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Anselm Franke

Introduction—“Animism”

For the Summer 2012 issue of e-flux journal *we are very pleased to present a special “Animism” issue guest-edited by Anselm Franke, curator of the exhibition by the same name. Even if you missed Animism on tour in Europe since it began at Extra City and MUHKA in Antwerp in 2010, you have probably learned of its encompassing mobilization of the systems of inclusion and exclusion defining “science” and “culture.” The various stages of the exhibition have shown the discourse of animism to be a crucial skeleton key for releasing the deadlocks formed by the repressed religious, teleological, and colonial foundations of modernity—the hysteria within its narrative that continues to shape the exhibition formats and sensibilities we are tethered to. The fifth iteration of Animism is now on view at e-flux in New York until July 28.*

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

A ghost is haunting modernity—the ghost of animism. It awaits us everywhere when we step outside modern reason’s cone of light, outside its firmly mapped order, when approaching its frontier zones and “outside.” We find it in the imagined darkness of modernity’s outside, where everything changes shape and the world is reassembled from the fragments that reason expels from its chains of coherences.

The task is to bring those constitutive others at the “dark” side of modern reason—like “animism,” but also the “imaginary,” the “negative,” “otherness,” or even “evil”—back into the relational diagram of modernity. To take those universalized sites of otherness that receive names such as “a universal tendency of humankind” or even its “origin,” and bring them back into history, would be perhaps the only way to account for the relational constitution of the present, to face the sorcery of its double binds. To embark upon this task is thus to understand these are never given “universals” of the modern, but its very relational products. They are the sites that modern history is silent about, to the extent that the very narrative of the “the modern” is built upon this silence as its fundament. The narrative-imaginary vacuum of the present is the direct outcome of this silence. This silence tells us that it is actually not animism, but modernity that is the ghost—halfway between presence and absence, life and death. And the future grand narratives of modernity may well speak of this ghost from the perspective of its other, from its “animist” side.

We see signs of this happening already, for it is now clear that the modern arrow of time has changed directions. The future is no longer a white sheet of paper awaiting our projective prescriptive schemes and designs, and the past is no longer the archaic animist “stage” of multiple

contagions and mediations which must be surmounted as "entry" condition into the hygienic order of modernity. The future is now behind us, and the past approaches us from the front. The specter of animism is no longer one that returns from the past, for the reversal of modern temporality has announced itself for some time in the ability to challenge monolithic modernist narratives with a multitude of other modernities that ultimately expose and highlight those contagions, hybridities, and mobilities that oppose the foundational modern acts of separation, inscription, and fixation. Here, animism shifts to become the experience of the event and experience that sets in when a naturalized, fixed order of signs is de-stabilized and opened up towards possible transformation, like a map covering the territory that is lifted to unveil multiple movements below what had appeared to be stable ground. Animism is thus no longer historical but is rather the ground upon which history is placed.

Today it is no longer the reified script modernity that we are enacting, but that of the "self." No longer unrestrictedly exporting its discontents into an imaginary primitive outside and other dumping grounds, the new site of export and displacement of social conflicts is interiority at the frontier of subjectivity. It is at this frontier where the double bind of imposed choice and the deadlock on the imaginary currently hits, as a conflation of difference between system and subject whence the subject must keep this difference up.

And we find the opposition to this experience in anarchic dialogism, one that resists all imposed or supposed possible closures of the field of dialogic subjectification. It is through animism that this possibility today becomes thinkable, while at the same time making a concrete history available to it. The history of animism is above all one of closure and division, but also a history of ontological anarchy—where exclusions become increasingly intelligible through their symptomatic displacements in the economy of desires, in the genres of fiction, in psychopathologies, and so forth. It is important to mention here that anarchy in this sense does not find its horizon of agency in a historical void or a tabula rasa known as the future. It does not seek an absence of power, but rather the insistence on the right and possibility not to be subjected to power. It finds its field in the immediate actuality of that which offers itself to dialogic contestation and engagement, in the permanent modulated exchange between the implicit and the explicit—or, in aesthetic terms, between what constitutes "figure" and what constitutes "ground" in any mapping that implicates us.

It is through this figure of ontological anarchy that we find ourselves in a time at which it is ultimately urgent to "understand"—in order to step beyond and unmake—the magic circle of double binds. But this time it is not the sorcery of the animist *other*, but the modern and "capitalist sorcery" (Isabelle Stengers) that keeps us spellbound, trapped within a set of false choices, within a systemic closure that suggests no alternatives, and does not cease to assimilate into clinical management its other and its outsides. Understanding the "modern" sorcery that crystalized in the concept of animism is the present issue of *e-flux journal*'s common denominator.

A significant share of the contributions to this issue of *e-flux journal* are based on the contributions to a conference co-organized with Irene Albers and the Freie Universität Berlin. It accompanied the opening of the exhibition *Animism* in Berlin at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in March 2012, which preceded its current installment at e-flux in New York. Previous chapters of the Animism exhibition where presented in 2010 at Extra City Kunsthal and MUHKA in Antwerp and the Kunsthalle Bern, and at the Generali Foundation, Vienna in 2011. My sincere thanks goes to all collaborators who have made this long-term project possible and who have contributed to it to date.

X

Isabelle Stengers

Reclaiming Animism

Some people love to divide and classify, while others are bridge-makers—weaving relations that turn a divide into a living contrast, one whose power is to affect, to produce thinking and feeling.

But bridge-making is a situated practice. As a philosopher, *I* am situated: a daughter to a practice responsible for many divisions, but which may also be understood as a rather particular means of bridge-making. The mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead wrote that all Western philosophy can be understood as footnotes to Plato's texts. Perhaps I became a philosopher because writing such footnotes implies feeling the text as an animating power—inviting participation, beckoning to me and suggesting the writing of another footnote that will make a bridge to the past, that will give ideas from the past the power to affect the present.

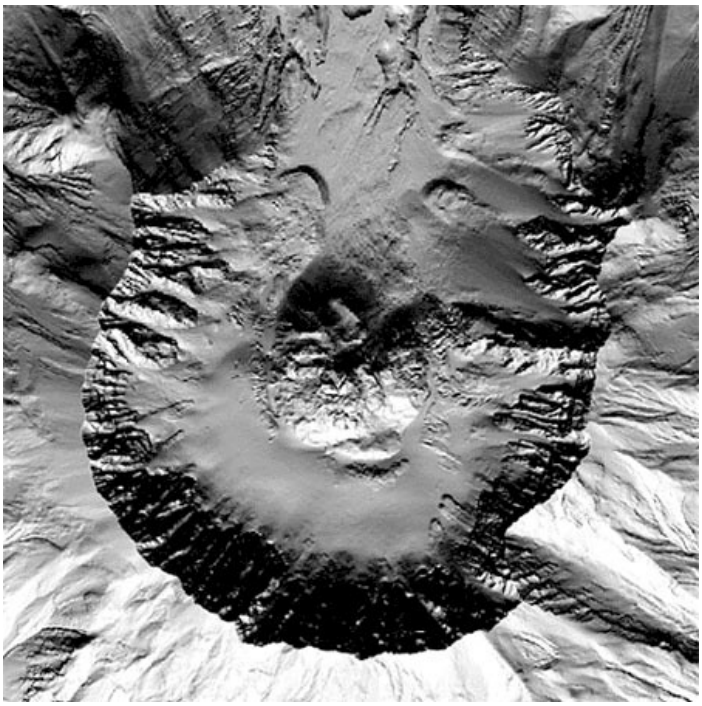
In spite of this, I will not take advantage of the possibility that philosophy is a form of textual animism, using this to delocalize myself, to feel authorized to speak about animism. Indeed, where what we call animism is concerned, the past to be considered is primordially the one in which philosophical concepts served to justify colonization and the divide across which some felt free to study and categorize others—a divide that still exists today.

Thus, in contrast to David Abram, whose experience enables him to turn the animist modes of experience, awareness, and knowledge into an intensely powerful bridge-making tool, as a generative constraint I must accept to not feel free to speak and speculate in a way that would situate others. Rather, I must acknowledge the fact that my own practice and tradition situate me on one side of the divide, the side that characterized "others" as animists. "We," on our side, presume to be the ones who have accepted the hard truth that we are alone in a mute, blind, yet knowable world—one that is our task to appropriate.

In particular, I shall not forget that my side of the divide is still marked today not only by this epic story, but also, and perhaps more crucially, by its moral correlate: "thou shalt not regress." Such a moral imperative confers another meaning on my decision to stand on the side I belong to. Indeed, there *is* some work to be done on this side. We can by addressing the moral imperative that mobilizes us, as it produces an obscure fear of being accused of regression as soon as we give any sign of betraying hard truth by indulging soft, illusory beliefs.

As for this hard truth itself, philosophers are anyhow no longer on the frontlines where it is expounded. When scientists' contradictory arguments resound, we are only bystanders. Neuroscientists may freely characterize what we were proud of—freedom and rationality—as mere beliefs. Anthropologists like Philippe Descola may freely affirm that our "naturalism" is just one of four human

schemes organizing the human and nonhuman world (with animism being another of these schemes). As philosophers, we may certainly wonder whether the neuronal explanation is a case of "naturalism," or whether our organizing schemes can themselves be explained in terms of some neuronal attractors. But what we know is that those who are not authorized scientists cannot intervene in these questions, any more than a mere mortal could intervene in the Olympian gods' quarrels. Neither philosophers nor theologians have a voice in such matters, although the former are descendants of Greek reason and the latter are the inheritors of the monotheistic creed. Let us not even speak of the old lady with a cat who claims that her cat understands her.



Shaded relief imagery developed by NASA showing volcanic unrest-related changes. Image depicts Mount St. Helens, 2004.

Scientists may disagree on how we are wrong, but they agree that we are wrong. The epic is no longer about the "ascent of Man," but rather about the ascent of the Scientist. How, then, to keep the question of animism, if it is taken seriously at all, from being framed in terms that verify Science's right to define it as an object of knowledge?

The work that I feel needs to be done on my side of the divide may be characterized in terms of what the ethnologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has called a "decolonization of thought"—the attempt to resist a colonizing power that begins already with the old lady with the cat, defining her in terms of a belief that may be tolerated but never taken seriously. However, I would not identify this colonizing power with the living work of scientists. The feeling that it is possible and necessary to resist also stems from my interest in what I would call scientific achievements, and my correlative disgust at the way such achievements have been translated into the great epic story about "Science disenchanting the world."

Science, when taken in the singular and with a big *S*, may indeed be described as a general conquest bent on translating everything that exists into objective, rational knowledge. In the name of Science, a judgment has been passed on the heads of other peoples, and this judgment has also devastated our relations to ourselves—whether we are philosophers, theologians, or old ladies with cats.

Scientific achievements, on the other hand, require thinking in terms of an "adventure of sciences" (in the plural and with a small *s*). The distinction between such an adventure and Science as a general conquest is certainly hard to make if you consider what is done in the name of science today. However, it is important to do so because it allows for a new perspective: what is called Science, or the idea of a hegemonic scientific rationality, can be understood as itself the product of a colonization process.

On this side of the divide, it would then be possible to remain true to a very particular adventure, while also betraying the hard demands of an epic. In order to think sciences as an adventure, it is crucial to emphasize the radical difference between a scientific conquering "view of the world" and the very special and demanding character of what I would call scientific "achievements." In experimental sciences, such achievements are the very condition of what is then, after they have been verified, celebrated as an objective definition. An experimental achievement may be characterized as the creation of a situation enabling what the scientists question to put their questions at risk, to make the difference between relevant questions and unilaterally imposed ones.

What experimental scientists call objectivity thus depends on a very particular creative art, and a very selective one, because it means that what is addressed must be successfully enrolled as a "partner" in a very unusual and entangled relation. Indeed, the role of this partner is not only to answer questions but also, and primordially so, to answer them in a way that tests the relevance of the question itself. Correlatively, the answers that follow from such achievements should never separate us from anything, because they always coincide with the creation of new questions, not with new authoritative answers to questions that already mattered for us.

We can only imagine the adventure of sciences that would have accepted such claims as obvious, which would have accepted the very specific challenge of addressing whatever they address only if the situation ensures that the addressee is enabled to "take a position" about the

way it is addressed. What we should not imagine, however, is that science would then have verified animism.

We may well think instead that the term itself would not exist. Only a "belief" can receive such a global name. If the adventurous specificity of scientific practices has been acknowledged, no one would dream of addressing others in terms of the "beliefs" they would entertain about a "reality" to which scientists enjoy privileged access. Instead of the hierarchical figure of a tree, with Science as its trunk, what we call progress would perhaps have had the allure of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari called a rhizome, connecting heterogeneous practices, concerns, and ways of giving meaning to the inhabitants of this earth, with none being privileged and any being liable to connect with any other.

One might object by calling this a figure of anarchy. Yes—but an ecological anarchy, because while connections *may* be produced between any parts of a rhizome, they also *must* be produced. They are events, linkages—like symbiosis. They are what is and will remain heterogeneous.

In order to resist the powerful image of a treelike progress, with Science as its trunk, I will now address another idea of Gilles Deleuze, that of our need to "think by the milieu," meaning both without reference to a ground or ideal aim, and never separating something from the milieu that it requires in order to exist. To think then in terms of scientific milieus and what they demand, it is clear that not everything will agree to some of these demands. In particular, not everything may accept the role associated with scientific creation, the role of putting to the test the way it is represented.

I once offered the example of the Virgin Mary—not the theological figure but the intercessor whom pilgrims address. It's wrong to think that the Virgin Mary could make her existence known independently of the faith and trust of pilgrims; for her to do so in a situation committed to the question of how to represent her would be in bad taste. Rather, tif we accept that that aim of a pilgrimage is the transformative experience of the pilgrim, we must not require the Virgin Mary to "demonstrate" her existence to prove she is not merely a "fiction." We must not, in other words, mobilize the categories of superstition, belief, or symbolic efficacy in an attempt to explain away what pilgrims claim to experience. Instead, we must conclude that the Virgin Mary requires a milieu that does not answer to scientific demands.

