

SOMETHING SIMILAR



SCREENING A DOOR AJAR

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE Directed by Wong Kar-wai

A hauntingly beautiful film about unfulfilled relationships, the fallibility of memory, and endings without resolution.

NOVEMBER 21 7:30PM

A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENT



TALK

LAURIE ANDERSON Voices

Anderson's voice being altered through electronics—creating her alter ego—is as much a part of her work as her singing, talking, and storytelling voices. This talk explores the many voices she has created over the years.

NOVEMBER 20 7PM



TALK

SCREENING

SERIES: A DOOR AJAR

FILM

Directed by Alan Schneider

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 2 2013 | 7:30PM

The launch for the film series *A Door Ajar* will bring together a screening of *Film* and a lecture by curator and film theorist Ed Halter.

Nobel Prize-winning playwright Samuel Beckett's only screenplay, *Film*, was inspired by George Berkeley's philosophical pronouncement, "to be is to be perceived" ("esse est percipi"). In one of his last film appearances, Buster Keaton is cast as the object of observation by an all-seeing eye. *Film* documents the chase between camera and pursued image, raising questions about the nature of recorded and projected images. 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. Then, in the end, one wins."

Hailed by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze as "the greatest Irish film," *Film* was commissioned and produced by Grove Press' Barney Rosset, directed by Alan Schneider, and features the cinematography of Academy Award-winner Boris Kaufman. The screenplay was written in 1963 and filmed in New York in the summer of 1964. For the shooting, Samuel Beckett made his only trip to America. *Film* has received numerous awards, including the Film Critics' Prize at the 1965 Venice Film Festival, the Special Prize at the Oberhausen Festival (Germany) in 1966, and the Special Jury Prize at the 1996 Tours Festival (France).

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 Berkeley'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

BIOS

STAFF

Johannes Goebel / Director

Geoff Abbas / Director for Stage Technologies

Eric Ameres / Senior Research Engineer

S. Argeo Ascani / Associate Curator, Music

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 Coordinator

William Fritz / Master Carpenter

Kimberly Gardner / Manager, Administrative Operations

Laura Gypson / Production Administrative Coordinator

Ian Hamelin / Project Manager

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

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

Ed Halter is a New York City-based critic and curator. He is a founder and director of Light Industry, a venue for film and electronic art in Brooklyn, and his writing has appeared in *Artforum*, *The Believer*, *Bookforum*, *Cinema Scope*, *frieze*, *Little Joe*, *Mousse*, *Rhizome*, *Triple Canopy*, and the *Village Voice*, among others. He is a 2009 recipient of the Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant, and his book *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games* was published in 2006. From 1995 to 2005, he programmed and oversaw the New York Underground Film Festival, and he has curated screenings and exhibitions at Artists Space, BAM, the Flaherty Film Seminar, the ICA London, the Museum of Modern Art, the New Museum, PARTICIPANT INC., and Tate Modern, as well as the cinema for Greater New York 2010 at MoMA PS1 and the film and video program for the 2012 Whitney Biennial. He teaches in the Film and Electronic Arts Program at Bard College, and is currently writing a critical history of contemporary experimental cinema in America.

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) was an Irish avant-garde playwright, poet, and novelist. Strongly influenced by fellow Irish writer, James Joyce, Beckett is sometimes considered the last of the modernists. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1969, “for his writing, which—in new forms for the novel and drama—in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation.” He attended Trinity College from 1923 to 1927, earning a bachelor’s degree in French and Italian.

Beckett won his first literary prize with the poem, “Whoroscope,” which imagined René Descartes meditating on the nature of time while waiting to be served an egg at a restaurant. He then published *Proust*, a critical study of Marcel Proust’s work and Beckett’s only published, long-form work of criticism. In 1935, he published his first novel, *Murphy*. He released his most famous work in 1953, the minimalist play, *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett’s later work, which focused on themes of entrapment, went through many phases, culminating in three “closed space stories” in which he interrogated the nature of memory and its effect on the confined and observed self. His final work, written in 1988, was a poem entitled “Comment Dire” (“What is the Word”), which dealt with the inability to find the words to express oneself.



EMPAC 2013-2014 presentations, residencies, and commissions are supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Dance Project of the New England Foundation for the Arts (with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation; additional funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Community Connections Fund of the MetLife Foundation, and the Boeing Company Charitable Trust), and the New York State Council for the Arts. Special thanks to the Jaffe Fund for Experimental Media and Performing Arts for support of artist commissions.