Anselm Franke

Animism: Notes on an Exhibition

The exhibition Animism sets out to provide a different context for reflecting on an old topic in the theory of art, one that has considerable reverberations in the present: the question of animation. Rather than investigating the effect of animation merely within the registers of aesthetics – for instance, by presenting a collection of artworks exemplifying different ways of achieving the effect of life or the lifelike within a field demarcated by the dialectics of movement and stasis – this exhibition tackles the unquestioned backdrop against which the aesthetic discussion of such effects normally takes place. This backdrop is usually taken for granted or carefully kept at a distance, but the works in this exhibition seek to bring it into the light. While the evocation of life is a well-known effect in animated cartoons and digital animations, and in more delicate ways, in painting and sculpture, outside the territory of art and mass media animation has been a disputed problem – one that leads to core issues in current debates about modernity. When animation is taken outside the field of art, it turns into an ontological battleground. Far from being a matter of abstract considerations, this is a battleground at the frontier of colonial modernity, and in the context of contemporary politics and aesthetics, it concerns the urgent question of the transformability and negotiability of ontologies, where claims to reality and the ordering of the social world are at stake. On this battleground, the problem of animation was given the name "animism" by nineteenth century anthropologists aspiring to see their work incorporated into the ranks of science.

I.

I should begin by mentioning the degree to which animism has continued to pose, despite all attempts at scientific explanation, a serious riddle to Western epistemologies, and also a provocation to our embodied everyday perception and rationality. That inanimate objects and things act, that they have designs on us, and that we are interpellated by them, is a quotidian reality that we all implicitly accept – just as we accept, and indeed are animated by, the very milieus and contexts in which we operate. But to acknowledge, articulate, and conceptualize this fact is apparently a wholly different issue, which is problematic on all levels. The provocation embedded in the notion of animism is that it demands us to confront just that. Imagining animism therefore takes on the shape of the extreme, such that animism assumes the form of a caricature-version of the reality we normally take for granted: If things become active, alive, or even person-like, where does this leave actual humans? Animism in this

Ken Jacobs, *Capitalism: Slavery*, 2006. Film still from video projection, color, silent, 3 min, transferred to DVD.

sense is greeted by the Western mindset as the threat that we must exchange positions, for now we can only imagine ourselves as annulled, in the role of the inert, passive stuff that was previously the thing-like "matter" out there. And the provocation reaches further. Its echoes can be heard in the question, "So, do you *really* believe?" For what is at stake here seems to be of a confessional nature, such that if one would dare to answer "yes," one would no longer be an accepted member of the modern community.

This project does not intend to answer this question with either "no" or "yes." Instead, it seeks to bypass the choice altogether and treat animism not as a matter of belief, but rather as a boundary-making practice. It seeks to shift the terms away from a contaminated terrain and uncover in this terrain a series of a priori choices embedded in the modern imaginary.

Indeed, the very mention of animism provokes immediate reactions of border-defense. A famous example of such a defense-reaction, on the level of affect and aesthetics, is the Freudian sensation of the "uncanny," in which something is either more alive than it should be, or exposed as "merely" mechanical. In both cases, we reassert the "proper" boundary between self and world. The question of animation – what is endowed with life, the soul, and agency – seems inevitably and immediately to call for distinctions and boundaries: between animate and inanimate matter, primitive and civilized, subjective perception and objective qualities, the colloquial perception of the real and the merely fictive or imaginary, and last but not least, between interior self and exterior world. And it would indeed be presumptuous to demand that contemporary viewers abandon such distinctions altogether, and, for instance, take the aesthetic effect of a cartoon to be *real life*. In our everyday perception, there is nothing that we identify more readily as fictional and as make-believe. And the project does not issue such a demand, nor does it devote itself, in a fashionable way, to the *hidden life* of images and things. However, it is in the readiness with which such distinctions are made that it identifies a colonial mechanism deeply ingrained in our everyday perception and our capacity to make sense of the world. Hence, the project refrains from postulating a *life* of things or images, not because this would go too far, but because it would not go far enough. The Animism project was built upon the conviction that what must be mobilized are the very grounds on which such distinctions are made.
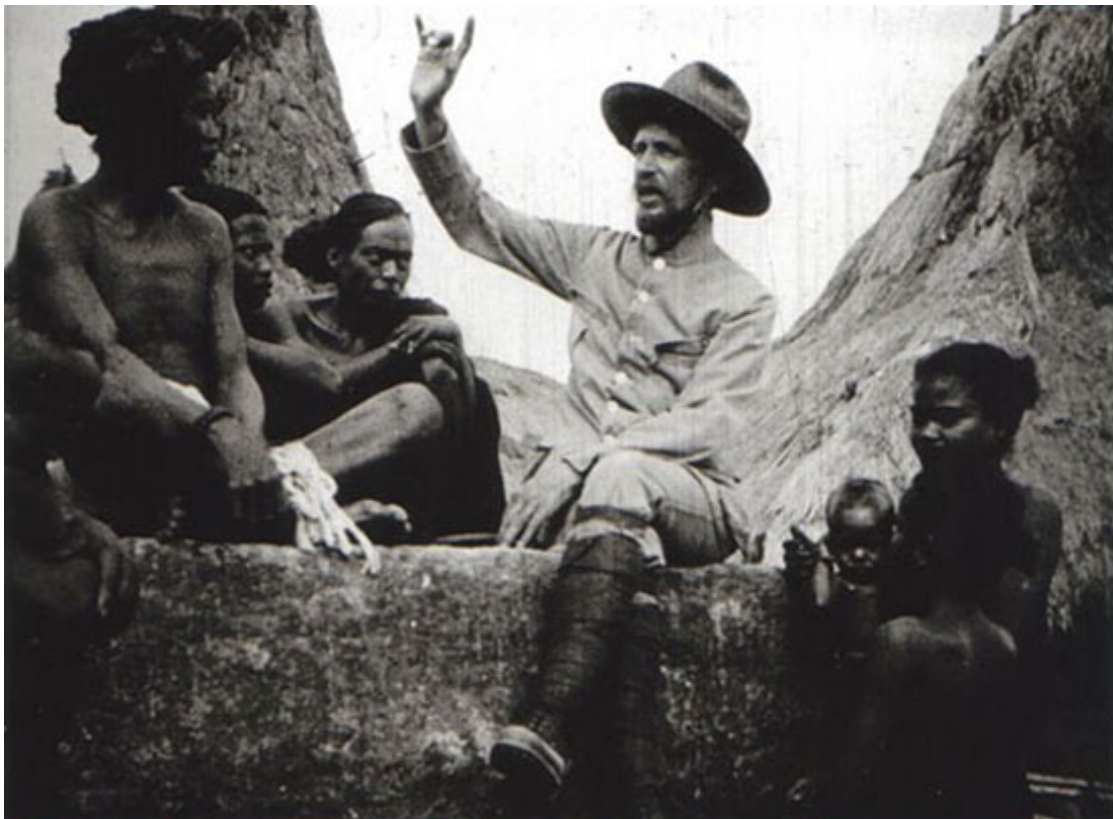
Vincent Monnikendam, *Mother Dao, the Turtlelike (Moeder Dao, de schildpadgelijkende),* 1995. Film, 35 mm, color, sound, 88 min, transferred to DVD.

What is at stake in putting those grounds at our disposal? At stake is the question of whether we are able to step outside the matrix of modern dichotomies – not by abandoning them, but by regaining our capacity to act on them, and to transform what presents itself to us as "given" reality. This ability is also the measure of all attempts to decolonize the modern colonial imaginary. This project argues that in the question of animism lies a kernel of colonialism. Across the registers of common sense and everyday perception, from aesthetic reflection to the most abstract conceptual distinctions, this kernel stands for a mechanism that has served to legitimize colonial subjugation, often in ways not immediately perceptible, precisely because it has become naturalized as part of how we perceive, experience, and relate to things. Animism apparently cannot be defined within modern terminology without applying to it a set of unquestioned assumptions that are the fundaments of modernity, and in whose matrix we necessarily operate as long as we assume that the question is one of determining the "correct" distinction between life and non-life, self and world. These assumptions are already manifest when it is described, in a seemingly neutral terms, as the belief of some cultures that nature is populated by spirits or souls. The very meaning these terms carry within modernity imply that such belief is at worst mistaken – that is, failing to account for how things *really* are – or at best symbolic representations of social relations projected onto a natural environment that is indifferent to them. When we use the term animism, we have thus already entered into the narrative structure and self-mythologies of modernity. And these narratives cannot but deny *reality* to what they construct as modernity's other. Mobilizing the grounds would require that we question the very meaning of terms such as "belief," "spirits," "souls," "projection," "fiction," and even "life," as well as the historical role they have played in Western modernity as part of a disciplinary system of divisions that organize a modern "reality principle," ghettoizing modernity's discontents as "fiction," "aesthetics," or "primitive animism."