However, pilgrims and the Virgin are weak examples of rhizomatic phenomena because they have been captured by the dichotomy of "natural" and "supernatural" causations. Within such a dichotomy, one would ask: What is responsible for the healings that occur at Lourdes and other miracle sites—a miraculous intervention or some sort of "enhanced placebo effect"?

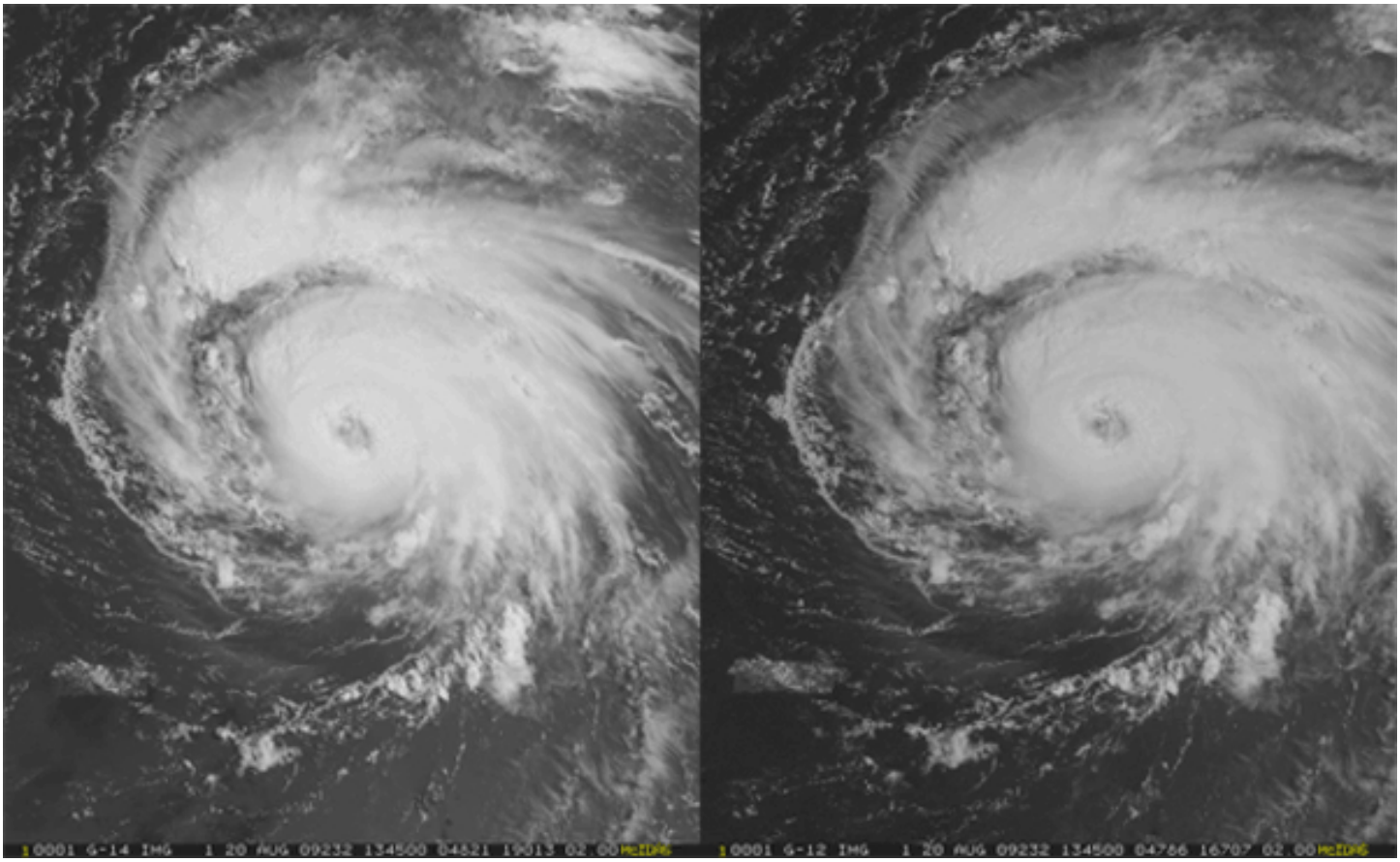
This question authorizes the ugly scene, where, before announcing a miracle, the church hierarchy awaits the verdict of physicians empowered to decide whether a healing can be explained away in terms of "natural causes," such as a placebo effect. This relies on a disastrous definition the "natural," namely: that which Science will eventually explain. "Supernatural" is then—just as disastrously—whatever challenges such explanations. In other words, the milieu here opposes any rhizomatic connections, pigeonholing the case in terms of belief—those who believe that "nature," as the domain where Science rules, explains effects that kindle superstition, and those who accept this belief but add another one: a belief in a power that transcends nature.

The half-forgotten case of magnetism offers an interesting contrast here. In the nineteenth century, magnetism provoked a passionate interest that blurred the boundary between the natural and the supernatural. Nature was made mysterious, and supernature was populated by messengers bringing news from elsewhere to mediums in a magnetic trance—a very disordered situation that understandably invited the hostility of both scientific and church institutions.

It has even been proposed that psychoanalysis was not the subversive "plague" that Freud boasted of, but rather a restoration of order, since it helped explain away mysterious cures, magnetic "lucidity," and other demonic manifestations pigeonholed as purely human. In the name of Science it deciphered a new universal cause. The Freudian unconscious was indeed "scientific" in the sense that it authorized the denigrating of those who marveled and fantisized, and it extolled the sad, hard truth behind specious appearances. It verified the great epic Freud himself popularized: he was following Copernicus and Darwin, inflicting a final wound on what he called our narcissistic "beliefs."

A distinct operation was attempted by the surrealist poet André Breton, who claimed that the magnetism should be taken out of the hands of scientists and physicians, who mutilate them through polemical verifications dominated by the suspicion of quackery, self-delusion, or deliberate cheating. For Breton, the point was not to verify what magnetized clairvoyants see, or to understand enigmatic healings, but to cultivate lucid trances (automatism) in the milieu of art, with the ultimate aim of escaping the shackles of normal, representational perception. The milieu of art would explore the means to "recuperate our psychical force."

Breton's proposition is interesting, as the milieu of art could indeed have supported and sustained the unsettling effects associated with magnetism. Such a milieu would perhaps have been able to produce its own practical knowledge of trances—a knowledge concerned only with effects of trances, indifferent to whether the causes were "natural" or "supernatural." Yet Breton's proposition was



Animated .gif image generated by the Cooperative Institute for Meteorological Satellite Studies. Stereoscopy is used to monitor hurricane activity.

less a practical one than an appropriative one, marked by a typically modernist triumphalism. To him, art was supreme, not a craft among other crafts but instead the final manifestation of the "surreal," purified of superstitious beliefs—such as animism.

He would thus not envisage making rhizomatic connections to other practices that likewise explore a metamorphic (rather than a representational) relation to the world. He would not break with the perspective that still dominates so many "interdisciplinary" encounters, where the "subjectivity" of the artist's standpoint is contrasted with the "objectivity" of Science. It is as if a contrast could be produced between two banners in a devastated landscape, each bearing one of these subjugating, commanding words—and therefore each empty. The seemingly opposite banners agree on one crucial thing: we should not betray the moral imperative that commands us to trample on what appears as a cradle we are able to leave, and have the imperious duty to leave.

Here it becomes crucial to finally ask, as an active, transformative, and not a reflexive question: Who is this *we*? It is a question whose efficacy I will associate with yet another operation, that of "reclaiming." Again it will be a question of thinking by the milieu, but this time a milieu that is dangerous and insalubrious, one that entices us to feel that we bear the high responsibility to determine what is entitled to "really" exist and what is not. It is a milieu that is, as a consequence, ruled by the power of judgmental critique.

Scientists are infected, of course, as are all those who accept their authority to decide what objectively exists. But also infected might be those who would claim to be animists, if they affirm that rocks "really" have souls or intentions, like humans. It is the "really" that matters here, an emphasis that marks the polemical power associated with truth. Coming back for a moment to the anthropologist Philippe Descola's classification, I would guess that those who are categorized as animists have no word for "really," for insisting that they are right and others are victims of illusions.

Reclaiming begins with recognizing the infective power of this milieu, a power that is not defeated in the slightest when the sad relativity of all truth is affirmed. Quite the contrary, in fact, since the sad—because monotonous—refrain of the relativist is that our truths do not "really" have the authority they claim.

Reclaiming means recovering what we have been separated from, but not in the sense that we can just get it back. Recovering means recovering from the very

separation itself, regenerating what this separation has poisoned. The need to struggle and the need to heal, in order to avoid resembling those we have to struggle against, are thus irreducibly allied. A poisoned milieu must be reclaimed, and so must many of our words, those that—like "animism" and "magic"—carry with them the power to take us hostage: do you "really" believe in...?

I received this word "reclaiming" as a gift from neo-pagan contemporary witches and other US activists. I also received the shocking cry of neo-pagan Starhawk: "The smoke of the burned witches still hangs in our nostrils." Certainly the witch hunters are no longer among us, and we no longer take seriously the accusation of devil worshipping that was once levelled at witches. Rather, our milieu is defined by the modern pride in being able to interpret both witchery and witch hunting in terms of social, linguistic, cultural, or political constructs and beliefs. What this pride ignores, however, is that we are the heirs of an operation of cultural and social eradication—the forerunner of what was committed elsewhere in the name of civilization and reason. Anything that classifies the memory of such operations as unimportant or irrelevant only furthers the success of those operations.

In this sense, our pride in our critical power to "know better" than both the witches and the witch hunters makes us the heirs of witch hunting. The point is obviously not to feel guilty. It is rather to open up what William James, in his "The Will to Believe," called a genuine, effective option, complicating the "us" question, demanding that we situate ourselves. And here the true efficacy of Starhawk's cry enters. Reclaiming the past is not a matter of resurrecting it as it was, of dreaming to make some "true," "authentic" tradition come alive. It is rather a matter of reactivating it, and first of all, of smelling the smoke in our nostrils—the smoke that I smelled, for instance, when I hurriedly emphasized that, no, I did not "believe" that one could resurrect the past.

Learning to smell the smoke is to acknowledge that we have learned the codes of our respective milieus: derisive remarks, knowing smiles, offhand judgments, often about somebody else, but gifted with the power to pervade and infect—to shape us as those who sneer and not among those who are sneered at.

However, we can try to understand everything about how the past has shape us, but understanding is not reclaiming because it is not recovering. Indeed, this is the anguished question of David Abram, a question that we cannot avoid just by invoking capitalism or human greed: How can a culture as educated as ours be so oblivious, so reckless, in its relations to the animate earth? Abram writes that an answer to this question hit him when he was in a bookshop where all the sacred traditions and resources of moral wisdom of the present and the past were gathered:

> No wonder! No wonder that our sophisticated civilizations, brimming with the accumulated knowledge of so many traditions, continue to flatten and dismember every part of the breathing earth ... *For we have written all of these wisdoms down on the page*, effectively divorcing these many teachings from the living land that once held and embodied these teachings. Once inscribed on the page, all this wisdom seemed to have an exclusively human provenance. Illumination—once offered by the moon's dance in and out of the clouds, or by the dazzle of the sunlight on the wind-rippled surface of mountain tarn—was now set down in an unchanging form.[1]

Yet David Abram still writes, and passionately so. As a first step towards recovery, I propose that the experience of writing (not writing down) is marked by the same kind of crucial indeterminacy as the dancing moon. Writing resists the "either/or" dismembering of experience. It resists the choice between either the moon that "really" offers us illumination, as an intentional subject would do, or the moon of the critique, just triggering what would "really" be of human provenance.

Writing is an experience of metamorphic transformation. It makes one feel that ideas are not the author's, that they demand some kind of cerebral—that is, bodily—contortion that defeats any preformed intention. (This contortion makes us larvae, as Deleuze wrote). It could even be said that writing is what gave transformative forces a particular mode of existence—that of "ideas." Alfred North Whitehead suggested that Plato's ideas are those things that first of all erotically lure the human soul—or, we could say, "animate" humans. For Whitehead, what defines the (Greek) human soul is "the enjoyment of its creative function, arising from its entertaining of ideas."

However, when the text is *written*, taking an "unchanging form," it may well impose itself as being of human provenance—even giving the impression that it can be the vehicle for accessing the intentions of the writer, for grasping what he "meant to communicate" and for what is ours to "understand." Correlatively, the Platonic soul may become a definition divorced from experience, something that we have and that "nature" does not have.

Whitehead wrote that, after *The Symposium*, where Plato discusses the erotic power of ideas, Plato should have written another dialogue called *The Furies*, which would have dealt with the horror lurking "within imperfect realization." The possibility of an imperfect realization is certainly present whenever transformative, metamorphic forces make themselves felt, but this is especially true where ideas are concerned, if, as I claim, the realization of ideas implies writing.

Indeed, once "written down," ideas tempt us to associate

them with a definite meaning, generally available to understanding, severing the experience of reading from that of writing. This is all the more so in a world that is now saturated with texts and signs that are addressed to "anyone"—separating us from the "more than human" world to which ideas nevertheless belong. In order to reclaim animism, however, it is not sufficient to entertain an "idea" that would allow us to claim that we know about it—even if for people like myself it is crucial to realize that my experience of writing is an animist experience, attesting to a "more than human" world.

Reclaiming means recovering, and, in this case, recovering the capacity to honor experience, any experience we care for, as "not ours" but rather as "animating" us, making us witness to what is not us. While such a recovery cannot be reduced to the entertaining of an idea, certain ideas can further the process—and can protect it from being "demystified" as some fetishistic illusion. Such an idea is the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of "assemblage" (the often-discussed translation for the French " *agencement*").

An assemblage, for Deleuze and Guattari, is the coming together of heterogeneous components, and such a coming together is the first and last word of existence. I do not first exist and then enter into assemblages. Rather, my existence is my very participation in assemblages, because I am not the same person when I write and as I am when I wonder about the efficacy of the text after it is written down. I am not gifted with agency or intention. Instead, agency—or what Deleuze and Guattari call "desire"—belongs to the assemblage as such, including those very particular assemblages, called "reflexive assemblages," which produce an experience of detachment, the enjoyment of critically testing previous experience in order to determine what is "really" responsible for what. Another word for this kind of agency that doesn't belong to us is animation.

