



SCREENING

A DOOR AJAR

# ORPHEUS

Directed by Jean Cocteau

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THURSDAY MARCH 6 2014 | 7:30PM



ORPHEUS. DIRECTED BY JEAN COCTEAU.  
PARIS: DISCINA, 1950

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*Orpheus (Orphée)*, Jean Cocteau's second film in the *Orphic Trilogy*, is a retelling of the Greek myth of Orpheus, a son of Apollo and a celebrated poet and musician who attempts to rescue his wife Eurydice from the underworld. Cocteau's surrealist film follows the poet Orpheus as he turns away from a world in which he is shunned toward the underworld's promise of inspiration. His poetic meditation on this classic story avoids direct adaptation and simplistic narrative formulas. Cocteau wrote of *Orpheus*: "When I make a film, it is a sleep in which I am dreaming.... There is nothing more vulgar than works that set out to prove something. *Orphée*, naturally, avoids even the appearance of trying to prove anything."

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**Jean Cocteau** (1889-1963) was a French poet, novelist, playwright, artist, and socialite. He was associated with a group of composers known as Les Six, and collaborated with such luminaries as Picasso, Stravinsky, Satie, and Diaghilev. He began his career first as a poet, then as a playwright for the Russian Ballet. Fascinated by classicism, Cocteau returned to the myth of Orpheus several times in his work, first in a play from 1926, and later in his surrealist film *Orpheus* (1950). He would create several key cinematic works over 30 years including, *The Blood of the Poet* (1931), *The Eternal Return* (1943), *Beauty and the Beast* (1946), and the *Testament of Orpheus* (1960).

Erika Vogt's Frieze Film commission *Darker Imposter* will be presented preceding *Orpheus*.

## 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

**Erika Vogt** lives and works in Los Angeles. Vogt employs both 16mm film and video to explore the intersection of science and the supernatural. She has been included in major international shows including at the Whitney Museum, New York; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; SFMOMA; and a recent solo show at the New Museum, New York.

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

## PLAYTIME

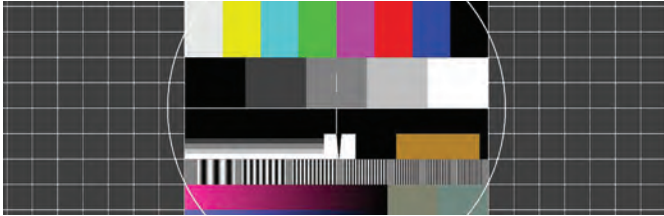
Directed by Jacques Tati

A hilarious and gloriously choreographed reflection on life in the modernist city.

APRIL 3 7:30PM

# A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENT

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TALK IN OTHER WORDS

## AVITAL RONELL

The Test Drive

Avital Ronell, professor of humanities and German, English, and comparative literature at New York University discusses the ubiquity of testing in today's society.

MAY 7 7PM