The measure for un-disciplining the imagination is the ability to stop "playing the dividing game" in order to look at the very practices that organize and police the divisions. This exhibition is not *about* animism, as if it were an *object*. Instead, it is about the making of boundaries – those boundaries that decide, in the last instance, the *status* of things within a social order, decide actual in- and exclusions. Boundaries are never given to us in the form of a priori categorical separations. As so many critical theoretical efforts of the recent past have

shown, borders are never "natural," they never precede their making – they are always the products of practices that organize them, depending on the order of knowledge, technologies, and politics. Representations, aesthetic processes, and media images consolidate, reflect, and reach beyond these boundaries. They are the very expression of the liminality of all things, including the liminality of all subjectivities. All social practice is, in these terms, boundary-practice, although every boundary is organized and conceived differently. The precondition for bringing these differences into view is the imaginary and conceptual ability to un-map the borders in question. This exhibition was conceived in those terms, moving between the inscription and the un-mapping of those boundaries through their transgression and negotiation at the limits.

II.

In order to meet the demands of un-mapping and un-disciplining, it is necessary to create an alternative narration, an alternative frame – which is at the same time an anti-frame – which can account for the phenomena of animation in terms beyond the taken-for-granted division. At the same time, this alternative frame must not fall into a terrain of indifference, as if all borders and hierarchies were already ultimately abolished. The first premise of the Animism project is that the *fact of animation* and the *event of communication* are one and the same. There is no being-in-communication that is not also a form of animation, even if this is a *negative* animation, the absence of a certain sovereignty and agency, as in the case of "objectification" or "reification." Animism then becomes the point of departure, the most common thing in the world – a world in which there is nothing outside of the relations that constitute it. Where there is communication, there is animation. Animation is always a form of entanglement with an environment and with *otherness*. This otherness is incommensurable and can never be fully objectified; it always escapes positivist knowledge to some degree, implicating such knowledge instead within situated practice. This point of departure hence also suggests that there aren't – there cannot possibly be – non-animist societies. Animism is a different name for the primacy of relationality, for social immanence. To conceive of this immanence not as closed and fundamentally undifferentiated is a current political task, the reason for the necessity of bringing boundary-making practices in the widest possible sense into view. Yet, however canalized by distinct border-practices, animism as such may well be irreducible. It stands for the demand that *relations must be,*

Jimmie Durham, *The Museum of Stones,* 2011/2012. Installation consisting of various stones and other materials, measurements variable. Photo: Arwed Messmer.

and always are, expressed. The discontent of a relational diagram (its foreclosed, excluded, muted part that is rendered *negatively*) will always be recoverable in a displaced, symptomatic elsewhere from where it will issue its claims – the site of desires, fictions, divinities, symptoms, or ghosts. Dealing with these phenomena requires that one does not address them by *these* names; it requires that images in the widest sense of the word be read against the grain, against their classification, such as when fiction becomes documentary.

The dramaturgy of the Animism project furthermore followed the speculative hypothesis that in the modern Western worldview, the always-already-animist "meridian line" of communication and mimetic engagement has turned into a "negative horizon." A negative horizon is a horizon that one leaves behind: hence to become modern, we have to cease being animists. We must leave behind a projected animist past, always in danger of returning. Furthermore, "animism" was the name given to the vanishing point situated on this meridian line at the horizon. Within a pictorial plane organized according to the central perspective, the vanishing point is the central spot on which the entire projective construction depends, but it ultimately is also the spot where all the lines that open up the space in the first place, and hence all its differences, conflate and fall into one. Hence animism was always imagined in terms of the *absence* of those distinctions on which modernity rests – for instance, as a "state of nature" in which there is no difference between the interior and the exterior world, between culture and nature, or between natural things and social signs. The vanishing point is also a tilting image, a negative, upside-down mirror that shows the non-self as a projection of self – as in the image of animism as a "natural condition" in opposition to "modern civilization." The upside-down mirror-screen is an instrument of an imaginary appropriation of otherness conceived in one's own image. It is the site of an export – hence the common accusation that so-called animists "project" their sense of self into the environment, while it is really those who label them animist that project themselves and their own normative distinctions onto others and the world.

Animism is a "multistable picture" (a figure in which figure/ground relations are reversible, with two mutually exclusive motives making equally strong claims on the perception), always unexpectedly switching between a positive and a negative, between figure and ground. Hence in the modern mindset animism is always conceived as either negative – that is, as a barbaric absence of civilization – or positive – as

a quasi-paradisic condition in which the painful separations that characterize modernity do not exist. It is *in the moment of the reversal* that this exhibition attempts to grasp the "making-of-boundaries," in suspending the either/or structure that characterizes the "multistable figure" just as the logic of boundaries, aspiring to substitute the enforced choice (a double-bind really) for a stereoscopic gaze that arrives from the meridian line, from the vanishing point. A generalized asymmetry took hold of the modern worldview, resulting in an inability to recognize a multistable figure as such*.* This is perhaps a perfect description of *dualism*, in which the imposed choice of the multistable figure is not traversed to interrogate the moment of encounter and untranslatability at the meridian of mediation, but instead is lifted to become a schizophrenic either/or principle. This leads to serious trouble with media and especially states of mediality. In the dualist multistable picture, everything at the end comes down to the question of agency and determinism, of just what and who is actually acting and what is acted upon – such as in the quarrel of matter versus spirit, body versus mind. The modernist subject preferred to conceive of itself as the *active* figure facing a *passive* world of matter that it acted upon. What constitutes a problem in this structure is the inverse, the fact that we do not only make, but are also fundamentally *made* – not in the material determinist sense, but in the sense of our relational environments and milieus and the vectors of subjectivation they contain*.* This *passive* increasingly escapes the modern framework, and it is actively excluded and stigmatized. To be made, to be animated, to be moved – those phenomena have no claim to reality other than in the ghetto of subjective emotion or aesthetic experience. Consequently, the most abject figure of savagery to the modern subject – the symptom of the exclusion and asymmetry – was "possession," the condition of passive experience where the subject fully became a medium, and was fundamentally made, animated, and moved. To break open the double bind surrounding the modern relation to mediality requires that the active/passive nexus is conceived as a two-way street, a multistable picture whose figure/ground relations must at all times be available for inversion and the stereoscopic gaze. This exchange of perspectives is a historiographic challenge, for it demands that our historical narrative be measured against the meridian where such reversal becomes possible, where the ability to *imagine* the reversal ultimately translates into actual possibilities to *act* on history. In the light of a contemporary situation that sees the displacement of boundaries from disciplinary

institutions into the subject, this ability to account for and act on the active/passive nexus is perhaps a political demand par excellence.

III.

The Animism exhibition begins with a constellation of works that bring to light the paradoxical position of the medium of the exhibition and the institution of the museum. What is a museum if not a grand de-animating machine? Life – animation – is subject to permanent transformation in time, and it is precisely this transformation that the very institution of the museum is directed against. Whatever enters the museum is subjected to de-animation in this very basic sense, as it becomes an object of the very conservation that is the purpose of museum's existence. Whatever enters a museum must also be positioned within a classificatory order of knowledge through which the object is fixed and identified. A handy example is the butterfly, a symbol of psyche and of metamorphosis since the ancient Greeks. The acts of conservation, fixation, and identification are all present in the single gesture that pins down the butterfly with a needle in its rightful place within a taxonomy. Museums have also frequently been compared to mausoleums. But do they not yield their own paradoxical forms of animation? Museums make objects to be looked at by subjects – and this is already a "relational diagram" in which one side talks *about* the other. But how do they "speak back," and how does the very relation produced here become articulated? Is it not that the de-animated objects are now what animates the very order of knowledge at whose service they have been installed? And does not the museum as mausoleum, moreover, produce a particular – perhaps compensatory – phantasy of re-animation, as the very expression of said relation? Why would hundreds of thousands people go to stare at mummies or dinosaurs if it wasn't for the uncanny phantasy of them coming to life again? Do museums, particularly in their popular and populist forms, not produce a specific kind of spectral animist imaginary through which "history comes alive"?

With regard to animism as a subject matter, this productive paradox needs further examination. For a basic assumption of this project is that animism is not an object, but the very set of practices that resist objectification. An exhibition about animism is hence impossible – simply because these relations cannot be exhibited. They resist the particular *form* of objectification that is the precondition for something to be exhibited. And putting artifacts in the place of the practice would give rise to a different problem: whatever way an object may have been animated in its original context, it ceases to be so in the confines of a museum and exhibition framework, where they are perhaps no less animated, but certainly in very different ways and to different ends.

