

OVERGADEN.

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7 NOVEMBER 2008, 5-8PM

Yvette Brackman and Maria Finn have curated an exhibition that takes off from a never realized script by the Italian film director Antonioni.

INTRODUCTION

From Concept to Fiction

By Maria Finn

Michelangelo Antonioni (1912-2007) wrote the film script *Tecnicamente dolce* in 1966. The film was supposed to be shot in Rome, Sardinia, New York and the Amazon jungle, starring Jack Nicholson and Maria Schneider. But due to lacking funds the plans were shelved and never revived.

Yvette Brackman and I, who have both produced works on the basis of Antonioni's films thought that it would be interesting to use one of the director's manuscripts as a take-off for further artistic work. Not least a manuscript like *Technically Sweet* that had never been realized. Here, as opposed to the many remakes of existing films we have witnessed in recent years, there were no concrete images and renditions that one would have to relate to artistically. This created a different, more open situation.

In order to give the project the diversity and openness, which is also one of the principal characteristics of Antonioni's work, we invited thirteen artists to cooperate with us. We did not want to somehow complete Antonioni's project. We were more interested in investigating whether a common artistic starting point could lend a certain coherence to the exhibition as a whole, making the individual parts supplement and refer to each other.

In New York, where we exhibited the project in January 2008, we had two collaborators. One was the exhibition space Participant Inc.; the other was the film house Anthology Film Archives where the artists could present their works as films in a cinema. It was quite fascinating, of course, to see the highly varied interpretations of the material in which fragments of the script appeared in different forms.

The more conceptual works focused on a reading of the very wording of the script which, paradoxically, emphasized how insignificant words appeared to be, until they were related to a specific place and a real person. Other works stressed the significance of the very place where the work had been produced, focussing on how the story unfolded in the encounter with a selected location. Some artists used pre-existing footage or private recordings so as to add a more personal or documentary dimension to their work. A few of the works produced entirely new stories in which the artists transformed scenes from the script into compressed cinematic experiences.

At Participant Inc., the films were presented in an installation context tailored to the exhibition. Based



Johannes Christoffersen *Incidents of Location Tracking in Antonionian Ark/Ponti Park, 2008*

on the script, different locations - Rome, Sardinia, New York and the Amazon - were set up in the gallery, and the works were installed in relation to these locations according to their narrative angle. This spatial device opened new aspects of the script and also uncovered different layers and connections between the individual works. The viewer could move through the room as she pleased and freely choose which contributions and which aspects of the works she wanted to concentrate upon. Several of the installations gave an impression of a multiplicity of meanings because the interplay between the visual layers of the images formed collages of mutually conflicting elements and meanings.

At Overgaden, this element of collage has taken a new turn since it is now the audio tracks in the exhibition spaces that tie the works together and not the different locations. Each single room will simply be filled with the sound of an individual work while the sound of the other works can be heard in earphones. This way, the exhibition will elaborate the atmosphere created by the individual work rather than the concrete cinematic story. Thus, Antonioni's script is subjected to a new spatial interpretation that to a larger extent emphasizes the fundamental difference between a cinema theatre and an exhibition space. The temporal and spatial sequence of a film is quite fixed, but in an exhibition space it is to

a higher degree up to the viewers themselves to create meanings and links between the individual works and to help construct a story about them. In this way the exhibition *Technically Sweet* will elucidate the difference between the premise of film and the premise of art and at the same time invite the audience to 'co-direct' the manuscript of Antonioni.

Reporters with a Script

By Yvette Brackman

Before Michelangelo Antonioni became a film director he worked as a journalist and made several documentaries. Later on he continually approached film shooting as if he was doing a documentary. When filming he would arrive on the set with his script, but leave it behind letting the day unfold unscripted. In this way his screenplays were only used as points of departure, not as a plan to be followed strictly. In describing how he worked on the set of his film *The Passenger* he said:

I have only tried to be more objective, even if this word seems ambiguous. A journalist sees reality with a certain consistency of his viewpoint, which to him, and only to him, seems objective. Jack in the film sees things in his way and I, as the director, play the role of the journalist behind the journalist: I again add other dimensions to reproduced reality.