Relating animism to the efficacy of "assemblages" is a dangerous move, however, because it may well reassure us a bit too easily. It is part of our fabrication as readers, to feel free to ponder without experiencing the existential consequences of our questions. For instance, we may be tempted to understand assemblages as an interesting concept among others, pondering its connections with other concepts—that is, without feeling our intentional stance threatened by its demand. And also without fearing the suspicious gaze of the inquisitors, without feeling the smoke in our nostrils. We are protected by the references we quote.

This is why it may be better to revive more compromised words, which have been restricted to metaphoric use only. "Magic" is such a word, as we freely speak of the magic of an event, of a landscape, of a musical moment. Protected by the metaphor, we may then express the experience of an agency that does not belong to us even if it includes us, but an "us" as it is lured into feeling.

I would propose that we need to forfeit this protection in order to relieve ourselves of the sad, monotonous little critical or reflexive voice whispering that we should not accept being mystified, a voice that relays that of the inquisitors. This voice may tell us about the frightening possibilities that would follow if we gave up critique, the only defense we have against fanaticism and the rule of illusions. But it is first of all the voice of the epic story that still inhabits us. "Thou shall not regress!"

We would admit many daring propositions as long as—like Breton's—they reflect a version of the epic, as long as they warrant that only selected types (artists, philosophers, and so forth) are authorized to explore what mystifies others.

Magic undercuts any such version of the epic. And this is precisely why neo-pagan witches call their own craft "magic": naming it so, they say, is itself an act of magic, since the discomfort it creates helps us notice the smoke in our nostrils. Worse, they have learned to cast circles and invoke the Goddess—She who, the witches say, "returns," She to whom thanks will be given for the event that makes them capable of doing what they call "the work of the Goddess."

In so doing, they put us to the test! How can we accept regression, or conversion to supernatural beliefs? The point, however, is not to wonder whether we have to "accept" the Goddess that contemporary witches invoke in their rituals. If we said to them, "But your Goddess is only a fiction," they would doubtless smile and ask us whether we are among those who believe that fiction is powerless.

What the witches challenge us to accept is the possibility of giving up criteria that claim to transcend assemblages, and that reinforce, again and again, the epic of critical reason. What they cultivate, as part of their craft (it is a part of any craft), is an art of immanent attention, an empirical art about what is good or toxic—an art which our addiction to the truth has too often despised as superstition. They are pragmatic, radically pragmatic, experimenting with effects and consequences of what, as they know, is never innocuous and involves care, protections, and experience.

The witches' ritual chant—"She changes everything She touches, and everything She touches changes"—could surely be commented on in terms of assemblages, since it resists the dismembering attribution of agency. Does change belong to the Goddess as "agent" or to the one who changes when touched?

But the first efficacy of the refrain is in the "She touches." The indeterminacy proper to assemblages is no longer conceptual. It is part of an experience that affirms the power of changing to be NOT attributed to our own selves nor reduced to something "natural." It is an experience

that honors change as a creation.

Moreover, the point is not to comment. The refrain must be chanted; it is part and parcel of the practice of worship. Can the proposition that magic designates both a craft of assemblages and their particular transformative efficacy help us to reclaim it from both the safety of the metaphoric and the stigma of the supernatural? Can it help us to feel instead that nothing in nature is "natural"? Can it induce us to consider new transversal connections, resisting all reduction, unlike this sad term "natural," which in fact means "no trespassing: available for scientific explanation only," and also unlike "the symbolic," which covers about everything else?

Reclaiming always implies a compromising step. I would claim that we, who are not witches, do not have to mimic them but instead discover how to be compromised by magic.

We might, for instance, experiment with the (nonmetaphoric) use of the term "magic," which designates the craft of illusionists who make us perceive and accept what we know to be impossible. Magic, the witches say, is a craft. They would not be shocked by a transversal connection with the craft of performing magicians if this connection was a reclaiming one—that is, if the craft of performing magicians was addressed as what survived when magic became a matter of illusion and manipulative deception in the hands of quacks, or left to the mercenary hands of those who know the many ways we can be lured into desiring, trusting, buying.

And this is precisely what David Abram, himself a slight-of-hand magician, proposes when he relates his craft with what makes it possible, that is, "the way the senses themselves have, of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things that we do not sense directly, with the hidden or invisible aspects of the sensible."[2] What "illusionists" artfully exploit would then be the very creativity of the senses as they respond to what Abram characterizes as "suggestions offered by the sensible itself." If there is an exploitation, the magician himself is exploited as the suggestions are offered not only by his explicit words and intentional gestures, but also by subtle bodily shifts that express that he himself participates in, and is lured by, the very magic he is performing.

Our senses, Abram concludes, are not for detached cognition but for participation, for sharing the metamorphic capacity of things that lure us or that recede into inert availability as our manner of participation shifts—but, he insists, never vanishes: we never step outside the "flux of participation." When magic is reclaimed as an art of participation, or of luring assemblages, assemblages inversely become a matter of empirical and pragmatic concern about effects and consequences, not of general consideration or textual dissertation.

Alluring, suggesting, specious, inducing, capturing, mesmerizing—all our words express the ambivalence of lure. Whatever lures us or animates us may also enslave, and all the more so if taken for granted. Scientific experimental crafts, which dramatically exemplify the metamorphic efficacy of assemblage conferring on things the power of "animating" the scientist into feeling, thinking, imagining, are also a dramatic example of this enslaving power. What I would call with Whitehead an "imperfect realization" of what they achieve has unleashed a furious conquest in the name of which scientists downgrade their achievements, presenting them as mere manifestation of objective rationality.

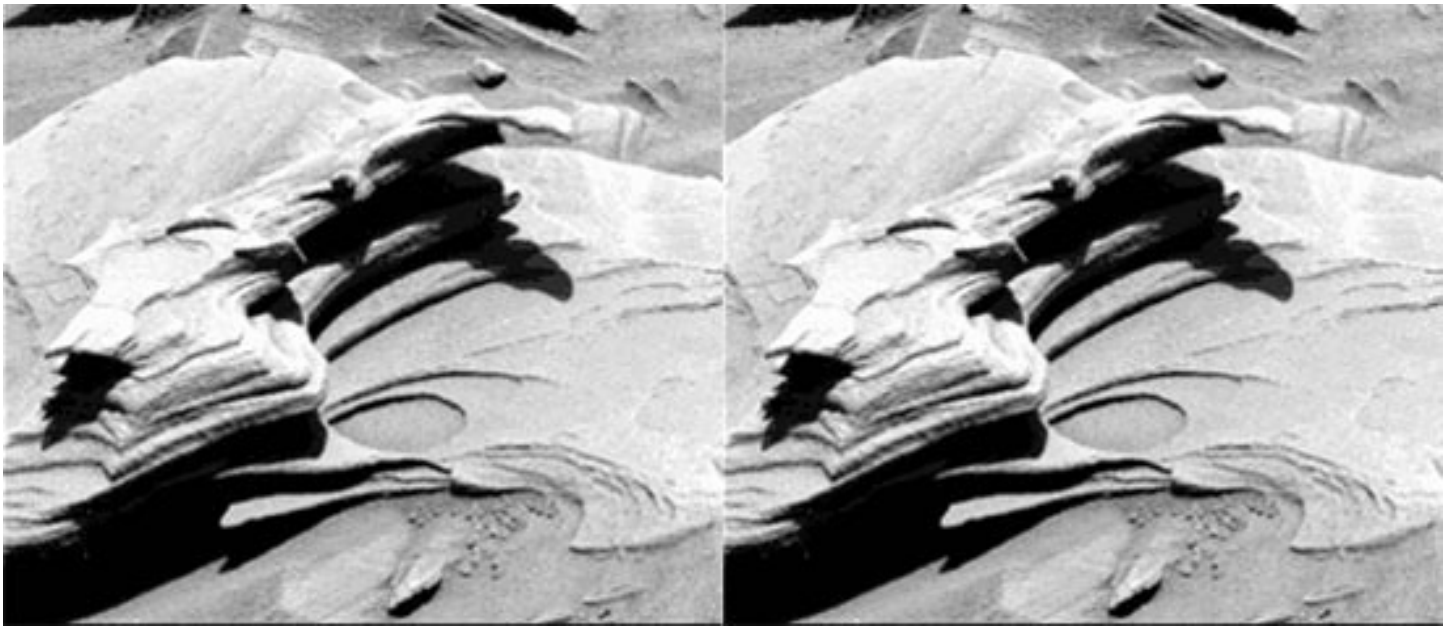
But the question of how to honor the metamorphic efficacy of assemblages—neither taking it for granted nor endowing it with supernatural grandiosity—is a matter of concern for all "magic" crafts, and more especially so in our insalubrious, infectious milieu. And it is because that concern may be common, but can receive no general answer, that reclaiming magic can only be a rhizomatic operation.

A rhizome rejects any generality. Connections do not manifest some truth about what is common beyond the rhizomatic heterogeneous multiplicity—beyond the multiplicity of distinct pragmatic significations associated with "magic" as related to what we call politics, healing, education, arts, philosophy, sciences, agriculture, or to any craft requiring or depending upon a capacity to lure us into relevant metamorphic attention.

The only generality here is about our milieu and its compulsion to categorize and judge—and spiritualism is here a probable judgment—or to negate whatever would point to the metamorphic dimension of what is to be achieved. Rhizomatic connections may be a non-general answer to this generality. Each "magic" craft needs connections with others in order to resist infection by the milieu, the divisive power of social judgment, to smell the smoke that demands we decide whether we are heirs to the witches or the witch hunters.

But connections may also be needed to heal and to learn. Where the dangerous art of animating in order to be animated is concerned, what connects may be practical learning about the needed immanent (critical) attention. Not about what is good or bad in itself, but about what Whitehead called realization. Again, no mode of realization may be taken as a model, only as calling for pragmatic reinvention. In order to honor the making of connections, to protect it against models and norms, a name may be required. Animism could be the name for this rhizomatic art.

Reclaiming animism does not mean, then, that we have



Satellite image of rock formation on Mars denominated The Home Plate. Stereoscopy is here used to identify volumes.

ever been animist. Nobody has ever been animist because one is never animist "in general," only in terms of assemblages that generate metamorphic transformation in our capacity to affect and be affected—and also to feel, think, and imagine. Animism may, however, be a name for reclaiming these assemblages, since it lures us into feeling that their efficacy is not ours to claim. Against the insistent poisoned passion of dismembering and demystifying, it affirms that which they all require in order not to enslave us: that we are not alone in the world.

X

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Harry Garuba

On Animism, Modernity/Colonialism, and the African Order of Knowledge: Provisional Reflections

> It might even be said that the fetish is the consummate form of power for Marx insofar as it mystifies and materializes in the same gesture, insofar as it crystallizes the necessity and inevitability of mystification for materialization. Indeed, if fetishism is that process whereby power as a relation is obscured through reification, through the guise of an object, then what Marx calls material life, with its thoroughly objective, tangible and concrete character, is always already fetishized.

—Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History*[1]

> Because of the colonizing structure, a dichotomizing system has emerged, and with it a great number of current paradigmatic oppositions have developed: traditional versus modern; oral versus written and printed; agrarian and customary communities versus urban and industrialized civilization; subsistence economies versus highly productive economies. In Africa a great deal of attention is generally given to the evolution implied and promised by the passage from the former paradigms to the latter.

—V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*[2]

How do we account for the recent resurgence of interest in animism and animist thought? Once considered a kind of cognitive error, as evidence of cognitive underdevelopment and epistemological failure, animism has once again become an object of discursive attention and intellectual inquiry, in addition to serving as a platform for political action, particularly around issues of ecology and the environment. It has become an acceptable if not entirely respectable way of knowing and acting in the world. Although E. B. Tylor's nineteenth-century definition of the concept has remained foundational, we have come a long way from the modernist understanding of it which Emile Durkheim summed up in these words:

> For Tylor, this extension of animism was due to the particular mentality of the primitive, who, like an infant, cannot distinguish the animate and the inanimate. [...] Now the primitive thinks like a child. Consequently, he is also inclined to endow all things, even inanimate ones, with a nature analogous to his own.[3]

This new interest has overturned the old prejudice which equated animism with everything that was childlike and epistemologically challenged, everything that was the negation of the mature, the modern, and the civilized.

It is fairly safe to say (as Bruno Latour has shown) that those same modern technological innovations that led to the creation of "hybrids," "quasi-objects," and so forth have also made the Cartesian distinction between object and subject no longer tenable, at least not in those categorical terms.[4] The literature on animism, animistic thought, animation, and so forth across a range of disciplinary domains, from science studies and philosophy to sociology and anthropology, all seem to support this revaluation, with some going so far as to proclaim the end of objectivism and its dualistic epistemology. This may be overly optimistic, but that it can be proclaimed without sounding entirely absurd is worth noting.

As Alf Hornborg asserts in his essay "Animism, Fetishism, and Objectivism as Strategies for Knowing (or not Knowing) the World," "We might begin by suggesting that the 'object'—in the sense of a material intrinsically meaningless, but essentially knowable reality—is a thoroughly modern invention."[5] It is important to recognize this. What has led to this recognition is that after the work of environmental/ecological movements that have increasingly invoked animistic understandings of the world derived from indigenous communities, postmodernism's relativist epistemologies, New Age spiritualism, and contemporary anthropologists' talk of relational epistemologies and different conceptions of personhood across cultures, it would appear that the boundary between Nature and Society, the world of objects and subjects, the material world and that of agency and symbolic meanings, is less certain than the modernist project had decreed. These recent developments may collectively or in conjunction be said to be responsible for the return of animism to discursive attention. This interest, however, opens up a significant series of questions.

