

COPENHAGEN SHORT FILM FESTIVAL

Bodies of Information

Text and curation by artist Jazbo Gross

Critical approaches to technology often stress the idea of alienation, painting a picture of a society out of touch with lived experience; isolated individuals that are like turtles on an F1 racetrack. This image is appealing in its simplicity and we should not disregard its potential to fuel conversations that foster congregation and participation in movements away from an exclusively utilitarian efficiency. Granted, the motorised vehicle and its successors sometimes leaves us feeling cold. But are the difficulties we have with incorporating these alien objects into our lifeworld perhaps more a problem of imagination than a problem of material? How often do we condemn the roads for allowing the transport of people and goods? Or maybe the real question is, how often do we fall to our knees and intimately embrace the slab of pavement that we have grown so accustomed to trodding on and insensitively passing by? In any case, this seems to be a question to ask ourselves as we watch **Mitra Saboury's** unsettling yet deeply pleasurable short video, *Stumbling Block*. No need to mythologise or conceptualise this ancient technology. Try spending some quality time alone, with the ground.

If questions around technology are badly framed with alienation, maybe we should ask ourselves, what is truly alien? I reckon zombie movies have it right. Reconnecting with the dead is a truly alien affair that requires our mental and physical faculties to be fully engaged. Perhaps technophobia can be restated as 'fear of the known'. In **Victoria Kaldan's** *Ljósið Mitt* (which I believe is Icelandic for 'my light') it is rather the unknown that is feared. It is night, the trees are heavy with unreal glistening snow and in this darkest of nights we can hear the wailing zombies of Espergærde in the distance. Their cries send our two protagonists further down an existential rabbit hole that leads them as Kaldan says, "to the river Styx, where the living can go no further." Our intimate companions on this journey are a pair of iPhones without which the voyage might not have been possible, without which the courage to travel this far might not have been summoned and without which we might never have known the true face of the zombies of Espergærde. *Ljósið Mitt* is a beautiful film about bringing the unknown close and feeling it on your body, your skin, your screen; letting it touch you and letting it go.

In **Alice Topsøe-Jensen's** electric Gmail/Facebook/MacBook video, everything takes place on the screen, in writing, yet I am immediately transported elsewhere; to places in my own story. There is not a body in sight, and in that, the bodies in this story are ever more present. The characters involved are (among others) the technician, the engineer, the transmitter/receiver station and the prime minister. How much work does it take to transform feelings into energy? Taking the form of an exchange of digital messages between two friends, lighting jolts of feelings are rendered exceptionally vivid in the mythologised language that the friends communicate through. There are other actors present in the story

as well: *The Square*, *The Affective Work*, *The Other Work*, *The Afterlife*, Google's Communal Data Center, all of which are weaved into a story that speaks about, in the artist's own words, "the value of emotional labour in an overworking society". Topsøe-Jensen's video, *Til Søde i Det Hinsides, del 1, 2 & 3 (To My Darling in The Afterlife, Part 1, 2 & 3)* leaves me with a feeling of having taken part in something intensely private and empowering.

In **Rustan Söderling's** *Tannhäuser Gate*, the information technology of our day lies in ruins. We move through an apocalyptic CGI rendered landscape where chickens and other animals roam a devastated and abandoned Family Mart. Incessant rain and the denseness of the environment, intermingling flora and fauna with OOH commercial billboards endless amounts of human debris, along with a disembodied voice that speaks the famous last words of Rutger Hauer in *Bladerunner*: "I have seen things you people wouldn't believe". I think of Harrison Ford's stupified face in that moment, confronted with Hauer's auto-eulogy, as he realizes that it is himself he is hunting. In this moment of confusion, the strict hierarchy and division of nature and culture are mediated for Ford's character and doubt is cast over his own origins. It is this kind of confusion or mediation that takes place in *Tannhäuser Gate*. Inside the Family Mart, a tiny immortal tardigrade floats around as if in zero gravity. With it an old broken hard drive strapped to a bone with metallic tape, a tiny figurine with a fox sticker, covered in solder wire and sequins, attached to the lid of a disposable coffee cup with the same thin metallic tape, leaves of fern, countless daedalia, everything painted, handled, touched, marked. For the disembodied observer in Söderling's film, this is a Venusberg; a place wherefrom we don't return.

"It's Matter that gets compressed. So much that it starts reacting to each other and it creates stars". A different kind of 'end of the world' scenario is presented in **Sidsel Christensen's** *A Conversation at the Edge of the Object* which unfolds through a conversation between the artist and the art collector Thomas Frankenberg. Here, the visual environment, that we very quickly become immersed in, begins as a kind of elemental abstraction. In question is our understanding of the Natural and specifically the status of an artwork. Why do we collect, catalog and exhibit these objects and what kind of work is it that goes into producing them? What makes them different from natural elements? Christensen's camera takes us on a meticulous and textured journey from undulating watery landscapes where foaming waves become rocks that become mountains to mountains that become artworks. We move almost unnoticeably into the art collection of Frankenberg where philosophical questions are brought into contact with these censored environments. Sidsel's careful observations of texture, proximity and presence fuse with Frankenberg's thoughts on meaning, preservation and disappearance.

A very different kind of archive is dealt with in **Thomas Goddard's** *The Word of Mouse*. After having watched this film it seems suddenly meaningful for me to think of the internet as our collective unconscious. This immense storage of information that is growing larger day by day; such a strange sticky beast. This stuff cannot be immaterialised any more than it can be reduced to stacks of binary code, PVC, silicone, zinc and aluminum or even complex procedures. Goddard's video material is a visceral, sticky goo that feels more moulded than cut. Primordial scenes of growth and birth become assembly lines and office workers but surprises us with a disappearing lady in a phone booth surrounded by sheep. This occupies our mind as we coast on the surface of the soundtrack through circuit boards and early digital user interfaces until someone inserting coins into a machine seems to send electronic fish flying through the head of a man in a suit with a blurred out face in a game-show room. I'm only halfway through the film and I feel like I've taken a bite of something slightly too big and still, I'm hungry for more. Is that what information is? A kind of foodstuff that sidesteps the stomach while spookily acting on it at a distance?

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