Many of Antonioni's films feature a journalist, recalling his own beginning and his early ties to neo-realism and its roots in documentary. The figure of the journalist features in *La Notte* (1961), *Blow-Up* (1966) and *The Passenger* (1974) as well as in the script *Tecnicamente dolce* (1966). In this script as in his later film, *The Passenger*, Antonioni was preoccupied with the crisis in journalism that surfaced in the mid-sixties. Both projects questioned the growing control and theatricality of the media. Antonioni wanted to obliterate the notion of mediation by dragging the documentary and journalism process into the film itself. He created an artificial situation but he did not have complete control over what unfolded before the camera. The script, *Tecnicamente dolce*, and the film, *The Passenger*, were fictions, yet both had elements of the so called *Cinema Verité* and its claims to authenticity, so the finished products were fresh and unpredictable as life itself.

In this way the fluid nature of relations in the sixties between art, film and documentary are clearly visible in Antonioni's films. This is one of the aspects that make his work so fascinating for artists. In the early sixties *Cinema Verité* in France and Direct Cinema in the US discovered the importance of the co-direction of their participants in the non-fictional discourse. At the same time experimental film artists were testing the limits of documentary, placing the acts staged for the cam-

era at the center of the filmmaking process. It is here, that the artist's and the documentarian's intentions merge in their aim to break through to reality and it is here between these two worlds that the work of Antonioni rests most comfortably. Acting as both ethnographer and pop artist towards the anxiety of the atomic age, Antonioni, through film, describes the modern landscape of alienation. He mixes up the staged and the real, a state of affairs still so relevant for us in today's media saturated culture.

The artists in *Technically Sweet* explore this territory further in the works included in the exhibition, engaging the already scripted and fusing it with the yet to be scripted. The curatorial operation of imposing a set-up on the participating artists through the use of the preexisting script is theatrical by definition. It is a situation designed a priori, and it bears only second-hand relation to the present. In effect the artists in the exhibition have been sent on an assignment to add new dimensions to the already reproduced. To gain access to reality by any means necessary. This directive has led to an unscripted and novel result. The resulting works become actors and locations that unfold to reveal new associations with Antonioni's work through their context and relationship.

Synopsis *Tecnicamente dolce*

By Birgitte Grundtvig

Tecnicamente dolce tells the story of a politically disillusioned journalist T, who leaves his job in Rome and goes on a hunting trip to Sardinia. Here he falls in love with an enigmatic young girl who is staying on the island with her mother. The girl, in her turn, is involved with a young man, S. A friendship develops between the two men as well, and all three of them become entangled in an intricate web of power games, love, friendship, rivalry and jealousy. Later in the story T and S decide to travel to the Amazon jungle together, but on their way the plane crashes in the rainforest. Miraculously they both survive and they start to fight their way through the jungle back to civilization. When they finally reach civilization they both die of exhaustion.

The story alternates between scenes from T's stay on Sardinia, and his subsequent experience a few months later, together with S, in the Brazilian rainforest. There they fight a different game of pure survival. The story evolves around the same persons and the same recurrent motifs - weapons, airplanes, the killing of animals - but displaced in time and space. The suspense increases as the narration nervously jumps between the two locations. It only gradually becomes clear what T is doing in the jungle with S, what happened on the island, and how the two stories are connected.

**Michel Auder and Michael Stickrod**

Technically Sweet Stickrod/Auder, 2008. (24 min.)

In this collaborative work we are presented with a narrative that touches on *Technically Sweet*, yet develops a more personal universe. Elements from the screenplay are recognizable through out the film but are presented together with more personal video footage from travels to places similar to the locations in the screenplay. Mixed with this footage the fiction of the screenplay becomes real again, dragged back to life. The abstract qualities of the video footage combined with animation gives the film a distinctive visual style. To watch it is like looking through a prism where what we see becomes a bit distorted but nevertheless beautiful and engaging.

Michel Auder (b. 1945) is a self-taught artist. He lives and works in New York.

Michael Stickrod (b. 1978) is educated at Yale University in Connecticut. He lives and works in New York.

**Yvette Brackman**

Superdeep, 2008. (11 min.)

Yvette Brackman uses the script to venture off into left-field exegesis with *Superdeep*, an open-ended video meditation using her father's 8mm home movies and her own 16 mm footage shot on Russia's Kola Peninsula near the eponymous SG3 Superdeep borehole. In reality, drilling the borehole can be viewed as another 'technically sweet' project - an act of pure research, in this case quite literally determining how low science can go.

Yvette Brackman (b. 1967) is educated at The School of The Art Institute of Chicago and The

University of Illinois in Chicago. She lives and works in Copenhagen.