This part of the exhibition has thus been devoted to reflection on the institution of the museum and the medium of the exhibition in relation to animism. Here the film *Les statues meurent aussi* (1953) by Chris Marker and Alain Resnais is on view. This is a film that follows the fate of "tribal" African sculptures. It is a narrative mapping of, on the one hand, the different forms of animation and de-animation that these sculptures undergo as they become specimens of the "primitive arts" in Europe's ethnographic museums, and on the other hand, of the uncanny animation they are endowed with as they become commodities in a new marketplace. This section of the exhibition also displays a series of photographs by Candida Höfer from her ongoing series on ethnographic museums around the Western hemisphere. These are portraits of the architecture of those spaces – including the world's most renowned ones – that seek to dissociate themselves from both time and space. The photographs chart the various axes of distance that are inscribed into the architecture of those institutions, and foreground their representational gesture, as well as the enormous machinery in their "backstage" that is needed to fight the inevitable disintegration of their objects. One photograph acts as a multistable figure par excellence. It shows two conservators at work wearing full-body white suits in front of vitrines packed with ethnographic artifacts. Faced with this curious picture, we wonder: What it is about these objects that draws so much attention? Or is there perhaps a danger of some viral contamination, from which these suits ought to protect those that have been assigned to interrogate the objects scientifically? Who protects themselves from whom? And what is the relation that we, as visitors, are allowed or prescribed to enter into with whatever objects are on display?

Next to these photographs are a series of vitrines that contain a collection of stones. The installation *The Dangers of Petrification* (2007) looks much like a classical display from a museum of natural history, except that the labels next to the stones are handwritten, and many of the stones look rather ordinary. The writings on the labels identify these stones as *petrifications* of things such as a piece of bread, an apple slice, a salami, or even a cloud – the latter's petrification, it is stated, was the product of extremely rare weather conditions that would sometimes occur just above the ocean's surface. And in the moment that one begins to smile at these descriptions, the whole dispositif of the

museum looks back at us. The way the Western tradition uses stone to symbolize its desire for eternity and, in the form of carvings, to document its understanding of mimetic representation is here turned on it's head. Against the understanding of mimetic representation that immortalizes the transience of life, here we have the mimicry of such mimesis presented as a natural, rather than a cultural, process, short-circuiting the entire scenery of the opposition. At stake here is also the metapsychology of the gaze and its mystification from religious art to minimalism, the very meaning of what it means for a work of art to "look back at us." And last but not least, it is possible to read into this work and its mockery-staging of natural mimesis and "primitive animation" a model for an alternative understanding of the subject-object dichotomy; what is staged here is not objects subjectified or subjects objectified, but nothing other than a short-circuiting of different temporalities – the short life and unstable condition of matter such as "bread" and the extremely long process of things-turning-to-stone. What remains, however, are not oppositions but rather a mimetic continuum in which "subject" and "object," "life," and "non-life" have become relative extremes – every "accident," as other works by Jimmie Durham frequently foreground, brings the precarious balance of subjects and objects, mobiles and immobiles, out of joint. The next work continues this line of thought, as it looks at one of the registers through which the boundary between persons and things is brought about and negotiated.

The archival installation *Assembly: Animism* (2011) by Agency displays a selection of its vast collection of court cases in which legal disputes around copyright, authorship, creativity, and agency turn into forums that negotiate the very boundary between humans and objects: a snapshot of just how the border between "nature" and "culture" is drawn by one of the clusters of disciplinary institutions, the judiciary, as inherently fragile claims on "authorship" and "creativity" are granted or denied.

IV.

There are usually two additional things I mention when presenting the next part of the exhibition. One concerns the Western history of the concept of the "soul." It was only in medieval scholastic theology that the soul was imagined as something firmly situated in the interior of a subject, and hence something that could be *owned*. Descartes later declared the soul to be substance – although a substance without extension, whose precarious status needed to be compensated for by a relative increase in

transcendent stability. Aided by what Foucault described as "technologies of the self," a new home – the inner self – was given to what had previously been exiled from exteriority. Following Christian theology, the soul-as-substance is given to individuals. The body is the container that receives a transcendental soul at the beginning of life. The soul is then the stage of a lifelong drama shaped by the forces of good and evil.

The Western tradition of theological and philosophical "soul-design" conceived of the soul as something that is owned by a subject, as its essence, and is enclosed within its interior. No wonder that when anatomists opened the body to look for the soul, they did not find it. What if the soul is not a substance, not a "thing," but a function (not unlike the "zero" in mathematics)? What if "soul" (*anima* in Latin) is another name for the very medium that makes reciprocal exchange possible, for what happens in the very in-between, the event of communication? Would that not also change the very meaning of what it means to animate?

When people ask me at this stage to explain once more what this exhibition is about, I answer that it is about two things: firstly, the fact that all of us are perfectly capable of distinguishing an animated conversation from a non-animated one, and yet few of us are able to explain this difference in any precise or meaningful way. As crucial as this difference is to our everyday lives, it constitutes a blind spot in our conscious knowledge, and hence of what we are able to openly negotiate. Secondly, I also answer that this exhibition is not about answering the question of whether some "thing" *possesses* an anima, subjectivity, or life as a property or quality, but about the silence of our classification systems regarding the event of cross-animations and reciprocal, dialogical relations, and above all, about what it means for us to be animated, to be acted upon, or to be *mediums* of our environments and milieus. In my own work on the subject, I have always been more interested in this dimension of mediality and passivity – how to articulate the designs that the world has on *us* – than in the question of, for instance, the agency or subjectivity of "things."

V.

The next part of the exhibition introduces the concept of animism historically. It begins with a vitrine-display of a number of key texts from 1871 to the 1990s. Animism as a term was coined by the anthropologist Edward B. Tylor in his seminal work *Primitive Culture* (1871), which gained him an academic chair in anthropology, the first position of its kind. Tylor aimed to

Installation view of "Animism", Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. Photo: Arwed Messmer.
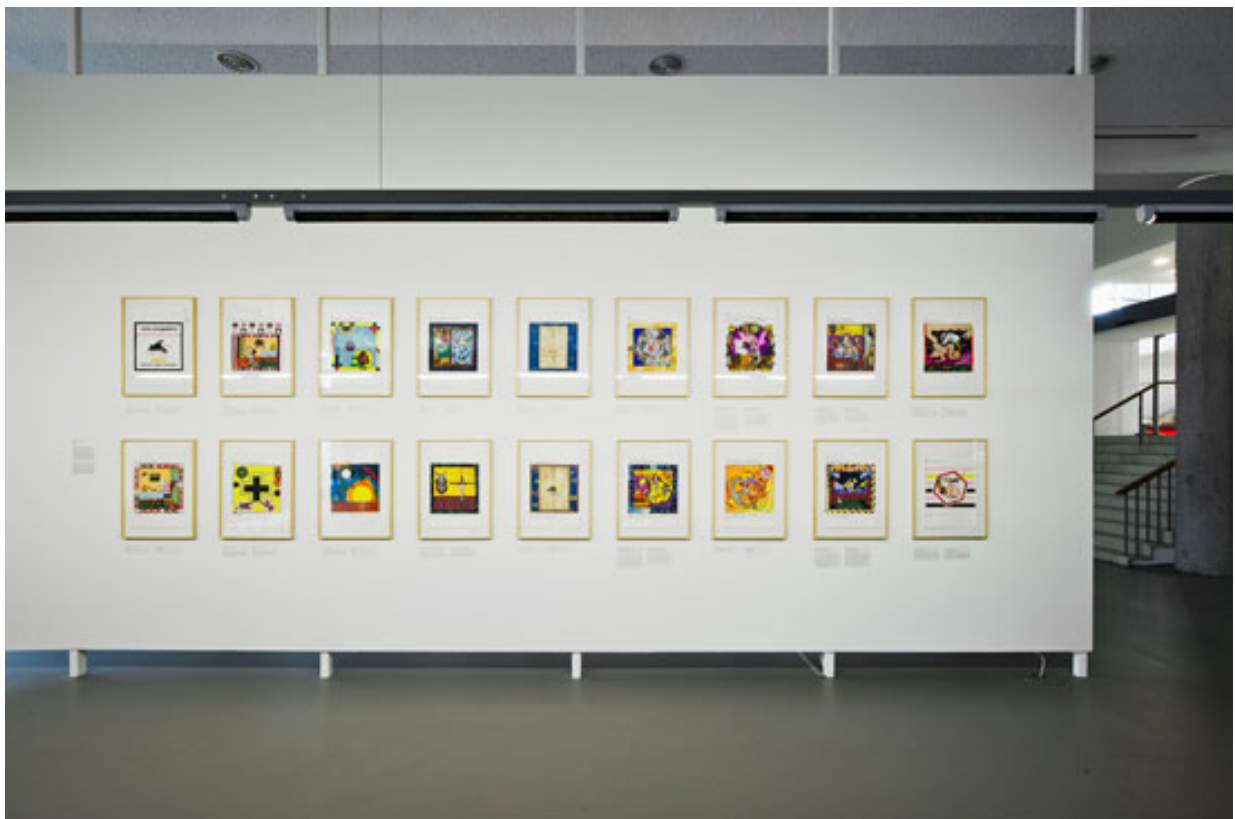
Installation view of Roee Rosen's *"Vladimir's Night" by Maxim Komar-Myshkin*, 2011/2012. Gouaches and text on paper.

articulate a theory of the origins of religion, and he found this origin in what was to him the primordial mistake of primitive people: the attribution of life and person-like qualities to objects in their environment.[1] Tylor's theory was built on the widespread assumption of the time that primitive people were incapable of assessing the real value and properties of material objects. Animism was explained by a primitive incapacity to distinguish between object and subject, reality and fiction, the inside and outside, which allegedly led primitive people to project human qualities onto objects. The concept was inscribed into an evolutionary scheme from the primitive to the civilized, in which a few civilizations had evolved, while the rest of the world's people, described by Tylor as "tribes very low in the scale of humanity," had remained animist, thus effectively constituting "relics" of an archaic past.

