

The future filmmaker - Experiments in experiential cinema

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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Sunday, 17 May: 9pm: Right, turn the volume up. An eerily ambient soundtrack fills the car, as does a voice: "Hello and welcome to The Endemic Project." I round the corner to the top entrance at Kirstenbosch and drive a few metres, a little slower than the recommended 50km per hour as I don't want to miss a thing and this road is so twisty, so turny, so dark.

That is till the first light painting catches my headlights and eyes. Unmissable, seemingly floating out of the darkness on the left side of the road in bright orange is the text; "Once upon a time..." and so begins my magical real life, real time cinematic experience.



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My car is a space rocket flying through this densely tree-lined tunnel, whizzing past tweeting luminous birds and butterflies. Next it mutates into a submarine, the tinkling sound of running water, a constellation of silver fish (the aptly named Cape Galaxias) flash by on my right. What's next? The Table Mountain Ghost Frog appears from the abyss; wide friendly eyes greet me, ghostly indeed. Driving further, many more illuminated species - a pair of Cape Gysbok, a squat Western Leopard toad, a magnificent fiery red protea, all spring from the darkness. Before I know it I've come to the end of this captivating journey. The road is inky black now, my car deadly quiet.

If you have driven on Rhodes Drive, that stretch of curvy tarmac from Kirstenbosch to Hout Bay, at night in the last few months you would have noticed beautiful luminous creatures emerging from the darkness on either side of you. These creatures belong to [Fly on the Wall](#) filmmaker Bryan Little and form part of his first experiment in a new way of filmmaking. I met up with Little at his studio in Hout Bay a few weeks ago to find out more.



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Bryan Little is on a quest, a quest for meaning, a journey of discovery, the path to enlightenment. He is still only at the beginning of his journey but guided by his intuition the map to his 'Eldorado' is becoming clearer. GPS signal is currently not lost, the route signs are coming into focus and they are all pointing in one direction: the future. FutureFilm is the journey. FutureFilm is the destination.

"With emerging technologies and sense of being only limited by our imaginations we must surely start sending tendrils of exploration into what cinema could become. And so I have started on my quest, I call it FutureFilm and I don't know where I am going yet. I am trying to find new ways to tell stories, new ways to be a filmmaker."



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Navigating the new

The idea of a new way of storytelling and making films has been brewing away in Little's consciousness for some time now. The way we view films really hasn't changed much in the 100 years since its birth, flat images in a rectangle box reeling by indefinitely. Isn't it about time we were surprised? Isn't it about time we were immersed? Isn't it about time we felt physically connected to cinema? Little feels this pull and is currently navigating the dimly lit flickering path to immersive, interactive storytelling.

Little's concept of FutureFilm is really a mix of film, theatre, performance art and site specific artworks - a more interactive form of film viewing, which allows the viewer to become part of the story or the trigger to the story.

["The African Cypher"__ Official Theatrical Trailer](#) from [Fly on the Wall](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Some of Little's tendrils of exploration can be traced back to some of his more traditional filmmaking projects, such as African Cypher, his award-winning documentary on Pantsula dancers in Soweto. And music video for sound engineer, fellow Fly on the Wall member and friend, [Simon Kohler aka Sylvan Aztok](#) entitled Liggaam/Lughawe (Body/Airport). Both expressed ideas of the beauty of release, reverence and exultation through physical movement.

Fortuitously arranged seating at a dinner at the Seattle Film Festival sparked a conversation with legendary filmmaker [Peter Greenaway](#), which amongst talk of animated gifs, included discussion of "distilling film making down into one poignant moment" and doing something uniquely new with cinema. This inspired Little to work on a film project which would do just that.

[martian jungle / liggaam lughawe](#) from [Fly on the Wall](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Implementing inspiration

Step one. The Endemic Project, Little's first foray in FutureFilm. Inspired by his frequent commutes between his home in Hout Bay and work in Cape Town's City Bowl, Little decided to create a little magic along the route, specifically Rhodes Drive, that twisty turny tree-lined tunnel that stretches from Kirstenbosch to Constantia Nek.

"I've always wanted to do a project on this road, give back a little bit for all the daydreams."

The Endemic Project consists of 16 luminous, fiery-coloured light paintings of creatures endemic to the area, such as the Geometric Tortoise or Ghost Frog, hung on the alien trees that line Rhodes Drive. The images are made out of reflector tape "the kind you would normally use on trailers and caravans" and are best viewed at night while driving at 50km per hour as they seemingly spring up out of the darkness when a car's headlights catch them.



[click to enlarge](#)

Adding an audio element to what was initially a silent film, Little unveiled Act Two of this feature in March this year. With the help of the guys at [VoiceMap](#), a locally designed, location-aware technology for telling stories about particular places, a geo-tagged soundtrack app has been created and arranged by Sylvan Aztok which triggers when you drive past the creatures. Eerie ambient tinkly water, tweeting birds, rabbiting frogs now give voice to the stars of this film.

Little deliberately tried to keep the film simple by placing the audience in the experience, letting the car's motion become the element of time and narrative.

Adding poignancy to the project is the fact that some of Little's creatures have been 'liberated' from their home along Rhodes Drive. This adds an unintentional layer of meaning as there is a real sense of loss when the creatures disappear, mirroring the current fragile existence of many of these species.

"When some went missing, people got really upset, myself included, and I think that's appropriate that people feel that loss and it makes the project way less abstract."



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Reaction reconnection

The response to The Endemic Project has been overwhelmingly positive. Little gets up to 10 emails a day from moved audience members and people inquiring about the work.

"I had a 65-year-old woman contact me the other day. She hadn't felt like that in 40 years. It made her feel optimistic and like a child again. It literally just totally altered her state and for me that's complete success."

Other fans have taken to The Endemic Project's Facebook page to express their praise. *"Totally, utterly inspired by this work. It's like being in a fantasy world, yet realising at the same time that it's our real world. I was almost breathless driving along Rhodes Drive the other night. Brought back feelings of anticipation and excitement that I have not had since I was a child. Thank you, thank you, thank you for this outstanding installation. I cannot put words to the gratitude I feel."* Vanessa Thomas.

This kind of response is exactly what Little hopes to achieve with this work and future films and projects; a reconnection to something physical, something meaningful.

"Essentially, what I'm trying to get to at the end of the day is that I want people to feel something - a moment of exultation - using our bodies and physical existence to reach something higher."

So what's next for Little and FutureFilm? Well he's currently investigating how best to illustrate his next project. Working in partnership with The City of Cape Town he's thinking about turning an abandoned building in Langa into a FutureFilm environment with the aim of creating a series of experiences throughout the space.

In fact, Little's ultimate goal is for someone to be so moved, so affected by one of his films or projects that they spontaneously combust. Once this happens he would have reached the end of his journey, he would have found his Eldorado.

"My secret ambition is for one day for someone to basically combust through an experience I create - to just burst into flames out of pure joy. That's kinda where I'm trying to get to."

As far as we know no one has of yet has been transported into a fiery ball of joy but for some of us we sure do feel a hell of a lot warmer.

www.facebook.com/theEndemicProject

www.flyonthewall.co.za

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