If the "object"—in the sense in which Hornborg describes it above—is a thoroughly modern invention, and the dualist epistemology of modernity is being contested on many fronts, what has happened to the order of knowledge it enabled and universalized? It is all well and good to announce the end of the grand narratives of the Enlightenment and modernity, but what has happened to the structure of knowledge on which it is grounded? What are the epistemic legacies of this regime of knowledge, especially in areas of the world defined by their "animist" worldviews and thus seen as outside of the modern? Have they been left largely untouched by the dualist episteme of modernity or have they been captured by it?

A number of theorists writing about this "other" world have argued that once touched by modernity, the colonized are conscripted into its regime of knowledge/power. Masao Miyoshi, for example, claims,

> Once absorbed into the "chronopolitics" of the secular West, colonized space cannot reclaim autonomy and seclusion; once dragged out of their precolonial space, the indigenes of the peripheries have to deal with knowledge of the outside world, irrespective of their own wishes and inclinations.[6]

This is another way of saying what Talal Asad said a long time ago, that we are all—whether we like it or not—"conscripts of western civilization."[7] This would mean that the modernist order of knowledge has not left untouched these "other" parts of the world previously governed—if you like—by an animist order of knowledge or an animist epistemology. If this is true, and if, as the Latin American decolonial theorist Ramon Grosfoguel has argued, "[t]he success of the modern/colonial world-system consists precisely in making subjects that are socially located on the oppressed side of the colonial difference think epistemically like the ones in dominant positions," can subjects previously defined outside of the modern construct an epistemic position that does not re-inscribe the dichotomies that Mudimbe describes as the paradigmatic oppositions that define the "colonizing structure"?[8] Recall from the second epigraph above that the colonizing structure is a knowledge structure premised on "the evolution implied and promised by the passage from the former paradigms [the animist] to the latter [the modern]." Can an animist world view enable an order of knowledge that would allow us to think outside and beyond this? These are the important questions that arise in light of the developments that have made animism an object of serious scholarly inquiry. For, while it may appear that the conditions of possibility exist for alternative conceptualizations, we also seem trapped within the epistemic structures and languages of modernity, and our attempts to speak outside them invariably return us to the same discursive archive, albeit by way of contestation or subversion.

In these brief reflections, I will explore these questions. I begin by returning to the epigraph from Wendy Brown, which daringly rereads Marx's work on commodity fetishism and reverses the dualisms that often characterize vulgar materialist readings of it. Following this, I suggest that animism is the spectral Other that simultaneously constitutes and haunts the modern. Rather like Gorgio Agamben's reading of the status of the *homo sacer* of ancient Roman law, it is always already included by its exclusion.[9] Accorded the recognition of non-recognition, animist understandings of the natural and social world functioned within discourses of colonial modernity as the aberration, the past-in-the-present, to be disciplined to create civilized worlds and subjects. The colonial modernist order of knowledge, built on

translating/transforming these animist worlds and subjects into modernity, spawned the various dichotomies that have defined the study of Africa. In other words, animism has functioned as the metaphoric receptacle for everything that is a negation of the modern, and the goal and structure of the African order of knowledge bequeathed by colonialism has been to *decipher* and *translate/transform* these worlds into European constructs and fit them into European theoretical models, as Mudimbe writes. After underlining this, I proceed to explore the possibilities that animism offers for instituting a different regime of knowledge, one rid of the dualisms of the modern. Here, I argue that there is a need to reach for new conceptual vocabularies that transcend the modern episteme in order to take advantage of this recent convergence of interest in the logics of animist thought, however difficult it may be to achieve this.

"A Commodity is therefore a Mysterious Thing": One Knowledge Domain for the Thing and Another for the Mystery

When Karl Marx spoke of the "mystical character of commodities," I doubt that he envisaged that within the following century knowledge would have become so fragmented that there would be a field of knowledge devoted solely to the study of the commodity as an object rid entirely of the messiness of the mystical character that attaches to it and constitutes it. His perceptive understanding, from as early as the nineteenth century, that a "commodity is therefore a mysterious thing" has been of renewed interest for thinkers and scholars from a variety of theoretical and ideological persuasions, including the deconstructionist, the postmodernist, and the post-Marxist, among others. If the commodity is central to economic modernity, an understanding of it as a locus of both the material and the mysterious must be of some significance, and scholars within the transdisciplinary field now known as critical theory have taken note.

Approaching Marx's view of the form of the commodity from a Foucauldian perspective that focuses on the operations of power, the epigraph taken from Wendy Brown succinctly brings together under one rubric the paradigmatic oppositions that mark the separation between the knowledge domains we broadly call "scientific"—those devoted to the study of the material world through a series of methodological protocols and practices that primarily involve the cleansing of objects of all traces of symbolic meaning—and the knowledge domains reserved for the Others. According to this reading, Marx "crystallizes the necessity and inevitability of mystification for materialization" and claims that "material life, with its thoroughly objective, tangible, and concrete character, is always already fetishized." Indeed, the epigraph should remind us, even as it overrides this division, of the construction of one knowledge domain for the "thing" and another for the "mystery," of the establishment of the hierarchy between the sciences and those disciplines broadly designated as the social sciences and humanities. Ever since the institution and consolidation of this disciplinary separation from the nineteenth century onward, the aspiration of those that fall within the latter domain to mimic the protocols of the former in the acceptable methodologies of knowledge production is analogous to and mirrors the promise of passage from one paradigm to the other that Mudimbe identifies as central to the "colonizing structure" and its knowledge regime.

Having drawn this analogy between the constitution and separation of the modern disciplines of knowledge production, the aspiration of the "lesser" disciplines, and the structure of the colonial order of knowledge and the promise of the so-called civilizing mission, I would go further and reiterate that the very identity of this order is constituted by that which it excludes, both in the rules of its discourse and in the protocols and practices of its enunciation. The "messiness" of the "lesser" disciplines and the "animism" of the native both come from the same inability to fully objectify, and this represents the spectral presence that shadows the objectifying imperatives of the privileged heights in the hierarchy of knowledge. As Frederick Cooper affirms in another context, "Without the native, without the Barbarian, without the slave, the values of the West are difficult to imagine."[10] I would extend this to say that without animism, the values of positivist science are difficult to imagine. As I argued in an earlier paper on "African Studies, Area Studies, and the Logic of the Disciplines":

> [...] it was in this process of disciplinisation and the creation of disciplinary structures of knowledge that Africa fell out of the boxes and landed in the domain of anthropology [... and that] many of the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, being disciplines of modernity, were invariably defined in opposition to Africa—African animism, African irrationality, African orality, etc. In short, Africa was the ultimate sign of the non-modern that was not available to disciplinary attention, except within the domain of anthropological knowledge.[11]

The fear of animism, it would appear, is the beginning of (scientific) wisdom.

Let us concede at this point that beginning as I do by foregrounding the predominant conceptions of modernity (and animism) and its dualistic framing of knowing, these

Film still from Alain Resnais' and Chris Marker's 1953 film Les Statues Meurent Aussi.

reflections cannot but employ its dichotomizing language even while advocating for its transcendence. My use of the term *animism* is therefore restricted neither to the strict anthropological definition nor to the descriptions offered in dictionaries of religion or in the pages of texts on developmental psychology. Rather, my usage speaks more broadly to an epistemological standpoint in relation to the world that is radically different from the modernist. In the essay, "'Animism' Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," Nurit Bird-David characterises this standpoint in the following way:

> If the object of modernist epistemology is a totalizing scheme of separated essences, approached ideally from a separated viewpoint, the object of this animist knowledge is understanding relatedness from a related point of view, within the shifting horizons of the related viewer. [...] Against "I think therefore I am" stands "I relate therefore I am" and "I know as I relate." Against materialist framing of the environment as discrete things stands relational framing of the environment as nested relatedness. Both ways are real and valid. Each has its limits and its strengths.[12]

In placing the term "animism" in scare quotes in the title of the article, the author seeks to gesture beyond those narrower definitions inherited from E. B. Tylor and the history of the usage of the term within modernist thought. I also read the careful phrasing captured in "approached ideally" as an acknowledgement that the dichotomy inherent in the self-constitution of the modern may not have been as hermetically sealed off from its opposite as it claimed. All the same, the oppositional framing persists because it is perhaps the only way to highlight these differences within the grammar of discourse available to us.

The challenge, I believe, is to find a conceptual space and a language of discourse to restore or reclaim that constitutive co-presence that Marx recognized between the commodity as material and mystical object and to find an order of knowledge that captures this and through which this can be represented. This is what epistemologies of relation, various forms of relativism that take the Enlightenment project as their target of assault, postmodern epistemologies, and so forth attempt to do. Contesting its authority is a fine thing, but it is much more difficult to overturn its legacies.

Braydov B., Dealer Services, 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

Linear Time, Teleologies of Knowledge Production, and the Logic of Animist Thought

It should be clear from the foregoing that I broadly endorse these "new" or "alternative" epistemologies and their goal of subverting the singular narrative of modernity and its knowledge regime. However, I find that I cannot shake off my unease about the linear temporalizing of these developments. Often when the story is told, the emergence of these new discourses is presented as an epistemological advance over the previous modernist paradigm (as the name postmodern suggests, for example) in an unproblematized, linear fashion. This narrative consigns the animist worlds upon which they depend to the status of data, objects used only as sources of primary evidence, and the knowledge capital gained is inserted into a linear narrative of the progression of Western knowledge. The subject of knowledge remains the modern self, moving forward in linear time.

Addressing the issue of evolution and the naturalization and secularization of time in his book *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, Johannes Fabian argues that under the linear paradigm "relationships between parts of the world (in the widest sense of both natural and sociocultural entities) can be understood as temporal relations," with some upstream in time and others downstream.[13] So even though it may appear that "animism" is the ground upon which these new epistemologies stand, it is not the "real" animistic practices of other peoples and cultures that matter; what matters instead is "animism" as a knowledge construct of the West, and this is what is being revisited to derive new Western knowledge constructs and paradigms. Seen in this light, it thus becomes a post-modern advance upon a prior knowledge paradigm and practice rather than an always already recognized coeval presence (to use Fabian's term) in the lifeworlds of those conscripted into modernity.

Presented in this manner, this conception is problematic because the West remains the "sovereign theoretical subject" of knowledge, to use Dipesh Chakrabarty's words, while the animistic other's lived experience and reality is yet to be disciplined into formal knowledge. Here is how Chakrabarty explains his idea of the subject of knowledge with regard to the discipline of history:

> I have a more perverse proposition to argue. It is that in so far as the academic discourse of history—that is, "history" as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university—is concerned, "Europe" remains the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call "Indian," "Chinese," "Kenyan," and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other Histories become variations of a master narrative that could be called "the history of Europe."[14]

What appears to have struck Chakrabarty—after all those nationalist historiographies produced in the aftermath of colonialism—was that even though the "content" of these histories may have been Kenyan or Indian or Chinese, "Europe remained the sovereign theoretical subject." This

means that all of these other histories, written within the protocols and idioms of the modern and the disciplinary practices that emerged from the modern episteme, were only Kenyan or Indian or Chinese in data, not in their authorizing discursive form. I read this as further saying that the paradigms and protocols of the discourse of academic history do not provide a discursive space from which to write a "non-modern" history, if you like—a history that does not inscribe the modernist, linear conception of time. (Was this also the point Masao Miyoshi was making about the colonized and the "chronopolitics" of the secular West?) My fear is that this could also be true of all the new literature on animism, as admittedly exciting as it has been.

The question of temporality has always been central to the narrative and ethos of modernity, and the consolidation and dissemination of a linear conception of time has been one of its enduring successes. While globalization and the migrations and mobilities it has set in motion may be unscrambling in social and geographical space the spatialization that anchored this conception of time and temporal relations, the teleological imaginary of time unfolding in a linear manner remains. We may no longer use overtly optimistic terms such as "progress" and "civilization," or the more derogatory "savage," but we have found various synonyms for them.

If the new convergence of interest in animism is to bear any advantage for those on the other side of modernity, it is here that we should begin with a conception of time that rejects linearity but recognizes the complex embeddedness of different temporalities, different, discordant discursive formations, and different epistemological perspectives within the same historical moment. And then we should search for a language to represent this knowledge.

Concluding Thoughts

In an earlier essay entitled "Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society," I highlighted a characteristic feature of animist thought whereby developments in science and technology and the discourses and practices usually associated with modernity and a rationalization of the world lead instead to a *continual re-enchantment* rather than a disenchantment of the world.[15] I described the process through which animist thought continually spiritualizes the object world, acknowledging and appropriating recent material developments and discoveries and animating them with a spirit. That this predisposition to continual re-enchantment is not simply a matter of religious belief has been highlighted by the Nigerian writer and activist, Wole Soyinka, who describes it as "an attitude of philosophical accommodation" that arises out of "the code on which this world-view is based."[16]

Installation view of the series "Ethnologisches Museum Berlin III 2003," by Candida Höfer.

I referred to this code, this logic of animist thought, as the animist unconscious, an unconscious that operates basically on a refusal of the boundaries, binaries, demarcations, and linearity of modernity.

In thinking through the questions I have posed, as well as the dilemmas presented by linear, narrative teleologies of knowledge production, we may want to return to the logic of animist thought as a site for transcending the rigid dualisms consecrated by the modern/western epistemological order. The logic of animist thought provides an opening for thinking other histories of modernity beyond the linear, teleological trajectories of the conventional historical narrative.