This evolutionary, anti-animistic scheme that placed the rational subject and the scientist at the top of the evolutionary ladder would soon be taken up by psychology on its own terms; psychology would go on to assert that every human passes through an animist stage in childhood, which is characterized by the projection of its own interior world onto the outside. Thus, next to Tylor's *Primitive Culture* are displayed two key texts by Sigmund Freud: *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *The Uncanny* (1924). It is in *Totem and Taboo* that Freud makes an extraordinary calculation – one that helps us a great deal in mapping the landscape of institutions and disciplines of knowledge that are the result of the modern dichotomies. Freud, building directly on Tylor's theory of animism, explains this "stage" as a form of narcissism by means of which consciousness is projected onto the external world, and ideal connections (as established in one's thinking) are mistaken for real ones – that is, a connection established in one's thought is assumed to exist in the outer world.

In his attempt to dissociate inner projections and outer reality, Freud, like Tylor, is an inheritor of the basic program of the Enlightenment, which in turn has been the secular-intellectual successor of the Christian war waged on "superstitions" and idolatry. In this process, outer reality comes to be defined in terms of an objectified nature – that is, as a nature uncontaminated by social representations, symbolizations, and projections. But if the holy task of modern knowledge was to calculate away from the outer world that which humans had previously projected onto it (thus initiating the Cartesian legacy), then where did the contents of such projections go?

The nineteenth century positivist mechanical world picture made no room for these projections – and hence they led a delirious, symptomatic, and anarchic life in the realm of the fictional, in the works of the Romantics, in the phenomena of the mediumistic and in the pathological. In *Totem and Taboo,* Freud explains that whatever had to be extracted from the proper exterior world (from nature and its laws) must now be given a home – the field of psychology. For what is the terrain and subject matter of psychology? It is everything that "primitive men" had projected outwards into the world, and that subsequently had to be "translated back into psychology." The "psyche" thus constitutes itself as the byproduct of the very categorical distinction made by rationalist science. It is the very field that administers whatever is left on the dubious subject-side when the proper calculations have been made. Freud's genuine contribution was that he actually assigned to those phenomena a territory where they could once again be recognized as an irreducible part of reality.

In the essay *The Uncanny* – his most distinct contribution to aesthetics – Freud comes close to suggesting that it is in the experience of the uncanny that the unconscious reveals its animistic and social, *collective* roots. Uncanny experiences are those that fracture the very border between self and world, between past and present, and between life and non-life. Freud finds two explanations for uncanny experiences, two ways of explaining *away* the collective, immanent dimension of an animism that has become the modern unconscious: they are either a matter of "reality-testing," insofar as they are vestiges of animistic beliefs from our ancient past that we have already successfully *surmounted*; or they are the return of something repressed – and since Freud's conception of the unconscious is not social, not collective, not historical, but confined to the private individual's family history, it *must* be something repressed from childhood experience, rather than the discontents of any given or historical "relational diagram" in which the possibility to speak back, and negotiate the situation as such, has been foreclosed.[2]

It is through the Freudian conception of the aesthetics of the uncanny, nevertheless, that we can grasp the degree to which this very border – on which our identity as "modern" depends – is a question of aesthetics, that is, of sensuous perception, and that it is in aesthetics that this border is frequently negotiated and transgressed. But is there not a similar "agreement" around the designation of something as "aesthetic"? Is the aesthetic not a kind of "safety valve," as Fredric Jameson

suggested, "a kind of sandbox to which one consigns all those vague things … under the heading of the irrational … [where] they can be monitored and, in case of need, controlled"?[3] And is "art" in this landscape of modern territorial and disciplinary demarcations and border-regimes not yet another safe enclosure, such that Freud can claim in *Totem and Taboo* that it is in art – and in art alone – that modern civilization has reserved a place where animism is allowed to survive? And what is the price paid for this right to remain animist, if not that art has no claims to make on reality?

The autonomy of modern art was achieved at the price of becoming fictional, which meant it had to become politically inconsequential, a merely subjective expression. Of course, this very contract that lies at the foundation of what we call "art" today, this magic circle that unhinged art from the collectivity of life and rendered it fictional, was like the red rag in the eyes of the bull called the avant-garde. Wave after wave of avant-garde artists attacked this shameful line that was drawn around art. They wanted to bring art back into life, back into politics, back into practice, often drawing up their own obscure horizons of animistic utopias. Or they had arranged themselves within the magic circle drawn around art as a preserve for animistic relations, and fashioned that preserve not as a realm of autonomy, but of superior sovereignty, a realm in which the very contradictions and alienations of modernity could be overcome.

But what happens with animistic relations when they cannot be contained by the subject through repression or through reality-testing, and when they cannot be successfully relegated to the field of aesthetics or art? In this case, the division of labor among the designated territories always proved to be a merciless regime, for the only categories left were those of "the primitive" and of psychopathology. And it is indeed possible to read all the mental disorders known to Freud as disorganizations of the very boundary between inside and outside, to which psychology owes its very existence, the very boundary whose assumed absence earned itself the name "animism."

Tylor and his contemporaries had successfully exported this animism – and the neglected social dimension of relationality for which it stands – to the spatio-temporal outside of an imaginary archaic past whose remnants could be found among contemporary primitives, the common name for non-modern irrational societies that found themselves under the rationale of colonial subjugation. Freud's invention of the unconscious, too, is an export operation of this kind, but it is the paradoxical export into an inside.

But we may wonder today how successful those export-operations actually were. Would it be going too far to speculate that they instead announced the coming impossibility of an export that was once far more operational? For one cannot but wonder at the importance of the vague term "projection" in both anthropological and psychological theories. "Projection" indeed is a term that ultimately leads into a cabinet of mirror effects. Recent anthropological critics have noted that it was in fact those very theoreticians who accused primitives, children, and the insane of projection who were guilty of the very process they attempted to debunk. The theory of animism with respect to non-modern societies is the product of those theoreticians projecting their notion of objective reality and their sense of self onto the people they accused of reading their own selves into others and the environment.[4] But was not the period of European colonial expansion guilty of precisely such narcissism and ignorance? Did it not consist of the successful export of violence to the colonial frontier, where Western scientists imputed to others the very savagery they themselves enacted?

VI.
Next to the vitrine with the excerpts from Tylor and Freud's texts there is a series of collages by Leon Ferrari called *L'Osservatore Romano* (2001–2007). The collages are made of articles – mostly their cover pages – from the Vatican's newspaper of the same name that address issues of Christian morality in today's world. On top of these articles, Ferrari brings together images of the torment of the damned from the canon of Christian iconography with scenes of the ecclesiastical torture of heretics. These images from the Western imagination of evil and damnation, of violence, transformation, and metamorphosis, become depictions of what was systematically destroyed by the reality of terror lurking beneath the surface of Western reason; images of an economy of terror and of a world that comes into being through the destruction of bodies and cultures – from the Inquisition and colonial South America to recent military dictatorships and Abu Ghraib. These collages are meditations on what anthropologist Michael Taussig has called "one of the great unwritten histories of imperialism" – the "blending" of the "great signifiers of death and the underworld" (in the case of South America, of Spanish-Christian, African, and indigenous New World origin) in the formation of the "culture of conquest."[5] But prior to such "blending," do these collages not point to the one-to-one export of an imaginary of negativity, a translation of the iconography of evil

from Europe into a colonial reality?

Compared to the anthropological theory of animism – which certainly also served to legitimize what Leon Ferrari calls "European barbarity" – was the prior export of images of evil by means of which indigenous people around the world could be assimilated to the picture of the idolater and the Anti-Christ not a far more mobilizing, far more numbing, operation? For the anthropological theory of animism put forward by Tylor already contained a grain of that very recognition whose denial was indispensable for the colonial project in its genocidal continuity, where it was not a question of where to draw boundaries around the soul, but a question of who possessed a soul and could thus be regarded as human. Tylor's book, in this respect, was perhaps more a failed attempt to retrospectively rationalize and legitimize capitalism and the use of religious warfare – an attempt, as I will argue later, that set in motion an unstoppable and ongoing process concerning modernity's ontological fundaments. Rather than exporting animism, Tylor opened the door to uncovering the modern export mechanism, and all attempts to contain that opening later could only do so by covering up the issue of animism.