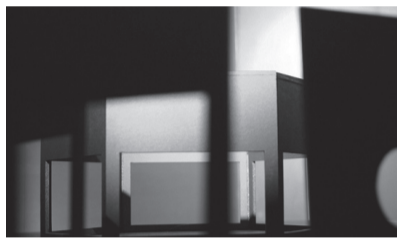
**John Brattin**

Eros is Sick, 2008. (20 min.)

John Brattin's film investigates the struggle for survival creating an artificial jungle in which the male characters encounter. The meeting turns into another kind of struggle when they encounter yet another male couple. Accompanied by an effective soundtrack Brattin's film is entertaining while it at the same time explores issues concerning gender and representation.

The film is shown together with a selection of drawings and photographs that explores themes from John Brattin's film. Here the men are fighting in the jungle but the proportions are distorted and a romantic touch creates a welcome alternative to the macho universe described in the screenplay.

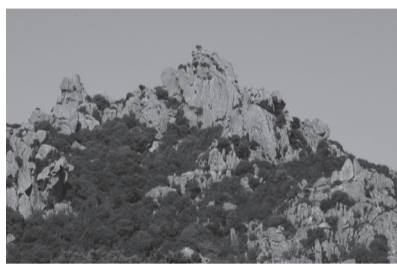
John Brattin (b. 1965) is educated at Massachusetts College of Art. He lives and works in New York.

**Johannes Christoffersen**

Incidents of Location Tracking in Antonionian Ark/Ponti Park, 2008.

Johannes Christoffersen has developed a storyboard with two parallel tracks; the search for film locations and the development of a film as a single tracking shot. In this work Christoffersen is reflecting the theme of death in the script. Death is presented neither as a morbid state, nor as the shocking consequence of violence, but as a natural function, and a state of tranquil equilibrium as described by T in the screenplay.

Johannes Christoffersen (b. 1968) is educated at The Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen. He lives and works in Copenhagen.

**Maria Finn**

A Technical Problem, 2008. (16 min.)

In this road-movie Maria Finn travels to Sardinia to find the planned locations for Antonioni's film. We follow T in his search for Valle della Luna and Isola Rossa, the places documented in the production stills, originally produced for *Technically Sweet*. A voice-over reads excerpts from the screenplay in Italian while we explore the landscape. While doing so discrepancies between the voice-over and the visual images takes the narration to unexpected places. Here questions are raised concerning the importance of the place you select for a film location, and how visiting these places affects us.

Maria Finn (b. 1963) is educated at The Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen. She lives and works in Copenhagen.

**Ulrik Heltoft**

Technically Sweet, 2008. (10 min.)

While filmed in LA, Denmark and Uganda, the story cuts between two locations only: Sardinia and the jungle. With a minimum of dialogue the

selected scenes from the manuscript weave together a lyrical narrative. The film is installed at Overgaden together with an African tribal stool.

Ulrik Heltoft (b. 1973) is educated at Yale University, Connecticut and The Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen. He lives and works in Copenhagen.

**Frans and Frederik Jacobi**

The Sound of two Plants Fighting for Life, 2008. (16:16 min.)

A film director and his leading actor fly across the Amazon jungle on their way to a film-set. The plane crashes into the rainforest and by strange accident the two men find themselves crashed into their own script as well. Oscillating between a new fiction about Antonioni and his actor and the story about T and S from the actual script, the film blends scenes from the script, quotes from Antonioni's preface, and new improvised scenes from the jungle. The brothers Frederik and Frans Jacobi direct and play the two characters, and the film is shot on location in the Amazon jungle in Ecuador. The film is installed together with a series of photographs by Frans Jacobi.

Frans Jacobi (b. 1960) is educated at The Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen. He lives and works in Copenhagen.

Frederik Jacobi (b. 1973) is educated at The National Film School of Denmark in Copenhagen. He lives and works in Copenhagen and New York.

**Elsebeth Jørgensen**

Viewpoint. Montage of possible locations for an unrealized movie, 2008.

This installation pieces together parts from the *Tecnicamente dolce* manuscript with text sequences from *Lonely Planet* and the artist's own stills from remote coastal areas. The audience is presented with an open narration of "possible" locations that Antonioni's character T in scene 41 "could have been" thinking about or visiting in the other island scenes. Here the life in small villages and changes of urban landscape are reflected. And as such this installation becomes another script: a scripted tour through a landscape with locations that are either abandoned, derelict and deserted or in the process of degradation and transformation.