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Spyros Papapetros

Darwin's Dog and the Parasol: Cultural Reactions to Animism

Picture an English garden on a hot summer day in the early 1870s. Charles Darwin is resting on a bamboo armchair in the backyard of his Down House at Kent, with his dog beside him. One or more women must have been strolling around, leaving an open parasol behind. Suddenly a slight breeze blows, the parasol moves, and the dog starts growling. The stillness of the picturesque landscape is instantly shattered and from the English countryside we are suddenly thrown into the jungle:

> The tendency in savages to imagine that natural objects and agencies are animated by spiritual or living essences, is perhaps illustrated by a little fact which I once noticed: my dog, a full grown and very sensible animal, was lying on the lawn during a hot and still day; but at a little distance a slight breeze occasionally moved an open parasol, which would have been wholly disregarded by the dog, had any one stood near it. As it was, every time that the parasol slightly moved, the dog growled fiercely and barked. He must, I think, have reasoned to himself in a rapid and unconscious manner, that movement without any apparent cause indicated the presence of some strange living agent, and no stranger had a right to be on his territory.[1]

While sitting in his garden, Darwin might have been ruminating on his recent reading of descriptions of animist religions in "primitive societies" by nineteenth-century British anthropologists, such as Edward Tylor, Herbert Spencer, and John Lubbock, all of whom are cited in the scientist's footnotes in the same section as the story of the dog.[2] In the ethnographic accounts collected in such narratives, it is not parasols, but trees, bamboo shoots, and seashells that sway, hiss, or whistle, eliciting the defensive reactions of the fearful "savages." Such auditory illusions were considered by Covent Garden anthropologists to be the very origins of animistic beliefs—a perfect aural supplement to Darwin's own anthropological observation in his garden.[3]

It is as if the dog's growl crossed a line between different topographies: animal and human, "savage" and civilized, textual and real. Darwin himself attempts to anthropomorphize his dog: "full grown and very sensible" as well as capable of rationalizing the agency of movement.[4] The dog, in turn, momentarily animalizes Darwin's mind, causing his thoughts to swerve and forcing him to identify reason as, essentially, an animal defense. The dog no longer represents a domestic animal but a radically disruptive form of animality. Its growling is similar to a pre-linguistic sign, such as mumbling, trying (and failing) to fully articulate a reaction.

Following Darwin, the absence of human agency in the production of movement causes the dog to

"unconsciously" bestow a living power on the parasol. The animation of the object is predicated on the momentary suspension of human presence. But here the human factor is essentially elided in more than one register. The "living agent" intuited by the dog behind (or inside) the parasol is evidently not human; it is rather another animal—or even something fundamentally unknowable, which triggers the hostile reaction. Animation is then not only about the uninvited "intrusion" of the object into the territory of the animal, but also the sudden reappearance of the animal within the territory of the human. Animism becomes animalism, and animation provokes animalization. The back and forth swaying of the parasol redraws these anthropological perspectives.

Darwin's brief animal example must have made quite an impression on his contemporaries. The growling of his dog not only echoes earlier anthropological descriptions, but also provokes new ones from the very class of anthropologists cited by the scientist. For example, in a chapter on "The ideas of the animate and the inanimate" from the first volume of his *Principles of Sociology* , Herbert Spencer would add his own reactions to the episode described by Darwin. Spencer in general rejects Tylor's doctrine of animism as the belief in "life" attributed to movement because, as Spencer claims, both men and "superior animals" are able to distinguish "living" from "merely moving" things by evaluating the "spontaneity of motion."[5] While birds or cattle browsing in the field were once alarmed by the presence of the railway, in contemporary times, claims Spencer, whenever a train passes, the same animals continue to graze, unruffled:

> Converse evidence is yielded by the behaviour of a dog mentioned by Mr. Darwin. Like others of his kind, and like superior animals generally, he was regardless of the swaying flowers and the leaves occasionally rustled by the summer breeze. But there happened to be on the lawn an opened parasol. From time to time the breeze stirred this; and when it did so, the dog growled fiercely and barked. Conscious, as his experiences had made him, that the familiar agency which he felt raising his own hair, sufficed also to move the leaves about, and that consequently their motion was not self-produced, he had not observed so large a thing as a parasol thus moved. Hence arose the idea of some living power—an intruder.[6]

Spencer's dog is even more rational than Darwin's (even if both authors refer to the same animal). The philosopher's canine is fully capable of deciphering the agency of movement and distinguishing the animate from the inanimate based on empirical observation. For the mental evolutionist, the parasol incident was simply a momentary "error," and even humans can temporarily err. Animation is then presented as an occasional lapse of our rational faculties; it signifies the reanimation of a primitive mentality, into which civilized subjects can, only under extraordinary circumstances, occasionally relapse.

I. Animation: Static and Dynamic

While Spencer refutes the animation of objects, his own description becomes more animated by the implementation of contextual details. The "flowers," the "leaves," the dog's "own hair"—none of which were present in Darwin's original description—here emerge, fusing reality with imagination. As Aby Warburg would later prove in his dissertation on Botticelli's representation of "accessories in motion," animation thrives by the flourishing of peripheral details following a state of epistemological suspension.

Darwin's animal example becomes further embellished in the interpretation offered by Tito Vignoli, the animal psychologist whose book *Myth and Science* (1880) was an influential source for the young Warburg.[7] Vignoli had apparently read about the dog and the parasol in Spencer, yet he enhances the biologist's description with new insights:

> For if the dog were frightened and agitated by the movement of the umbrella, or ran away, as Herbert Spencer tells us, from the stick which had hurt him while he was playing with it, it was because an unusual movement of pain produced by an object to which habit had rendered him indifferent, aroused in the animal the congenital sense of the intentional subjectivity of phenomena, and this is really the first stage of myth, and of its subsequent form of fetishism.[8]

For Vignoli animism is not an instantaneous lapse into the animal, as it was for Darwin; nor is it a momentary suspension of rational faculties, as it was for Spencer. Animism for the animal psychologist is an ongoing "myth-making" impetus, deeply embedded in the organic memory of the living being. For Vignoli, it is primarily pain that revives the experience of animation. While pricking the animal skin, the formerly unseen "stick" (the material signifier of the parasol) stirs the concentric circles of disquiet that engulf the organism from within.[9]

As an animal psychologist, Vignoli was particularly interested in the response of animals to inanimate objects in movement, which he investigated in a series of experiments that he describes in detail in *Myth and Science*. The scientist would, for example, insert an "unfamiliar object" which he would then move by a "simple arrangements of strings" inside the cages of "birds, rabbits, moles, and other animals"; or he would also

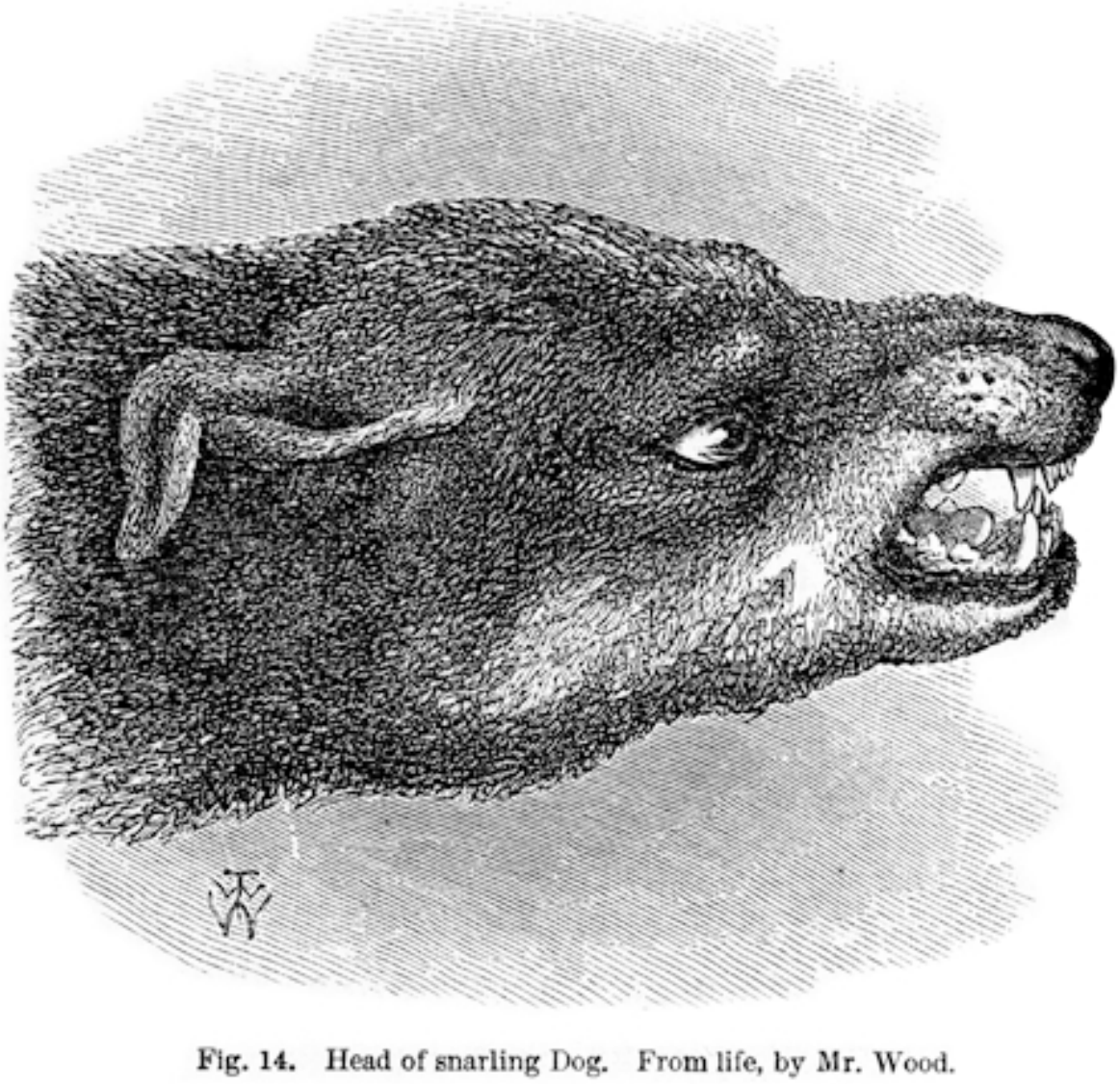


Fig. 14. Head of snarling Dog. From life, by Mr. Wood.

Figure 14, "Head of Snarling Dog. From life by Mr. Wood," from the book by Charles Darwin, The Expression of the Emotions in Men and Animals.

instruct one of his assistants to hide among the hedges and interrupt the path of a running horse by brandishing "a white handkerchief" attached on a stick to test how the animal would react.[10] Vignoli concluded that the animals' responses to the movement of objects correspond in two modes of animation or " *Belebung*"—the experience of infusing life into an object. The first animation Vignoli called *static*, and the second *dynamic*. In static animation, "the sentient animal subject remains tranquil." While the act of vivification has a tremendous impact on the animal's mind, the living creature shows no "external signs" of it. While extraordinarily intense, psychological response remains physically muted. In dynamic animation, Vignoli observes the reverse behavior: the animal expresses the overwhelming effect of the object "with violent gestures, cries, and other animated signs ... as if the inanimate object were another real animal."[11] Such would evidently be the case of the violent reaction of Darwin's dog to the swaying parasol. In the static mode, animation is an imperceptible trembling, while in the dynamic one, a violently arrested form. Unlike all previous authors, Vignoli makes clear that animation is not necessarily associated with external movement, but it can also be intensely present in inertia.

In his working notes and in his copy of the German translation of Vignoli's book, the art and cultural historian Aby Warburg underlines precisely the scientist's two types of animation.[12]Warburg essentially combined the static and dynamic aspects of animation in the singular gesture of the "pathos formula" or *"Pathosformel*"—an ancient pictorial device that transforms a vital bodily reaction

provoked by an impending mortal danger into a stylized pattern of expression. In Warburg, dynamic animation becomes essentially static by its form of expenditure. And it is in a similarly expressive gesture—albeit a textual one—performed by Warburg himself that we may witness the poignant conclusion to the episode of Darwin's growling dog and the parasol.

During his student days in Florence in the late 1880s, Warburg read Darwin extensively, as well as Vignoli. Among his lengthy notes on Darwin's *The Expression of Emotions in Men and Animals* there is one page on "dogs" (*Hunde*). Here, Warburg refers to a page of the English edition of Darwin's book that includes the engraving of "a snarling dog." (image above) The same cluster of transcriptions and comments includes references to Darwin's *Descent of Man* and Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*.[13]

II. Reanimations

Nearly thirty-five years later, in March 1923, while receiving treatment for his mental breakdown at Ludwig Binswanger's sanatorium in Kreuzlingen, Warburg composed an autobiographical fragment in preparation for his well-known lecture on Pueblo dance rituals. In a passage from this text that refers to mythical conceptions of causality, Warburg notes: "When a door screeches because of an air current, this excitation provokes in the savage or in the infant a sentiment of anxiety." And here, in a spontaneous association, the art historian exclaims: "The dog growls!" (*Der Hund knurrt*!)[14]

Three and a half decades after the art historian had first read Darwin and Vignoli, the dog's growl reverberates as a mental reflex—just as Darwin had originally perceived it in his own autobiographical memoir. As in Vignoli, animation for Warburg represents the reanimation of a phobic memory *engram*. As opposed to the liberating protraction experienced by the Pueblo dancers in their identification with nature, animation for Warburg and Vignoli is transformed into a phobic contraction, the memory of which is as painful as the original event.

From Warburg to Vignoli to Spencer and back to Darwin the same animal cry ricochets from one text to the next. The animated event becomes part of a historiographic legend that amplifies the original incident. All four of the authors associate the dog's growl with the idea of causality. But contrary to all of them, one might argue that the spasmodic reaction of the dog is motivated by the very inability to find a cause. The moving artifact can offer no answer to the question of agency, but it can further procreate this and other questions. The dog would have to attack and destroy the parasol, only to discover there is nothing behind its beckoning surface.

I would then finally argue that Darwin's dog is *not* barking at the parasol; instead, it is barking at itself out of frustration. The dog's hostile reaction stems from its inability to decipher the enigmatic object treading on its territory. The response of late nineteenth-century European thinkers to the phenomenon of animation is perhaps not much different. The reason that anthropologists and mental evolutionists, like Spencer and Darwin, appear so puzzled by the dog's cry is because they themselves are fundamentally perturbed by the enigmatic intrusion of animated artifacts within their own cultural ground. The dog's growl resonates with their own ambivalence towards a strangely familiar animistic mentality that, while omnipresent in both archaic and technologically advanced societies, they dismiss as irrational and animal-like.

Invented as an apparatus of climatic temperance, the parasol serves now as an ideogram of cultural intemperance. It oscillates not only by the breeze, but also by the psychological ambivalence of its users—no wonder that its slight swaying would end up causing such a stir.