In his psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious, Freud came close to opening this door entirely, by conceiving of the unconscious not as a private, individual affair, but as an "extension of animism." When he states that "the psychoanalytic assumption of the unconscious ... appears to us a further development of that primitive animism which caused our own consciousness to be reflected in all around us," one could wonder whether he is not suggesting that psychoanalysis – perhaps the very process of therapy, including those mediumistic phenomena like transference – could be seen as re-instituting animistic relations between the subject, the foundational encounter with otherness, and the world. However, this was not the path that Freudian psychoanalysis would pursue. It was the Freudo-Marxist tradition in critical theory that attempted to open up the unconscious to the dimension of the social, conflating it with the entire realm of production, and it was in this context that aesthetics was interrogated as the very bridge between psyche and society.

In the vitrine next to Tylor and Freud there lies a page from the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer – a book in which animism figures most prominently as a decisive and ultimately ambiguous hinge. Adorno and Horkheimer, however, in arguing that the Enlightenment must come to terms with its own "regressive element," stay firmly within the modern matrix, where that which is repressed is not sensuous mimesis – and hence animism – for the sake of bringing to light the sovereignty of modern thought, but the constitutive role of terror in colonial modernity. And like Adorno and Horkheimer, their successors in the Freudo-Marxist tradition have failed to theorize animism in relation to the modern colonial narrative. This is all the more surprising given the key role it plays in their critique of "alienation," "reification," and the "uncanny animation" of the commodity in the capitalist world – which are all terms that in the last instance derive their meaning from a hidden horizon and referent.

VII.

The next work in the exhibition is a film that documents the colonization of what is today Indonesia. Vincent Monnikendam's *Mother Dao, the Turtlelike* (1995) is the outcome of six years of work with more than 200 hours of found footage shot from 1912 to 1933 in what was then the Dutch Indies. That practices upholding inherently social relations with the natural environment were always a crucial feature of the cultures of the Indonesian archipelago is not the main reason for the inclusion of this film, which is otherwise the only "ethnographic footage" in the exhibition. (It is worth noting that the Indonesian government's attempt in 2006 to recognize "animism" as an official religion alongside Islam failed due to the resistance of Muslim clerics.) *Mother Dao* is rather a story – a myth-of-origin – about de-animation by the coming-into-being of the colonial world.

The film, which takes viewers through Indonesia under the colonial regime, shows images that were originally shot to promote colonialism to Dutch audiences. However, Monnikendam's montage is an attempted reversal of the relations of power thus inscribed into and by the camera gaze. It is not merely the montage that tells a story different from what public opinion in Europe then predominantly thought about the colonial enterprise; it is equally the omission of the usual commentary, and a different narrative framing, through which these images begin to speak a different language. For Monnikendam uses a creation myth from one of the islands of West Sumatra to frame his counter-epic. The myth tells of the coming-into-being of the world through Mother Dao, who is called "the Turtlelike" because the shell of a turtle resembles the curved horizon. And the soundtrack adds to this reinscription of the images; it is interlaced with poems and songs from Bahasa Indonesia, which tell of the suffering of workers and peasants, of famines and deaths by smallpox, of betrayal, deceit, and profit-making, of the destruction of language, of the falling silent of the world under the burden of

the terror of "primitive accumulation," of capitalist exploitation, and of colonial administration, adding up to a rather different version of the modern epic of the "disenchantment" of the world.
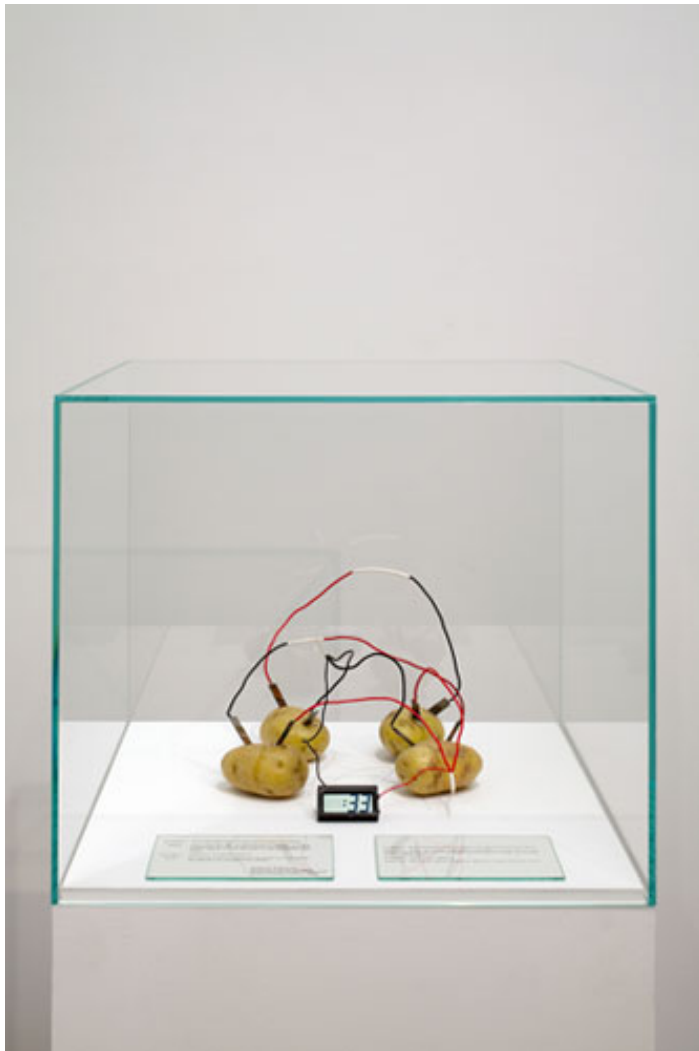
Victor Grippo, *Tiempo, 2da. versión,* 1991. Potatoes, zinc and copper electrodes, electric wire, digital clock, painted wooden base, glass vitrine and text.

The exhibition continues with another vitrine in classical museum-design. This work too, like the one by Jimmie Durham that it mirrors, is a mediation on matter and time – and energy. Victor Grippo's *Tiempo* (1991) consists of a digital clock that gets its energy from a battery consisting of four potatoes and a combination of copper and zinc. During the exhibition, as the time on the clock continues to run, the potatoes gradually decompose and regerminate. But not only are these potatoes in conversation with Durham's stone regarding different aggregate conditions of matter and energy. They also mark the passage, within the logic of this exhibition, from the concept of an anonymous animating force as found in the once enormously popular and vague anthropological concept of *mana*, to

its modern equivalent: electricity.

For what animated the modern age, aside from the free flow of capital was the electrical current. And electricity has an undeniable relationship to the phantasmagoric image-culture of the modern age and the rise of technological media. Here are vitrines that display illustrations of "galvanized corpses" coming back to life, posters from Frankenstein movies, an advertisement for the 1891 Chicago World Fair and its "Hall of Electricity," a stereoscope and several short movies by the infamous inventor Thomas A. Edison, including *Execution of Czolgosz, with panorama of Auburn Prison* (1901) showing the reenacted execution of Leon Czolgosz, an anarchist who attempted to assassinate US president William McKinley in 1901. Made by the camera that was invented by Edison's company, this reenacted execution was meant to promote yet another of its inventions, the electric chair. Within the logic of the exhibition, the electrocution in the prison is an instant of "objectification" But as Avery Gordon suggests in her text written for the exhibition catalogue, it was above all an example of electricity in the service of the restoration of a social order momentarily disrupted by the killing of the President of Progress, Industry, and Empire by a self-proclaimed anarchist ... By the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, Mary Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein, grievously troubled over his usurpation of the divine powers of creation, has been replaced by Edison's Tower of Light, blinding in its scientific harnessing of what Henry Adams called electricity's "occult mechanism" to capitalist expansion and social order. Electricity was a key technological and symbolic medium to modernity's presumptive progress. Cinema played an important role in justifying and normalizing this way of life.[6]

There is another Edison film on display, with potential reverberations that exceed all that can be said here: the *Sioux Ghost Dance.* Shot in 1894, the year that the Kinetoscope first made a massive profit for Thomas Edison's company, the movie shows a group of American Indians performing the "Ghost Dance" in "Buffalo" Bill Cody's infamous Wild West Show. The show was a theatrical, carnivalesque dramatization of the American frontier, mystifying as heroic struggle the war of white settlers against the inhabitants of the continent.

The Ghost Dance originated in the 1860s as a revitalization movement of Native American resistance. In 1889, the Paiute prophet Wovoka had a messianic vision of the restoration of Indian culture, the return of the murdered ancestors, and a future world without the whites. This peaceful transformation was to be brought about by spiritual renewal, by abstaining from

fighting hopeless battles, and by practicing the Ghost Dance. The movement spread quickly across North America, and the US Bureau of Indian Affairs banned the dance. Edison's movie was shot only four years after the Wounded Knee Massacre of December 1890, in which the 7th Cavalry of the US Army murdered some three hundred Lakota Sioux men, women, and children, which ended the Indian Wars and buried Wovoka's vision of an Indian renaissance. The massacre happened after Chief Sitting Bull, an eminent leader of the resistance supporting the Ghost Dance, was shot dead during an attempt to take him captive. Sioux leader Big Foot surrendered shortly thereafter. His followers were brutally massacred during the subsequent disarming, after a medicine man began practicing the Ghost Dance.

