Stempel / Front of House Manager

Kim Strosahl / Acting Production Administrative Coordinator

Jeffrey Svatek / Audio Engineer

Dan Swalec / Master Electrician

Todd Vos / Lead Audio Engineer

Pete Wargo / Manager, Information Systems

Michael Wells / Production Technician

Emily Zimmerman / Assistant Curator



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