III. You live and do me nothing?

Let us now consider the epigram "You live and do nothing to me" (*Du lebst und thust mir nichts*) used as a motto by Warburg on the first page of his unpublished manuscript on aesthetics, originally titled *Foundational Fragments for a Monistic Psychology of Art* and written between 1888 and 1903. In this highly disparate collection of over four-hundred and thirty aphorisms, one of the overarching themes is the shifting relation between the experiencing subject and the object through the mediation of the image.[15]

"You live and do nothing to me": a statement in which the art historian addresses an object as if it were a living being. But how much confidence can we bestow upon this "nothing"? Is it not the object's status as a living entity that enables it to do something? And does not the very act of talking to an inert thing empower it with the agency of hearing? Could the subject's denial then be a form of exorcism against all the things that objects *can* do, the harm that they are capable of inflicting? And would not this refutation ultimately provoke a response by that inert interlocutor that is condemned to say or do "nothing"?

Warburg's intellectual biographer Ernst Gombrich translates the epigram as "You live and do me no harm," which presupposes that the only thing that an object can do is "harm" rather than good (and which, most likely, was also Warburg's presupposition).[16] However, the phrase itself is much more ambiguous than this unequivocal assertion. Firstly, who is the person that speaks: a subject, an art historian, or the unconscious? Why does it appear only as the recipient—"to me" (*mir*)—of the object's tentative action? But then does the "You" (*Du*) refer to another subject or an object, and if it is an object, is it a

Animated sequence of a dog galloping. Photos by Eadweard Muybridge, first published in the book by the same author Animal Locomotion (1887).

physical artifact or a two-dimensional image? Or could it simply be anything that could eventually be perceived as "living"—a general perception of aliveness? But the most ambiguous word in this small sentence is the " *und*" in the middle of the original phrase, which can entirely change the meaning of the statement: are we to understand it as a merely paratactic "and" or as an apposite conjunction, such as "yet," "but," or "even though"?

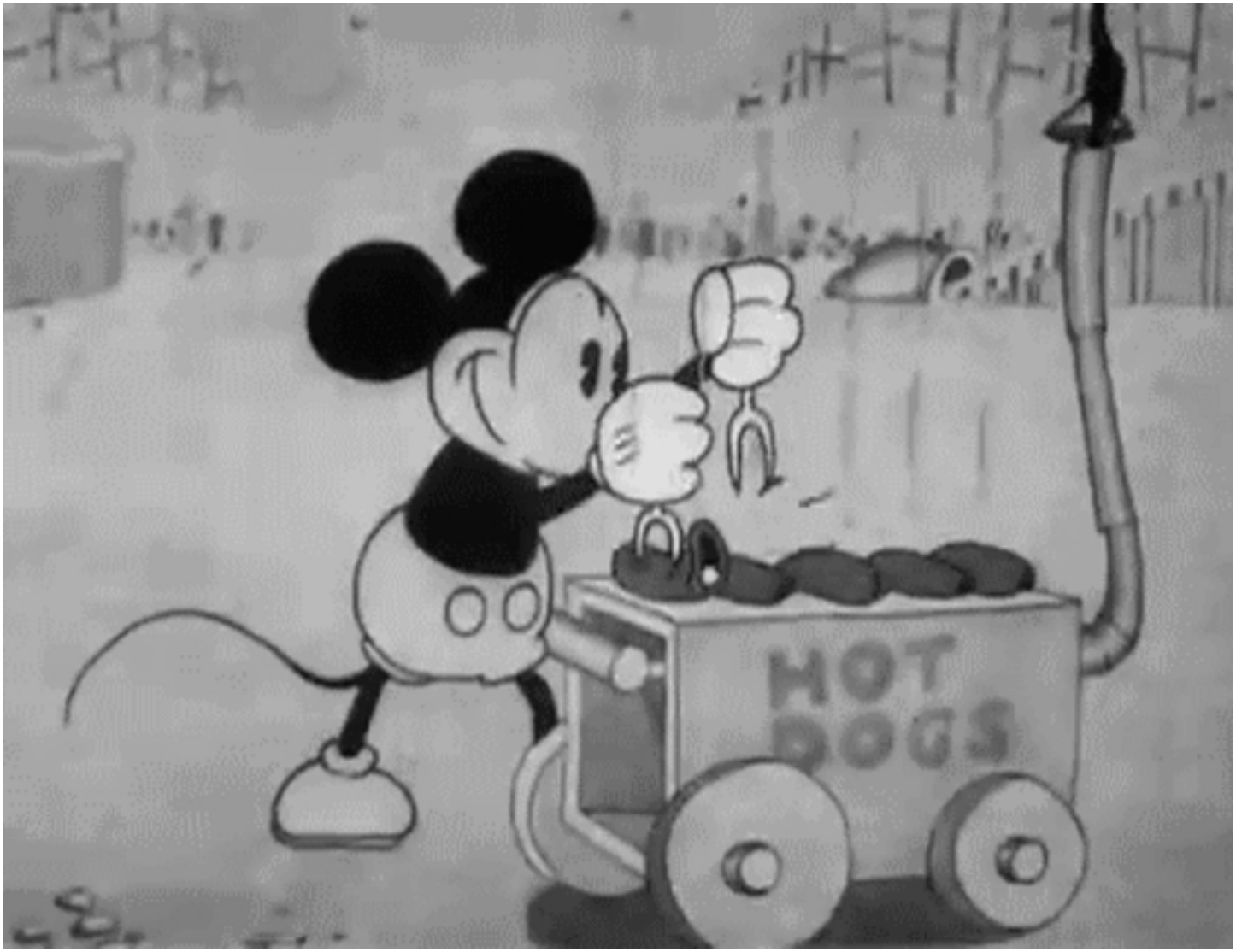
Either "You live and (because you live) you can do nothing to me," or "You live, yet despite the fact that you live you can do me nothing." In the first case, the phrase demonstrates our empathetic attachment to things that give a general semblance of life by appearing life-like. Following empathy theorists such Friedrich Theodor and Robert Vischer, whom Warburg was avidly reading at the time, humans have a tendency to empathize with things that look like them, such as objects with curved shapes that give a semblance of organic life. And yet, the object of organic form is merely "lively" but not actually living; therefore, even if it appears capable of "doing things," it can essentially do "nothing."

Following Vignoli, Warburg considers that in real life animals and humans perceive everything that looks alive or merely moving as "hostile" and potentially harmful.[17]

But not in art. Art (or at least Western art) allows us to have representations of "life in motion" (*Bewegtes Leben*) that are not threatening. The subject is pacified by encountering "living" things that are essentially harmless. The lively images of turn-of-the-century Western representations exorcise the animistic power that artifacts have in tribal cultures. The "you" (or *du*) of Warburg's motto could then entail all three possibilities of being a subject, an object, and an image; but it is ultimately the image that absorbs, inflects, or nullifies all previous agencies and mediates our communication with both subjects and objects.

"Here," adds Warburg in a note scribbled underneath his motto, "lies the idea of Distancing" (*Entfernung*).[18] By turning the "living" object into a lively image, our once empathetic identification with it transitions into a seemingly safe abstraction. Like most of his contemporary theories of empathy, Warburg's motto is a defensive response against the animistic properties of the object—a reassuring assertion that seeks to pacify the terror of agency in a category of being that is radically different from our own. Instead of being confronted with real life (*Leben*), the subject rejoices in the graceful liveliness (*Lebendigkeit*) of animated images. Cartoons then could be the antipode of Darwin's parasol.

But we could also read Warburg's phrase in reverse. What happens when an object does *not* live or does not seem to be living? What is the impact of images or artifacts that do not appear lively, but dead? Perhaps the art historian's statement demonstrates not only our sympathy with things that are seemingly alive, but also our fundamental dread of things that appear lifeless or inorganic. Western art knew for centuries that in order to obliterate the enigmatic power of an object, the trick was to infuse it with life, to strip the *thing* of all its deathly connotations. That



From the Walt Disney animation Mickey's follies, 1929.

is exactly the task that modern art and architecture, having absorbed the lesson of the primitive fetish, have forsaken. Modern art-industry has discovered that in order to keep the human subject under its spell it has to unleash the auratic power of death that the artifact innately carries with it.[19] In their illusive inertia and animated inorganicism, modern artifacts whisper vindictively in Warburg's ear: "I may not live, yet I can do *anything* I want to you!" "*I* can—*you* can:" the object now does the talking.

X

The article is based on material from my book *On the Animation of the Inorganic: Art, Architecture, and the Extension of Life*, forthcoming by University of Chicago Press in summer 2012.

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1
Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* , vol. 1 (1871; repr. New York: Appleton & Co., 1873), 64-5.

2
Ibid., 64.

3
See the entry "Animism" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* , 11th ed., 1910-1911, 53-5.

4
For the presence of dogs in Darwin's texts, see Kay Harel, "It's Dogged as Does It: A Biography of the Everpresent Canine in Charles Darwin's Days," *Southwest Review* 93, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 368-78.

5
Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology* , vol. 1 (1876; New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1897), 125-33.

6
Ibid., 127.

7
Tito Vignoli, *Myth and Science: An Essay* , (1880; New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1882). For the original Italian edition see *Mito e Scienzia* (Milan: Dumolard, 1879). For the contemporary German edition see *Mythus und Wissenshaft: eine Studie* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1880). For the young Warburg's reading of Vignoli see Ernst Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), 68-71.

8
Vignoli, *Myth and Science*, 162.

9
Though drawing more from Leibniz than Darwin, a century later Gilles Deleuze would again invoke the example of the "stick" and the dog: "a man has tiptoed up to the dog from behind, when he has raised the instrument in order to strike it then upon the dog's body." The impression of "the stick being raised up" makes "the animal always look about" anxiously; "it is the soul that watches out," with "the animal or animated state par excellence" being "disquiet." Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* , trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 56.

10
Vignoli, *Myth and Science*, 58-9 and 119.

11
Ibid., 57.

12
See the copy of Vignoli's *Mythus und Wissenshaft* in the library of the Warburg Institute, p. 50, and Warburg Institute Archive, London (WIA) Zettelkasten (ZK) No. 41 " *Aesthetik.*"

13
Figure 14, "Head of Snarling Dog. From life by Mr. Wood," in Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Men and Animals* (London: J. Murray, 1872; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 117. Citations refer to the 1965 edition. For Warburg's notes on Darwin's book, see Warburg Institute Archive (WIA), Zettelkasten (ZK) No. 1, *Ausdrukskunde* 001/000038-62.

14
Aby Warburg, "Reise Errinnerungen aus dem Gebiet der Pueblos," WIA III. 93.4, p. 26. A large section of the same passage is cited in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 217-18. An English translation of Warburg's draft has been published as "A Journey through the Pueblo Region," in Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (Cambridge, Mass: Zone, 2004), 310.

15
Aby Warburg, *Ae.(sthetik)*, WIA, Z ettelkasten (unnumbered) and "Grundlegende Bruchstücke zu einer monistischen Kunstpsychologie," WIA, III.43.1-3.

16
Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* , 71.

17
In one of his aesthetic aphorisms written on September 14, 1890, Warburg noted: "Two periods can be distinguished in man's perception of objects: 1. Anything alive is assumed to be hostile (*Alles Lebende wird als feindlich angenommen*) and capable of movement and pursuit, so that a position is taken up accordingly 2. Anything alive is examined for the limitation of its movement, law, force. It turns out that man is not only a beast of prey but also a slothful creature." See WIA, III.43.3, "Grundlegende Bruchstücke," pp. 39-40; also cited in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* , 76.