The "dancer" on the celluloid of this motion picture is the ghost of genocide, the ghost lurking behind the triumph of white European conquest that turned the continent into a permanent colony. In the decades preceding 1890, largely in the shadow of the Civil War, this history culminated in the Indian Wars and the creation of the reservation system that still exists today. But the "Ghost Dance" here has yet another meaning that exceeds its particular

context. It does not only stand for the genocidal continuity of colonial modernity, but also for the continuity of repressing the mimetic faculty, and hence of animism-as-social-practice. For it is these kinds of "ecstatic rituals" – circular dances being emblematic of them – which stand for a tradition of collective mimesis that had been exiled from Europe in early modernity[7] – and which only shortly afterwards, European colonists, missionaries, and travellers alike would encounter around the globe.

Mirroring this "Ghost Dance" are examples of chronophotography and the "graphic method" by infamous physiologist Etienne Jules-Marey. These "inscriptions of life" were not only a defining source of modernist iconography, since many artists saw in them an expression of the dissolution of the unity of time and space. As inscriptions of the essence of life – motion – they also turned into notations and *scripts* through which new choreographies of movement could be planned and controlled. Chronophotography was not merely a decisive step towards the animation of images. It was equally the basis for the animation of the Taylorist factory regime.

Ken Jacobs's video *Capitalism: Slavery* (2006) overlays the technique of animating

Installation view of Vincent Monnikendam's video *Mother Dao, the Turtlelike (Moeder Dao, de schildpadgelijkende)* and Al Clah's film *Intrepid Shadows*, 1966/69, from the series "Navajo Film Themselves." Photo: Arwed Messmer.

pictures with the monotonous, standardized movements of plantation and factory work. Ken Jacobs is a filmmaker whose work systematically explores the intersections between the human sensorium and technologies. He is perhaps best characterized as an archaeologist of media, and not only because he works extensively with found footage and archival materials. His works are, in their very form, meditations on and revisitations of those "revolutions" of which we have no explicit memory, since they have become embedded in the ways we now sensuously perceive the world: the encounter with modern technologies, with machinery and media, and the profound impact they have on the coordinates of time and space and on human experience.

Capitalism: Slavery (2006) is based on a stereographic image of labor on a cotton plantation. The stereographic image is animated digitally by alternating between two images, as if to reproduce the standardized monotonous gesture of the slave laborers, while the stroboscopic flickering of the video draws us into its image space. In the backdrop of the image, we see the white overseer on horseback looking in our direction, his controlling gaze uncannily communicating with the disembodied camera lens, both producing and controlling space. Animation here is flipped on its head and becomes a form of evocation, turning the spectral presence of a foundational scene of capitalist modernity into an innervating experience, a ritual of actualized remembrance, an unearthing of the original encounter, an archaeology of how the link between sensorium and technology brings into being new worlds and rewrites both "nature" and "humanity." Jacobs thus adds to our understanding of media the other, frequently forgotten half: the innervation where body and mind act as a medium, the way we are "hypnotized," mesmerized, affected, and moved, the way technologies channel desires and keep us under their spell. His forays into the history of media explore the link between the libidinal and production, between desire and capitalist modernity, between the factory and image technologies, between rationalization and standardization, mobility and immobility.

VIII.

Next in the exhibition there is a larger section devoted to animation and what Marina Warner has termed the "logic of the imaginary" (a "logic" that must by all means be taken out of the ghetto of the "merely imaginary" to become a dialectic picture of actual history). A key figure in this section is Sergei Eisenstein, although nothing of his own work is on display here save an excerpt from his textual analysis of the works of Walt Disney. Eisenstein, within the script of this

exhibition, holds the place of the paradigmatic "modernist" artist for whom animism appeared to become an issue at the horizon of his aesthetic practice and political project. Eisenstein appears in this exhibition rather than Picasso, Braque, Gauguin, or Kandinsky because in his eyes the medium of cinema was the "synthesis of all art of the time," and because he was a paradigmatic "researcher-artist" with an extensive output of theoretical work, much of which takes up the question of animism.

In Eisenstein's work the question of animism appears in the form of the *Grundproblem*, the basic problem of the relation between rational thought and sensuous thought that he believed structures all works of art. Eisenstein characterized Disney's animations as an embodiment of animism through "formal ecstasy," as a revolt against "metaphysical inertness" – but a revolt that is merely "a sweet drop of relief," a revolution that "lacks consequence."[8] Is this – as Theodor Adorno would claim in a somewhat charged debate with Walter Benjamin – because Disney's aesthetics of all-encompassing metamorphosis fuels alienation by reconciling it with the order that it aesthetically negates? And is not the very critique of "regression" itself bound, as Isabelle Stengers notes in her text accompanying the exhibition, to the primitivist notion of "stages" within a "triumphalist and thoroughly anti-Darwinian evolutionary story of progress?

On view next to this vitrine is *The Skeleton Dance* (1929), the first episode of the Silly Symphonies series produced by the Walt Disney studio. This animated short represents the essence of the art of cinematic animation perhaps more than any other work. It can be regarded as an exemplary articulation of the very laws of the genre. In *Skeleton Dance*, Disney reworked the ancient motifs of the danse macabre and the Ghost hour, thus making the crossing of the border between life and death his point of departure. *Skeleton Dance* celebrates the victory of life over death, in a carnivalesque spectacle that may be likened to the infamous Mexican celebrations of the Day of the Dead. But here, what is being celebrated is the literal victory of the animated drawing over the static picture that fixes life and movement in a standstill – the victory of metamorphosis over stable form.

The trope of the Ghost hour furthermore suggests that Disney alludes to the animistic quality of animation as the return of the repressed, as embodied in gothic imagery and the aesthetics of the uncanny. Skeleton Dance unfolds in the contrast between the plasmatic, metamorphic line and the rigidity of the skeleton – and this very contrast is not merely the content

Candida Höfer, *Ethnologisches Museum Berlin III*, 2003. Copyright of the artist Candida Höfer, Köln, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2012.

of the work but crucially also the very principle of its composition: Skeleton Dance is choreographed to the music (composed by Carl Stalling, presumably based on Edvard Grieg's *March of the Trolls* and Camille Saint-Saëns's *Danse Macabre*), and its basic principle is that each bone is equated with a musical note – a principle perhaps best expressed in the scene where one of the skeletons is turned into a xylophone by another. Along with the principles of surprise (everything is always more alive than one thinks) and of the exaggeration of cause and effect, Skeleton Dance articulates a fundamental "law" of the fictive animated universe: its many voices must be integrated into one single "song" or tune along a musical "carcass," the source of the "enchantment" on which the *effect* of animation relies. But the effect is only one side of the coin of the actual animation that takes place here, in the process of our becoming-immersed, "attracted" and affected by the animation, a process that is a mental and corporeal event of mediality on the cerebral and cellular level.
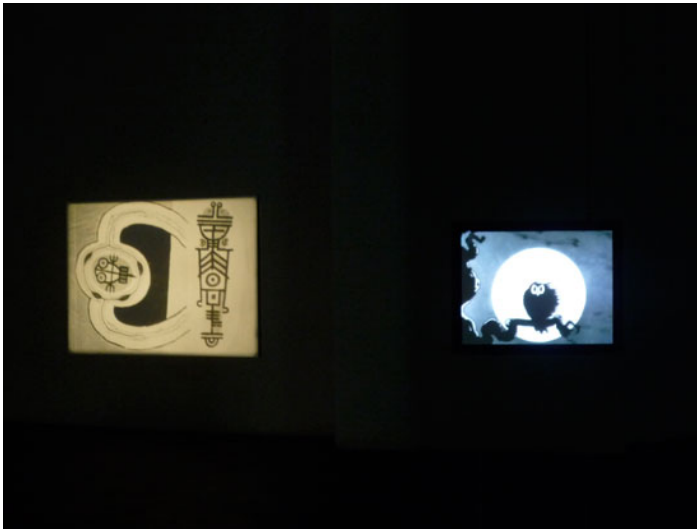
Installation view of Len Lye's film, *Tusalava*, 1929, and Walt Disney, *The Skeleton Dance*, 1929, from the series "Silly Symphonies." Photo: Arwed Messmer.