Elsebeth Jørgensen (b. 1970) is educated at The Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen. She lives and works in Copenhagen.

**Lars Mathisen**

Ext. A city street. Morning, 2008. (26 min.)

This installation is comprised of a montage of still images appropriated from diverse sources and accompanied by a male voice reciting the Antonioni-scripts 55 scene titles as well as fragments from the script. The ongoing sound of a hi-hat drumbeat is heard throughout the film. However instead of utilizing the dialogue, Mathisen builds up an audio visual collage gleaned from the director's running commentary of his own script and the location directions, portions of the script that are normally unspoken but present in the form of setting and atmosphere. Mathisen reverses this by visualizing the director's notes and verbalizing the setting/atmosphere. The result is a narrative without gestures and a film without characters.

Lars Mathisen (b. 1955) is a self-taught artist. He lives and works in Copenhagen.

**Mark Orange**

Temps Mort: Dead Time, 2008. (2:20 min.)

Temps Mort: Dead Time is based on a short wordless scene that occurs early in the *Tecnicamente dolce* screenplay in which T meets 'The Countessa' (mother of the 'The Girl'), with her nurse, in the doorway of a pharmacy. They exchange glances but, at this point in the screenplay, we are not aware of who this woman is, or whether the man and woman know each other, nor the significance of the pharmacy location. The scene ends with a close-up on the countess' scarf, an image that takes the narration to a halt, emptying it but thereby also opening up for endless associations.

Mark Orange (b. 1966) is educated at University of Ulster in Belfast and P.S.1 in New York. He lives and works in New York.

**Laura Parnes**

Untitled (for Technically Sweet), 2008. (2:30 min.)

In her video installation, Laura Parnes works with the parallel universe of Antonioni's screenplay. On the one hand we have the old, well-known world, the cultural landscape of Sardinia, and on the other hand the wild jungle of the Amazon. On one monitor Parnes shows us a family - father, mother and a little child - in a beautiful and peaceful landscape. On the other monitor we find footage of wild animals in their real surroundings interacting with each other, both peacefully and threatening. Meanwhile the soundtrack is unsettling, emphasizing the vulnerability of our carefully constructed secure island in society.

Laura Parnes (b. 1968) is educated at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. She lives and works in New York.

**Pia Rönicke**

Scanning through Landscapes, 2008. (21:39 min.)

Made up of still images with voice over and referring to similar themes from Antonioni's script, Rönicke's work uses the *Tecnicamente dolce* screenplay as a point of departure. The film explores an undetermined space, Elysian Park in middle of Los Angeles - a largely unkempt park on the edge of a Mexican and Asian immigrant quarter with a high crime rate. A place, that is now in the process of being gentrified.

Pia Rönicke (b. 1974) is educated at The Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen and California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles. She lives and works in Copenhagen.

**Elisabeth Subrin**

Sweet Ruin, 2008. (10 min.)

In her film installation, Elisabeth Subrin investigates the leading male and female character in Antonioni's screenplay through one actress. In a double projection we simultaneously follow the girl and T unfold in different surroundings. Most of the time the girl is seen inside a house, while the male character struggles in the jungle scenes with a gun. As the film unfolds the characters are getting closer and closer into focus and at one point we see both of them close up, an image of two states of mind that intertwine. They melt into a third point of view, a mix of both characters.

Elisabeth Subrin (b. 1964) is educated at Massachusetts College of Art in Boston and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She lives and works in New York.

TALK TALK

In connection with the exhibition *Technically Sweet* there will be a series of three talks where the participating artists will discuss their work two by two.

Thursday 6 November at 6pm John Brattin, Mark Orange, Laura Parnes, Elisabeth Subrin, Michel Auder & Michael Stickrod.

Thursday 27 November at 6pm Johannes Christoffersen, Maria Finn, Elsebeth Jørgensen and Lars Mathisen.

Thursday 4 December at 6pm Yvette Brackman, Ulrik Heltoft, Frans & Frederik Jacobi and Pia Rönicke.

Thursday 8 January at 6pm Yvette Brackman will discuss Antonioni's early documentary work and how the themes that figured in them turn up in his later films.

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

Friday 6 February 2009 Overgaden presents a solo exhibition by Søren Lose and the exhibition *Interrupted Game* with Amel Ibrahimovic & Slaven Tolj. The last day of the exhibitions is 5 April 2009.

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Translation: Morten Visby

This exhibition folder can be downloaded from www.overgaden.org



KUNSTRÅDET



DaNYArts

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