18
Warburg, "Grundlegende Bruchstücke," WIA, III.43.3, p. 1

19
For a different view of that polarity, see T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 235-36.

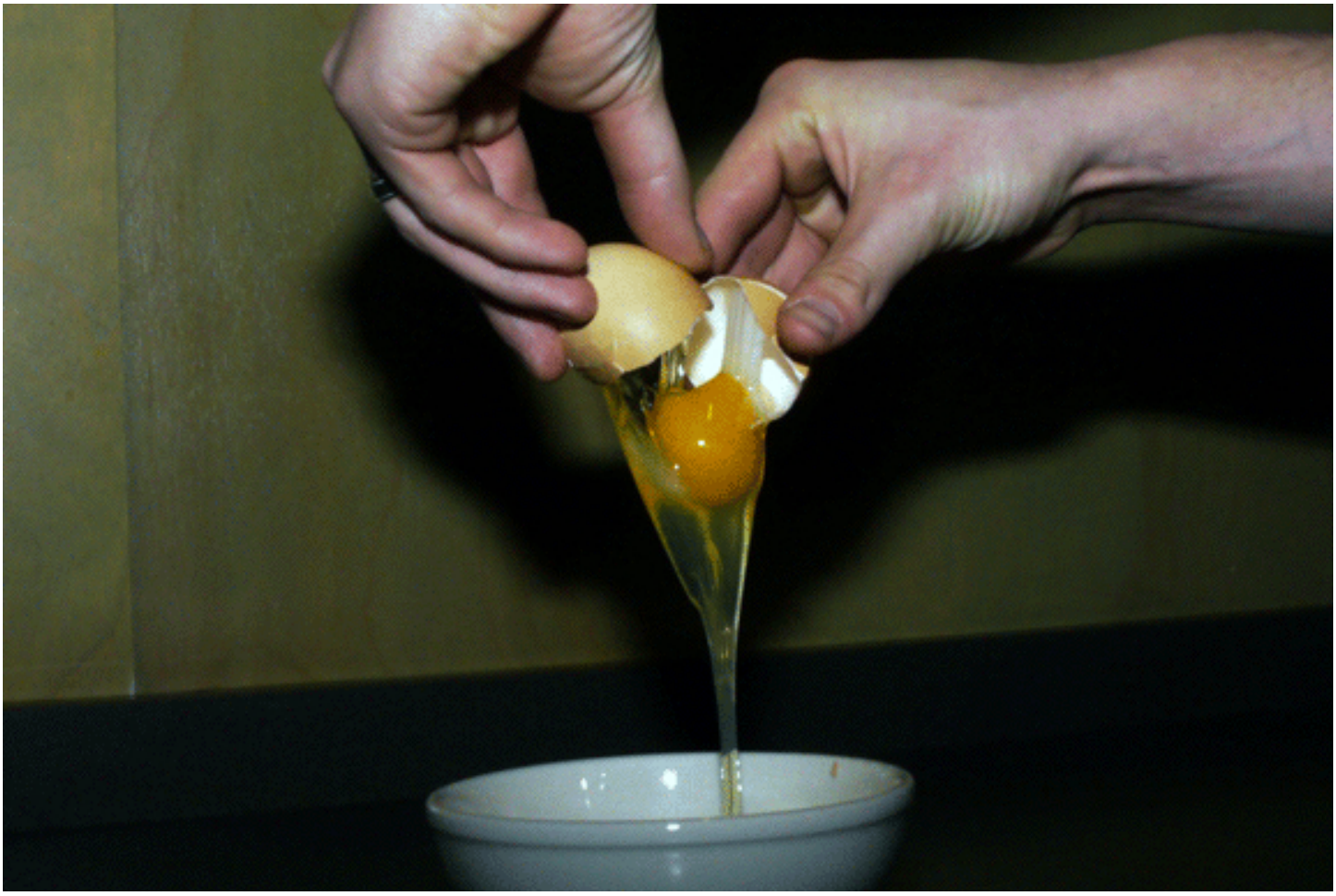
Diedrich Diederichsen

Animation, De-reification, and the New Charm of the Inanimate

1. The Grin and Smile of the Inanimate

My three-year-old nephew plays with toy cars and model trains just like I did fifty years ago when I was his age. I recently wanted to give him a present, and so, thrilled with nostalgic anticipation, I walked into the toy department at a large store for the first time in decades. I was truly baffled by what I saw there: there was not a single car, not a single locomotive, crane, truck, construction vehicle, sports car, or tractor without eyes, a nose, and a smiling mouth. These simpering objects moreover bore first names, and little stories about them were printed on the packaging. Now, everyone knows that children have been animist creatures for as long as the concept of animism has existed. They are the ideological complement of the so-called savages or the so-called primitive peoples, matching their animism. For only if we can ascribe an ultimately familiar form of humanity—that of children—to those peoples, can we at once also deny them full—which is to say, developed—humanity. They are like us, but different, and that is the principle proposition on which any culturalizing, any ideology that supports segregation by marking some as others, rests. Such ideology is particularly careful never to mention the absolutely Other, which for now abides in a select few (of the better) science-fiction novels—or among the "Old Ones" from H. P. Lovecraft's "Call of Cthulhu," among other stories, in their "blasphemous" ugliness.

My childhood also knew an animist zone peopled by teddy bears and other stuffed animals, but it was fringed, however, by a second zone of games and toys that gestured toward reality, towards the world of inanimate things that functioned rationally and could be controlled. I would almost say that the animate zone and the realistic zone (to use a tentative name) were interdependent. What was important about the toy cars and model trains in the realistic zone was that they referred to the concrete world of existence. They were hard, made of metal, designed, authentic, robust. Recognizing specific car brands from the street and being able to sort and categorize them was part of the point: these were *things*. Today, however, it seems that an overarching holistic sphere of *animae* fills the world of children and, to a degree, that of Harry Potter–reading, esoterica-believing adults. Animist toys have triumphed over the technological toys of the Fordist and industrialized world. The current generation of educators (and the culture industry that caters to them) twists Jean Piaget's maxim of infantile animism—namely, that the child animates things according to their function—into its opposite.[1] For the children Piaget observed, things did possess a soul and consciousness, but they actualized them solely for the action that corresponded to their special function: the wind knew that it must blow, the chair, that it must support me, and so forth. In contrast with this instrumental and Taylorist animism, today's animism holistically multiplies its esoteric parents.



Stereoscopic snapshots by 3Erd.

There is nothing new about teaching children about the world by animating things. What is new, however, is that the world of cranes, locomotives, and model planes now grins and talks at us. As far back as the 1920s, Paul Valéry had a presentiment, an eerie vision of a future world under the total rule of the culture and music industries, though he had in fact experienced the same vision as a child:

> I am reminded here of a fairy play that, as a child, I saw in a foreign theater. Or perhaps I only fancy I saw it. In the Sorcerer's palace the furniture spoke and sang, took a poetic and mischievous part in the action. A door opening set off the piping or solemn tones of a village band. If anyone sat down on a pouf, it would sigh politely. At a touch everything breathed forth a melody.

Valéry concluded the thought with a view to a public sphere that was, to his taste, over-animated by music and advertising (even in 1928): "I sincerely hope we are not moving toward such excesses in the magic of sound."[2]

Children no longer know what to do with this world. There is an old educational idea of confronting animals and anthropomorphic candidates for animation with a hostile technological world of hard matter—one that we need tools to come to grips with because songs and kind words won't do—and this idea no longer works. The pseudo-de-instrumentalized reason of the post-Fordist and post-industrial condition is meant to train "soft skills" and human-resources leadership techniques, but it doesn't always work out. On occasion, this attitude will fall into its other—into love.

The fifth Berlin Biennial featured a work precisely about a person's love for an object. The Norwegian artist Lars Laumann had built an installation that included a documentary about Eija Riitta-Berliner-Mauer. At fifty-seven years old, Riitta-Berliner-Mauer describes herself as "object-sexual" and objectophile. Objectophilia is distinct from fetishism, she claims, in that it is directed at things themselves rather than things as something else. As early as 1979, she had fallen in love with the Berlin Wall, and had soon married it. Both Riitta-Berliner-Mauer and her portraitist insisted on presenting her case as non-pathological, arguing that her sexual orientation was

simply unfamiliar to most people.[3]

One might think of my nephew and Ms. Riitta-Berliner-Mauer as opposing cases. In the first instance, objects must evince features signaling humanness—faces, mouths, voices—to be considered animate; in objectophilia, the object is sexy precisely because it is not human, not soft and full of liquids, but instead hard, hard, hard—though also a bit porous. But both cases are about objects coming to a new life in relation to their counterparties—subjects, people, *wetware*. Still, both are about subjects engaging with objects, whose new status is merely attributed to them by the former. In Jane Bennett's view, by contrast, the new charm of things is rooted in their being seen as things, which begins when they are no longer objects for subjects.[4] They then become available not only for animist animation and sexual desire, but also for a third relation: as objects of identification, as avenues toward what is ultimately a de-animation, a form of de-subjectivation or critical complication of subjectivation. Hito Steyerl may have had something like this in mind when she wrote in *e-flux journal*:

> Traditionally, emancipatory practice has been tied to a desire to become a subject. Emancipation was conceived as becoming a subject of history, of representation, or of politics. To become a subject carried with it the promise of autonomy, sovereignty, agency. To be a subject was good; to be an object was bad. But, as we all know, being a subject can be tricky. The subject is always already subjected. Though the position of the subject suggests a degree of control, its reality is rather one of being subjected to power relations. Nevertheless, generations of feminists—including myself—have strived to get rid of patriarchal objectification in order to become subjects. The feminist movement, until quite recently (and for a number of reasons), worked towards claiming autonomy and full subjecthood.
>
> But as the struggle to become a subject became mired in its own contradictions, a different possibility emerged. How about siding with the object for a change? Why not affirm it? Why *not* be a thing? An object without a subject? A thing among other things?[5]

In his currently much-debated novel *Dein Name*, Navid Kermani charts a literary path of such self-reification or self-objectivation.[6] Kermani, who is the narrator and protagonist of the novel, describes his life as it is shaped by a marriage in crisis; the everyday occupations of a journalist, literary writer, and academic, and his work in the public spotlight. In the course of the novel he drafts a book about dead people he knew, reads his grandfather's autobiography, and studies Jean Paul and Friedrich Hölderlin. The many names and terms Kermani invokes are used in constant alternation, and each describes only a function in relation to the respective settings in which he finds himself. In the novel, Kermani doesn't exist independently of these functions: he is the son, the father, the husband, the grandson, the friend from Cologne, Islam (whenever he participates in a public debate as the Muslim representative), the traveler, the user, the consumer, the son of Iranian immigrants, the poet, the scholar—the first-person pronoun appears only in meta-textual references to the "novel I am writing."

His novel is by no means an attempt to revive modernist literary techniques (such as the objective registering of events by the narrator) or to construct a polycentric multiplicity of perspectives. It is in the end always the same Navid Kermani the book is about. But he tries to turn himself into an object by denying that he has any primary essence and by describing himself as secondary and relational through and through, as someone who is something only for others. This effort to comprehend all the relations he maintains with others demonstrates, paradoxically, that he does in fact possess a quality that sets him apart from everyone else: he is the only one who can tie all these people together; he is a special node in a network of relations. And only the combination of these relations affords him a particular spot in the world. It is therefore also what furnishes the central maxim guiding the narrative project: to bring out the improbable connectedness linking the point I now find myself in to all other points in time and space.

A debate pitting Bruno Latour against the American philosopher and academic Graham Harman was recently published under the title *The Prince and the Wolf*.[7] Harman identifies as both a Latourian and a Heideggerian and is moreover considered a leading exponent of a new school of philosophy labeled "Speculative Realism." Despite considerable differences of opinion, this group, the so-called speculative realists (Graham Harman, Ray Brassier, Ian Hamilton Grant, et al) share one fundamental idea, which they derive from Quentin Meillassoux's book *After Finitude*: the rejection of "correlationism"—the term Meillassoux and his followers use to designate all those philosophical positions according to which the world and its objects can only be described in relation to a subject.[8] Meillassoux argues that, on the contrary, it is not impossible to grasp the thing in itself. As in Jane Bennett, what is at issue in this thinking is something like the self of the object; yet unlike in Bennett, the goal is not to merely think this plane or to observe it in contingent everyday experiences, but to place it at the center of a sustained epistemological inquiry.

Harman himself uses yet another label to describe his

work: "object-oriented philosophy," or "O.O.P." for short. This is where his thinking converges with Latour's, whose object-orientation is likewise one that leads to the things, even if to things in relations rather than things as such—yet in Latour's view these things are agents no less than other, animate or human, positions in the web of interconnections: whence his well-known idea that a "parliament of things" must be convened as a necessary extension of democracy. So Harman and Latour find themselves very much in agreement on this point. Where they disagree is the question of whether things—among which we count traditional and non-traditional things, which is to say, persons—possess qualities that are non-relational. At this point, Harman drives at a possible conjunction, as it were, between speculative realism in a wider sense and Latour's sociological project. Do things have qualities that exist outside their relations? Latour thinks the question is irrelevant; Harman offers examples, trying to describe relational things without relation or even defend a residual existence. Interestingly enough, most of his examples concern things one would traditionally call persons. Kermani, then, is ahead of Harman by not ascribing such qualities to himself; the objects of speculative realism, by contrast, which are out there or millions of years away, do in fact depend on existing outside relations: that is where the things that win a seat in parliament separate from those whose origin is in ancestral spheres, which, in Meillassoux's view, indicate that there must exist a sphere of things beyond the objects that exist only either, in correlationist fashion, for subjects or, in the Latourian manner, for other objects.

Here, I am interested in this matter insofar as it bears on art, literature, and politics. I harbor no ambition to resolve epistemological questions for epistemology's sake; they concern me only with a view to their implications for literary narrative and the artistic constitution of objects, e.g., in minimalism, the readymade, and psychedelia. In this regard, the following example has bothered me since my Latin classes. As everyone knows, the subject of Ovid's classical epic poem *The Metamorphoses* is none other than what modern vampire movies call shape-shifting. Entities of all kinds—gods, nymphs, satyrs, humans, birds, lions, dragons, statues, rivers, and celestial bodies—perpetually transform, in episode after episode, into different kinds of entities. The Ovidian narrative guarantees the permanent translatability of any mode of existence into any other, which is to say it is set in a Latourian world. But it also understands, first, that bridging the differences between these modes requires immense power (it takes a god to do it, which is to say that these differences are significant), and second, that it matters whether one exists as a river or a nymph or a chunk of marble. These entities would never sit down at a table with each other to establish a parliament; any particular form of existence amounts to a life sentence. By being forced to live as one or the other, the individual is condemned to a defined and enclosed sphere. So in the end Ovid's world is not a Latourian one.

What I always found profoundly unsettling, however, was something else: How could Ovid claim that a being that has changed form—a human who has become a stone, or a god who has turned into a bird—is still the same thing and must therefore be called by the same name? The time someone spent living as a flower and the time that same someone spent living as a woman are part of the same fate, and make sense within the horizon of that fate. That, apparently, is exactly the meaning of the principle or the concept of the narrative in general: building a relation, and indeed a relation that can even take the form of identity, between two completely different things. The stone and the woman are the same. It is tempting to assume that there is an eternal soul here, a spiritual object that exists beyond all objects and survives all forms. Yet we may also say that narrative is the name of a mode of continuity that permits the building of interconnections between dissimilar things, to the point where they are translated into, and identified with, each other. The entity in the narrative is composed of the narrated relations and is nothing outside these interconnections. And the latter survive even the translation, at which point two relations coincide. Not a single molecule remains when a woman is turned to stone, but her relation to her lover, her enemy, and the jealous goddess to whom she owes her metamorphosis persist through transformation. The relation survives thingness and personhood; it transposes both into the same world of possibilities.

My nephew, Eija Riitta-Berliner-Mauer, Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, Navid Kermani, Hito Steyerl, and Ovid: they all seem to contribute different nuances to the same sentiment. This sentiment seems to say, with regard to things, that they have changed and, with regard to *us* —whomever that includes—that we are no longer fundamentally different from them. We either turn them into persons or fall in love with them precisely because they are not persons; we want to be loved the way they are because we are sick of being loved as persons or because we are only loved the way things are anyway. And if the latter is at least done to us in an adequate manner, we experience something almost like the authenticity of a thing—almost as though we were a person. Or we cross over into a world beyond the distinction; whether there is a price to pay—that a thing can be distinguished only by reference to its relations—or instead a payoff—that things are finally free of their correlativity—remains to be seen.