Disney's film is juxtaposed with another work from the same year. Len Lye's film *Tusalava*, an animation made of five thousand single drawings, is, like *Skeleton Dance*, a study in morphology. It demonstrates that animated film always contains a contagious exchange of sensorial becomings on the "pre-logical" level, as Lye himself would characterize it. (In this regard Lye was a typical primitivist.) The mutating cellular shapes in the film slowly give rise to an enigmatic protoplasmatic scenario from which more distinct shapes emerge, resembling the penetration of a body by a virus, with this body being reminiscent of "totemic"

imagery. Influenced by aboriginal art, *Tusalava* is indeed a primitivist work of sorts, while expressing the fundamental animistic qualities of its medium through its imagery.

The works that follow this constellation further elaborate on the question of figuration, morphology, and sensuous-mimetic exchange. The first series of works deal with the destabilization of social morphologies. There is Hans Richter's film *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (1927), a lesson, so to speak, about the *symmetrical* constitution of the social order and the order of things, as the anarchic revolt of things disrupts, in the same stroke, all social hierarchies. There is a series of paintings, conceived as an album, made by Roee Rosen under a pseudonym, which depict – in the visual language of Russian Constructivism, political caricature, and Soviet children books – a revolt of things against Vladimir Putin in his house outside of Moscow – a work in which the derangement of the "order of things" is folded onto the psychopathological conditions of individual psychosis just as much as on the uncanny histories of power. These works are juxtaposed with Marcel Broodthaers's slide show *Caricatures – Grandville* (1968). In the slide show, Marcel Broodthaers uses images from J. J. Grandville's book *Un Autre Monde* (1844), along with nineteenth-century caricatures and illustrations by artists such as Honoré Daumier, including scenes – proclaiming "Liberté" – from the French Revolution.

Broodthaers juxtaposes these images with newspaper photographs of the student revolts of May 1968. *Un Autre Monde* is among the most powerful and bizarre of Grandville's works: the collective phantasmagoria here becomes the objective property of things. This phantasmagoria is exhibited formally, by continually blurring the boundaries and upsetting the orderly hierarchies between people, animals, and things. Broodthaers described Grandville's book as a "satiric phantasmagoria that one of these days will come into being." "The romanticism of the nineteenth century already contains this fantasy that we now confuse with scientific reality," wrote Broodthaers in an article about the Atomium, the landmark building from the 1958 Brussels World's Fair and the symbol of perhaps the last of the world expositions that worshipped the nineteenth-century dream of techno-scientific progress – fashioning itself in the romantic image of universalism enveloped in a mythological cloud of imperial grandeur.[9] In this slide show, Broodthaers takes Grandville's images literally, by using Grandville's "types," "characters," and "figures" like "text." He thus reveals the fundamental ambivalence in the

phantasmagoric objectification achieved by the caricatures as they "exhibit" a collective dream-image of an epoch through, for example, masking humans as animals and thus unmasking human society as "natural." At the same time, this phantasmagoria is also a symptomatic, uncanny depiction of the objectification of both nature and human society in the world of modern science and capitalism. The relation between text and image is a key theme in Broodthaers's work – the dissolving of text into image, and the becoming-text of images. Metaphoric figuration occupies the unstable space between image and text, the literal and the visual. One need only think of Broodthaers's extensive use of the abbreviation "*fig*." for "figure," and the way it is used in his fictional museums to systematically subvert taxonomic orders of knowledge. Given the centrality of figuration, one could speculate about whether Broodthaers's interest in Grandville lay in the latter's use of the "animal metaphor."

The animal-as-metaphor is a figuration of anima – understood as states of consciousness and modes of being turned into images. And such metaphoric figuration, it has been suggested, is at the root of language. As John Berger claims, language is made of "fossilized" images, tropes, and metaphors: "The first subject matter for painting was animal ... It is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal."[10] Berger suggests that Grandville's work is a prophetic, uncanny depiction of a grand transformation in our relation to animals, leading to their imprisonment by society and, ultimately, to their disappearance. The modern phantasmagoric dream space invoked by Broodthaers *qua* Grandville may thus well be an image of disappearance and catastrophe, announcing a new subjugation of both "nature" and "humanity." For Walter Benjamin, the "secret theme" of Grandville's art was the "enthronement of the commodity." Benjamin holds that the cynical and utopian element of Grandville corresponds with the commodity fetish, which demands to be worshipped by fashion: "Grandville extended the sway of fashion over the objects of daily use as much as over the cosmos. In pursuing it to its extremes, he revealed its nature. It stands in opposition to the organic. It prostitutes the living body to the inorganic world."[11] It's worth nothing that Grandville's work was a major inspiration for Walt Disney. However, Broodthaers inserts into the slide show some images of May 1968 in Paris, thus making us wonder who (or what) is in fact the subject of the dream or phantasmagoria enacted here.

The film *The Love Life of the Octopus* (1965) by pioneering filmmaker Jean Painlevé is both a

document of ethology and a surrealist film. It portrays the titular octopus as a personification, and in so doing, it destabilizes presumptions about "nature," including those essentialist tendencies found in some of the previous works, which like to transform the mimetic exchange of self and world into a scientific method. In Painlevé's film, the dreadful allegation of anthropomorphism is systematically pushed to its tipping point, enabling the recognition of the otherness (and striking personality) of the octopus, and therefore also breaking open the narrow confines of anthropomorphism. The work of subjectification, Painlevé demonstrates, does not consist of "projection" but rather of knowing-through-engagement, of making contact with difference. As a movie, furthermore, this work is a formidable introduction to the very morphology of becoming that characterizes animated film, and the more-than-aesthetic power derived from conflating appearances with essences. Didier Demorcy's slide show *Vital Phantasy* (2010) subsequently takes us on a journey through evolutionary morphology and the "adventure" of life on earth, traversing the boundaries of species and ultimately pointing to play as a form of communicative exchange.

Installation view of *Animism*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. Photo: Arwed Messmer.

IX.

The following works delve deeper into the realm of mimetic and morphological figuration, as well as the interconnected dissolution of boundaries, difference, and form. The film *Self-Obliteration* (1968) documents a happening created by Yayoi Kusama wherein bodies commune ecstatically with nature and one another. The happening acts out the very dissemination of the self that is characteristic of Kusama's work – a theatrical mimicry, a folding out of interiority to become exterior, devouring the environment by total immersion in it and vice versa. There is a

distinctively ecstatic quality to her work, a systematic transgression of the boundary between body and environment, between mind and physical space. Her destabilization of the seemingly fixed border between psychological "inside" and social, physical "outside" is a way of assuming autonomy precisely by abandoning it – the subject reacts to invasion by way of a countergesture of abandoning its own border, by folding the inside out, collectivizing and spatializing individuality, culminating in installations where self and environment interpenetrate.

Kusama has suffered from hallucinations since early childhood, and likens these hallucinations to a sort of "cannibalizing" of the self by the outside. Her "theatrical dissemination" can thus be regarded as a "countercannibalism" acting against, by way of countermimicry, the pathologization of mental disorder – the latter consisting precisely of an assumed "disturbance" of the "given" (conformist) boundary between self and world. Then there is a slideshow by Ana Mendieta entitled *Alma Silueta en Fuego* (*Silueta de Cenizas)* (1975) in which we see the artist's silhouette impressed into the ground, inscribing herself as a negative into nature. Mendieta frames her explorations of body and self and its relation to earth explicitly as a search for the "bonds that unite her with the universe," while alluding to ritual practices of West African, Caribbean, and Cuban provenance. In their time – the 1970s – these works subverted and redefined the accepted frame of how art was conceived. Together with several other artists, Kusama and Mendieta worked against the commodification of art and began to establish an understanding in which the work is conceived less as a product of an artist-subject than as a process that creates the subject, or oscillates between making and unmaking subjects and objects alike. Luis Jacob's work *Towards a Theory of Impressionist and Expressionist Spectatorship* (2002) shows the interaction of children in whole-body suits with several Henry Moore sculptures – a strange sort of theater of mimetic cross-animation, the creation and conflation of difference. In most of these works, animation happens in the shadows and while the outright transgression of taxonomic boundaries happens in the revolt against positivist objectification and fixation in the rationalist order of knowledge, or in the queer subversion of the power of musealization.

In Natascha Sadr Haghighian's installation *Empire of the Senseless II* (2006), we enter into such a classification machine ourselves. This double projection, in which two images are projected onto each other so that they overlap

completely, is installed in such a way that the visitor must step into the projection and cast his or her own shadow onto the image. One of the overlapping images is a blue background, such as that projected by default if no signal is available to a projector. In the middle of this is projected the second overlapping image, a computer-generated succession of text. The blue background against which we cast our black shadow thus acts as a "blue screen" – a technology for dissociating figure from ground, scene from context, since the blue can later be replaced with any "background" in the editing room.

