

SCREENING

A DOOR AJAR

# THE SHORT FILMS OF GEORGE LUCAS & ARTHUR LIPSETT

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THURSDAY FEBRUARY 20 2014 | 7:30PM



21-87. DIRECTED BY ARTHUR LIPSETT. MONTRÉAL,  
QUÉBEC: NATIONAL FILM BOARD, 1964

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The short films of experimental filmmaker Arthur Lipsett, were deeply influential to George Lucas. Rarely screened in the US, Lipsett's films combine found footage with seemingly unrelated appropriated soundtracks, creating a cinema of fragmentation and disconnection intended to subvert the traditional structures of storytelling. Four of Lipsett's shorts will be presented, including *21-87* (1963), *Free Fall* (1964), *A Trip Down Memory Lane* (1965), and the Academy-award nominated *Very Nice, Very Nice* (1961), followed by George Lucas' student film, *Electronic Labyrinth: THX 1138 4EB* (1967). Lipsett's influence is also visible in Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) as "the Force" was inspired by a quote from *21-87*.

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**Arthur Lipsett** was a Canadian avant-garde director of short collage films. His first short film, *Very Nice, Very Nice* (1961) was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Short Subject, Live Action Subjects in 1962. Other films include *Hors d'oeuvre* (1960), *21-87* (1963), *Free Fall* (1964), and *A Trip Down Memory Lane* (1965).

The creator of the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* series, **George Lucas** is a critically acclaimed director and producer of myriad films. In 1973, he co-wrote and directed *American Graffiti*, which won the Golden Globe and garnered five Academy Award nominations. Four years later, *Star Wars* broke all box office records and set new standards for sophistication in film visuals and sound.

Peter Gidal's Frieze Film commission *CODAI* will be presented preceding *The Short Films of George Lucas & Arthur Lipsett*.

## 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

**Oraib Toukan** lives in New York and teaches and works in Ramallah and Amman. Toukan works across a variety of media focusing on historiographical absurdities and discreet institutional interventions. Previously, she produced a short sound work for radio for ARTonAIR.org and ArtDubai Projects (2011) and took part in the Serpentine Gallery Map Marathon (2010). Recent exhibitions include the 7th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, the Mori Art Museum, and the 11th Istanbul Biennial.

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.

## **STAFF**

Johannes Goebel / Director  
Geoff Abbas / Director for Stage Technologies  
Eric Ameres / Senior Research Engineer  
S. Argeo Ascani / Associate Curator, Music  
Eileen Baumgartner / Graphic Designer  
David Bebb / Senior System Administrator  
Peter Bellamy / Senior Systems Programmer  
Michael Bello / Video Engineer  
Victoria Brooks / Curator, Time-Based Visual Arts  
Eric Brucker / Lead Video Engineer  
Ash Bulayev / Curator, Dance + Theater  
Michele Cassaro / Guest Services Coordinator  
John Cook / Box Office Manager  
David DeLaRosa / Production Technician  
Zhenelle Falk / Artist Services Administrator  
William Fritz / Master Carpenter  
Kimberly Gardner / Manager, Administrative Operations  
Ian Hamelin / Project Manager  
Katie Hammon / Administrative Specialist  
Ryan Jenkins / Event Technician  
Shannon Johnson / Design Director  
Pamela Keenan / Production Technician  
CathyJo Kile / Business Manager  
Carl Lewandowski / Production Technician  
Eric Chi-Yeh Lin / Lead Stage Technician  
Stephen McLaughlin / Event Technician  
Candice Sherman / Business Coordinator  
Avery Stempel / Front of House Manager  
Kim Strosahl / Acting Production Administrative Coordinator  
Jeffrey Svatek / Audio Engineer  
Dan Swalec / Master Electrician  
Todd Vos / Lead Audio Engineer  
Pete Wargo / Manager, Information Systems  
Michael Wells / Production Technician  
Emily Zimmerman / Assistant Curator



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# SOMETHING SIMILAR

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SCREENING

FILMMAKER FOCUS

## FUTURE IS NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE

Directed by Mika Taanila

Documentary portrait of Finnish electronic arts pioneer,  
philosopher, and artist Erkki Kurenniemi.

FEBRUARY 25 7:30PM

# A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENT

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PERFORMANCE

## KRISTIAN BEZUIDENHOUT

New interpretations of the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and  
Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach performed on fortepiano.

FEBRUARY 23 4PM