The projected text in Haghighian's installation is taken from the novel *Empire of the Senseless* by American experimental and feminist writer Kathy Acker. Acker's novel, like her other work, takes the conventionalized modes of representing gender, class, sexuality, and individual psychology in the "empire" of the bourgeois white male and pushes them to the point of linguistic implosion. The novel is a Franz Fanon- and Wilhelm Reich-inspired cyberfiction situated in revolution-shaken Paris. It is a monstrously luminous vision of the turbulent return of the repressed – the id, the female, the black, the "Third World," and the outcast. Haghighian's installation takes all the words used to address and interpellate people in the novel and makes out of them what can be called a "border machine" of the representational field. Only as we enter into the projection do the names – previously indecipherable due to the overlap – become readable: one on our back, and the other in front of us. It is our presence, physically, as an empty shadow profile and as what is named, that mounts and upholds the field of knowledge and representation – the very order and border of society. But this installation creates not only the experience of being "installed," immobilized, subjected, and framed within this order. It also evokes – by means of both the changing names and the playful uncanniness of the shadow – the aesthetic, figurative possibility of all kinds of "crossing."

X.

"Art fights reification by making the petrified world speak, sing, perhaps dance," said Herbert Marcuse, who was a major inspiration for the countercultural movements of the 1960s.[12] It is not only in works like Ana Mendieta's slide show that we can sense the presence of animism not as a negative but as a positive horizon – the beyond of an immobilized order and an outside where something lost can allegedly be retrieved. Joachim Koester's film *My Frontier is an Endless Wall of Points* (2007), an animated short created from drawings made by Henri Michaux under the

influence of mescaline, equally addresses this horizon. However, it conflates this imaginary with structural film, thus pointing, simultaneously, at a growing divide between the representable and non-representable, symbolic structure and imagination. In so doing, Koester displaces some of Michaux's key concerns.

The exhibition also presents a film made by Michaux with Eric Duvivier called *Images du monde visionnaire* (1963). Commissioned by the pharmaceutical corporation Sandoz, where Albert Hoffmann synthesized LSD in 1938, the film was meant to portray the effects of acid. In this aim it must ultimately be regarded as a curious failure. Walon Green's film *The Secret Life of Plants* (1979) was far more successful in a somewhat related attempt. This film is a document par excellence of a then-popular form of "rediscovering" animism as the alterity of a faulty modernity, drawing on the romantic and primitivist traditions, bridging New Age spirituality and science. What is striking about the film is not only its use of the language of both scientific and spiritualist universalism, but also the contrast between the supposed immediacy of an animated cosmos and the scientific instruments and laboratory technology that are used to gain access, to "translate" and recognize what then appears as the genuine utterances of plants.

Indeed, the film's narration and commentary ignore the role of this technology entirely, even though it acts as the bridge through which we enter the supposedly newly discovered animate universe. This somewhat schizophrenic stance toward technology is symptomatic of the romantic imaginary and its mystification of "nature" as an unmediated and technology-free "authentic" realm, to which humans could "return" to overcome their alienation caused by modern civilization. So much for antimodern romanticism and the primitivist stance: it is precisely because the mediating technologies of both non-modern cultures and modernity remain deeply un-understood that "animism" can become the horizon of an imagined immediate, authentic oneness with "nature." This "economy" or "logic" of the imaginary employs animism as an alterity of modernity in ways that must therefore remain under the spell of the modern boundary regime – a negation that falls prey to affirming, in the last instance, what it negates, reproducing its mythology on a higher plane rather then shifting the grounds.

Daria Martin's film *Soft Materials* (2004) intervenes in and displaces this schizophrenic stance toward technology, as she upends the technophobic imaginary that serves as an inexhaustible resource for so many products of

popular culture. *Soft Materials* is the document of an encounter between human bodies and decisively non-anthropomorphic machines, showing a curious, sensuous interaction between people and robots shot in a well-known artificial-intelligence laboratory.

What is un-made here, among other things, is the *categorical* division between the mechanic and the organic – we are indeed looking at a rather different "frontier" of the human/non-human assemblage. *Assemblages* (2010) is a multiscreen installation and research project by Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato. It follows the intellectual trajectory of Félix Guattari, philosopher, activist, collaborator of Gilles Deleuze, and institutional psychotherapist. It brings together the two strands that structure this exhibition: the relations between self and world and between humans and nature. In *Assemblages*, what is still a "border" that needs to be bridged and transgressed in documents such as Walon Green's film is transformed into a psychogeography of polysemic, transindividual "enunciations" of partial subjectivities, described by the notion of the "machinic assemblage." Toward the end of his life, Guattari investigated animist societies in his attempts to overcome the Western paradigm of subjectivity and further articulate this notion of the assemblage. The work, drawing on archival material and discussions as well as newly produced material, follows Guattari to the Clinique de La Borde in France, which sought to practice "institutional psychotherapy," a different form of psychiatry in which the patient/agent vector of the institution is reversed. The work follows Guattari's interest in animism, which was mainly sparked by his engagement with colleagues in Japan and Brazil. The materials produced in those countries inscribed the anti-institutional psychiatric practice and the search for a different articulation of the concept of subjectivity into the historical geography of colonial modernity.

XI.

The Animism exhibition is conceived as a topography of the "middle ground" that opens up if we suspend the division between the "Great Divides" of modernity. The works of art in the exhibition are like "crossings," as they pass from one side of the abyss to the other, from object to subject, from one "subject position" to the next, or from one ontological register to another. They "map" what happens if the iron cages of subject and object are broken open. From there, the exhibition suggests, we can begin to understand what happened to this middle ground throughout modernity. Only if we cease to take the splits for granted can we grasp that it is in the logic of the

divide that modern power manifests itself. Through the generalization of the logic of the divide, this middle ground becomes something like the "included-excluded," an "outside" that is already enclosed and policed. It is where all the substantial political choices are made, even while their making is also what is obscured.

Through this kind of inquiry we can begin to imagine how the middle ground became what Michael Taussig has called the "epistemic murk," the "negative," "irrational" other of the positive enlightenment, and how it "fell," like Eve and Adam from their infamous paradise, into the abyss and there turned into the imaginary stage for the "archaic illusion," where moderns began to nourish their fantasies about the primitive other, mysterious communications, mimetic contagions, spirits, enchanted nature, and so forth. We can begin to imagine the very forms that deviations from the norm assumed – for instance, the creation of an autonomous zone of art, in which all those "crossings" between ontological registers could take place at the price of being neutralized in the ghetto of exceptionalism ever since called "art." And how the very same deviations, in the "real" world, would ultimately be rendered as pathologies. We can begin to imagine that what Freud called the "unconscious" really is that very murky, old middle ground that is now newly "discovered" – the product, not least, of the bracketing off from reality of all non-linguistic communication (for the empire of signification was for the moderns the only legitimate way to "cross" the abyss), and thus the displacement of affect, emotion, imagination, mimesis, and so forth into the transformative darkness of the "unconscious."

XII.
Today, "animism" is no longer what is repressed in order to install in its place a Cartesian regime of disciplinary identification and boundary policing. Rather than providing the justification for colonial subjugation, today it provides the justification for the biopolitical mobilization of the individual psyche. In his BBC series *The Century of the Self* (2002), Adam Curtis partially traces this development by investigating what Western politicians throughout the twentieth century have made of Freudian ideas. In the marriage of digital communications technology and 1960s counterculture (in whose hippiesque imaginary "animism" played the role of a redemptive alterity and outside), the modern frontier has folded in on itself and has become *intensive* rather then extensive. The unconscious no longer needs to be repressed, as long as it can be successfully contained by the self-management of individuals and prevented from becoming a collective affair. Ever since this

epochal shift, we – as self-realizing, self-animating subjects – have lent capitalism our human face.

Complementary to the big, depressive cybernetic machine, the "self" has become the very frame (or profile) in which the old oppositions and divides are masked and seemingly reconciled. *Century of the Self* could be read as suggesting that the only substance that is left of the old order, and on which its continuity now largely rests, is paradoxically the autonomous individual that must be realized. If for Freud psychology was founded on "calculating" out of reality and into the psyche what we had "projected" onto the world, popular psychology now implies that it is on us to reverse the calculation once again. We must subjectify, and thus animate, our world and milieus, and in the process "positivize" and naturalize the regime. It is now on us to undo the very "alienation" that capitalist modernity induces. The structural discontents and exclusions thus become increasingly unspeakable, as the losses are effectively privatized. And for those who fail to comply with the task of self-management in this paradigm, the old disciplinary regime always awaits.

It is impossible to get past this impasse of contemporary politics without reclaiming autonomy on a different plane, where autonomy resides in the ability to articulate relationships and collectivity. And this requires us to "pass through" animism, in order to reclaim the imaginary – without the qualifier "merely" – as the space of the political, where we can break open the logic of division, not in order to realize the utopian image of a "borderless world," but to bring into politics the very border-matrix which was categorically hidden, as the unquestioned background condition against which modern politics unfolded. This results in a particular plea for a continued modernization – if one irreversible aspect of modernity is the explication of previously implicit background conditions, the turning of ground into figure. The background that now must become a "figure" is the history of boundary-making practices, not as "past," but as the dialectic picture through which the actual "relational diagrams" of the present can be grasped and un-mapped.

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