But the question is perhaps not so much why this is happening—why things are fashionable, why sociality, personification, subjectivation, and individualization are suddenly applied to objects that heretofore existed on the other side of what seemed like a stable distinction. The question, it seems to me, is rather this: By overcoming the prejudices of anthropomorphism and biocentrism, have we indeed crossed another epistemic threshold on the path of intellectual progress? Or might this not be the revival of a very different philosophical fashion, one that was in style a hundred years ago? Is this the return of the

philosophy of life, of energy and the *élan vital*, the age of Nietzsche and Bergson, only with the difference that its central reference has turned by a hundred and eighty degrees: from life and its energy to thinglikeness and cosmic chill? On the level of cultural critique—though not necessarily on that of epistemology—we might then dare to draw a connection between the heyday of *Lebensphilosophie* between 1870 and 1930, at the height of industrialization, urban modernism, and Fordism, and the present era, in which the primacy of the idea of coldness and object-orientation seems to have become plausible under conditions of biopolitics and the exploitation and commercialization of aliveness. To pursue this connection, I will first go back in history to the situation around the beginning of the twentieth century, when thinkers used the concept of reification to try and get a critical handle on the relations between subjects and objects.

2. Reification and De-reification

The emergence of separate and separable things—the fact that a living relation becomes a thing, which classical critical theory calls reification—rests on a slightly different idea of thing and thinglikeness than the contemporary version I mentioned above. There, the goal was always to sketch a mental zone in which the different entities might coexist irrespective of their status with regard to a distinction that has become questionable. In the critique of reification, that zone of coexistence already exists; only it is located in an idealized past. The critique of reification argues that the capitalist mode of production generates a separation between humans and their products, such that the former can no longer recognize the latter as something they have produced and instead take them to be something utterly disconnected, to be things. This separation occurs on several levels: the level of the economy as well as the practical organization of labor, the commodity-form, the division of labor, and finally, commodity-fetishism. In pre-capitalist societies, whether real or imagined, this umbilical cord between producer and product had not yet been severed; there existed a connection between producer and product—but of course it was not embedded in a networked and multidirectional community; it knew only one line and direction. Nonetheless, we have critical theory on our side when we say that the moment of reification, the inception of an existence of the thing as thing by virtue of its separation from the one who produces it, marked the end of an earlier

coexistence, of a zone they jointly inhabited.

And not even the directionality of their relation follows of necessity from critical theory's critique of reification. It is Adorno and Horkheimer's famous argument, after all, that instrumental reason, the source of reification, begins with any purposive use of an object, which is to say, with the use of an object or thing that consists primarily in a relation not to that object but to another, third, virtual thing, the object of a plan that will exist in the future and that, we might say, is preferred to the primary object or thing in an "unfair" act.[9] That in fact sounds as though Adorno and Horkheimer already envisioned not just the human subject as alienated in the Marxist sense of the term—wandering through a forest of things that don't tell him that he made them all—but also, beyond such anthropocentrism, the object as an entity of equally complete emancipation that suffers damage from the instrumental employment of reason. This proto-Latourian component, of course, is lost as the *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* proceeds, and not entirely without reason; still, it seems important to point out that this version of the critique of reification observes injuries inflicted by reification not only upon the human subject, but also upon the things themselves.

The classical critique of reification stands in need of revision today, not so much because of its native anthropocentrism, but because capitalist production has changed, imposing a different sort of compulsory relation between humans, their products, and the effects of industrial production. Put simply, we might describe the current state of the capitalist logic of exploitation as one of de-reification rather than reification, the only constant being the commodity-form. In bemoaning the worker's alienation from her product, the classical critique of reification referred to a situation in which the laborer was utterly dependent on the decisions of others: her superiors and other representatives of those to whom she had sold her labor-power. This alienation was not entirely defined by its objective causes—Taylorism, the division of labor, surplus value, which ultimately amounted to no more than different modes of non-ownership, of non-control over the product the laborer produced. The sense of alienation also concerned the hierarchy of the workplace, the customary practices of large disciplinary units such as factories, major operations where all decisions were made elsewhere, by others, and in opaque fashion. To maintain a psychological balance under these Fordist-industrial labor conditions, the worker had to mentally travel: she had to dream. Fordist workers severed their laboring bodies from their dreaming minds, which drifted elsewhere while their hands, here, tightened screws and stamped sheet metal. This increased the distance between the objects they produced and the energies, desires, and fantasies they might have projected onto them, with which they might have appropriated them—for these energies were involved in scenes of fierce escapism set elsewhere. Such separation intensifies a disconnect that has long existed: the things are unrelated to their producers and their users. Thus, the world of manufactured things—the famous "second nature"—has the same status as the world of natural things: they are both unattainable.

We might ask, by way of a digression, whether the insistence in speculative realism that the thing in itself is within reach—or at least not beyond reach, that nature can be experienced as a wholly other "outside"—represents a circuitous attempt to undo the consequences of reification. It might be argued, after all, that reification shares a common historical origin with a reason that professes itself incapable of objective cognition of the thing in itself. We might say that the second nature, too, is a *grand dehors*, to use Quentin Meillassoux's term, or that the two do not in fact differ on this point. On the other hand, perhaps speculative realism is, quite to the contrary, an attempt to win full metaphysical (Heideggerian) honors for reification?

Yet in today's capitalism of immaterial labor, the capitalism that exploits knowledge and commercializes aliveness in the service industry, tourism, the beauty industry, and the mass-production of courteousness and subservience, the primary quality demanded of workers isn't technical skill or physical stamina; it is that they identify with their work and their workplace, that they be authentic. The persuasive presentation is more important than practical ability; being trumps application. This robs the wage-laborer of any place to which she might escape. Old-school alienation at least left room for the daydream. Now it has no place in the contemporary management of the self. In this regard, the old demand for the sublation of alienation has been met—but its realization has of course taken the wrong form, that of self-compulsion. We might also say that its symptom, industrial labor, has been abolished (or is approaching abolition); but its cause, the commodity-form, has not.

So what we experience today is the sublation of the old distance between reified labor and alienated laborer, but not by way of a reconciliation between living work and dead product: instead, the product has come to full life just as the worker has been transformed into the product itself. The latter is now human, alive, biological, sexual, and emotional. The worker is the object of her own subjective labor, which is nothing but her self, which is nothing but a product. This process traces a perverted dialectical logic of negative synthesis, or bad sublation.

This situation makes it seem appealing to efface the animate self altogether. That is because it has become far too much work to be a subject under neoliberal capitalism; as many critics (most prominently Alain Ehrenberg) note these days, the neoliberal subject is exhausted by its double function as responsible agent and object of the action.[10] So why not affirm the inanimate, be it in one's own self or in the beloved other? Why not choose a self without essence or history, as nothing but a conjunction of

relations in the here and now?

3. Thing and Cooperation: Psychedelia and Sexuality

There are two fields in which the struggles for liberation and emancipation of the past fifty years have reaped success (though often limited): on the one hand, the field of sexuality, gender politics, and sexual orientations; and on the other, what I would like to call psychedelia. Of special significance to both areas is the relation to the thing and to objecthood. In sexuality, affirming the scripted nature of sexual relations and being able to experience ourselves as objects without fearing that we therefore risk becoming objects in real life (to paraphrase Adorno's famous definition of love) is part of an expanded conception of freedom; in psychedelia, the aim is to perceive objects beyond their functional and instrumental contexts, to see them where, in Jane Bennett's words, they cease to be objects and begin to become things.

In psychedelia, where there is no unified discourse, the status of the object has remained more or less stable over the past fifty years. This status is characterized by a tension between, on the one hand, the psychedelic thing as a metaphysical thing in itself, and on the other, the psychedelic thing as a laughable commodity. Do we take hallucinogens to laugh ourselves silly about the world, or do we take them to finally get serious? By contrast, in the realm of sexuality the status of the object has undergone revision over the same time period. The original discourse of sexual liberation, as the passage from Hito Steyerl illustrates above, was about becoming a subject, about taking one's fate in one's own hands and representing oneself. Gradually, however, a new idea emerged, partly due to the influence of queer studies: true sexual freedom consists not so much in my realizing my desires, but rather in my ability to experience something that is not owed to the controlling, framing, and planning faculties of my subjectivity—but instead made possible by the assurance that no sexual script, however surprising, subjecting, or drastic it may be, has consequences for my social existence. The old freedom to do something that had heretofore been prohibited, to break the law or call it into question, is a very limited freedom, depending on one's constant control of the course of events, when losing such control is the point of the scriptedness of sexuality: it is the script that determines sexual lust, not the lusting ego that writes the script. Only if we can give ourselves over to the script—which includes objectification and reification (but they crucially do not need to be related to our personal practice outside the script)—and only if we are things and not things can we be free. It is only then that we have good sex.

In light of these considerations, it would indeed be undialectical and regressive to seriously imagine oneself as a thing utterly reducible to the network of its relations, entirely like a one-dimensional Facebook existence, without any locus of self-command: Is not the renunciation

of self-command perfectly meaningless and unappealing when there is none to begin with?[11] Being a thing works only when you are not *really* a thing, when you merely *embody* a thing. But what about the other side of this relation, the act of attaining, recognizing, touching the thing, the step into the great *dehors*—the psychedelic experience? How do we experience the thinglikeness of the thing, and how is it the basis of our own becoming things?

In this context, I would like to take a brief look at a concept of psychedelia that may be understood traditionally—that is, with regard to the use of certain hallucinogenic drugs—but also with regard to certain aesthetic experiences in movies, the visual arts, or music. In the classic psychedelic experience, after taking some LSD, peyote, mescaline, or even strong hashish, the user will often perceive an object thoroughly defined by its function in everyday life—let's say, a coffeepot—as suddenly severed from all context. Its function not only fades into the background but completely eludes reconstruction. The emptiness of the figure that emerges (or its plenitude) prompts incredulous laughter, or inspires a sense of being overwhelmed in a way that lends itself to religious interpretation. Sublime/ridiculous: this pure figure reminds us of the way we used to look at minimalist sculptures, but without someone nearby switching on the social conventions of how to look at art. The shape strikes us as part awe-inspiring, part moronic. A thing without relational qualities is not a thing; it is not even a glimpse of a Lacan-style unrepresentable Real. It is just very, very awkward.

But would not this thing without relations be exactly what Graham Harman fought for in his debate with Bruno Latour? This thing that, according to my slightly sophistic observation, is usually tied to a person, the speaker himself or another human being? Would not the thing without relations, after we have said farewell to the soul and other essences and substances, be the locus of the personal, or even the person—at least in the technical sense defined by network theory? Psychedelic cognition would then have grasped the thing without soul, or perhaps I should say, the soul of the thing—which must first be stripped of its relations and contexts. Our psychedelic responses to things are similar to our usual responses to other human beings in works of art and fiction: empathy, sarcasm, admiration.

In the heyday of psychedelia, of course, there were other interpretations. The most widespread construal at the time was the spiritual one. By becoming aware of the jug stripped of its function, we peer behind the veil of maya, seeing what is beyond the illusion of matter. Occasionally there would be phenomenological readings, variants of phenomenological reduction and the so-called *epokhé*—by cutting off the connections to the world of functions and instrumental applications, by subtracting them, one by one, from our sense perception, we attain an object we could never perceive as such with our senses (although, according to Husserl, we can calculate it, as it were). Psychedelia provides us with the result of this philosophical computation as sensory intuition.

Yet there is a third explanation that I have always liked best. Objects we engage with in our daily lives do not initially appear to us as functional things whose use value we realize when we employ them. They appear first and foremost as commodities that have exchange value. The internal relation between their exchange and use values—a relation neither of pure dominance nor one of adequacy or representation, but one that appears time and again as the frozen form of their genesis, of the history of their production—renders them the monstrous things Marx describes in the first chapter of *Das Kapital*. The psychedelic experience would then not just lift the veil of maya, it would also reverse the distortion generated by the false rationalization of exchange value; the poor commodity would stand in its pathetic nakedness before one who sees it while tripping, be it under the influence of hallucinogens or the pertinent art.

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno returns to the debate over reification that he initiated in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* twenty years earlier. He criticizes Lukács's theory of the reification for implying an aboriginal pre-capitalist purity, an extra-instrumental adequacy in the way humans engaged with things. Against such daydreaming, Adorno calls for the "primacy of the object," insisting on its non-identity with the rational terminology that instrumentalizes it.[12] "Not even as an idea can we conceive a subject that is not an object; but we can conceive an object that is not a subject."[13] Here Adorno, too, seems to take what we might call an anti-correlationist stance. In an essay on the reification debate, the philosopher Dirk Quadflieg proposes that we identify the sources of this turn in Adorno's thought in order to resolve a conflict that continues to occupy critical theory to this day.[14] On one side, there is Adorno's position, virtually aporetic in terms of political consequences; on the other, there are his younger theoretical descendants like Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, who discern the solution to the problem in strengthening the intersubjective aspect of the human-thing relation, hoping to find between subjects what will lift the individual subject's blindness. Yet such intersubjectivism can do entirely without things if need be; nothing but "systemic imperatives" (Habermas) prevents people from cooperation. By contrast, Adorno's source, a passage from Hegel's Jena manuscripts, declares that the thing is the precondition for cooperation; rendering oneself a thing for the other is explicitly described as the basis of cooperation and freedom.

We might conclude that the contemporary tendency in a wide range of fields to declare things to be (ghostly) beings and to call for their emancipation is a response to a contemporary capitalism of self-optimization, with its

imperative to produce a perfect self as a perfect thing. This response would roughly parallel the enthusiasm for vitality in the philosophy of a hundred years ago, when capitalism extracted surplus value through the exploitation of man's repeatable, external, materially based, physical-vital skills. The reified soul yearns to finally become a thing through and through, just as the exploited body sought to become pure physicality and energy. Of course, this tendency is also an attempt to salvage the thing as the embodiment of alterity, which we urgently need for the production of a self. The contemporary subject must permanently engender itself as an ostensible subject and yet a consumable—edible, we might say—and legible self; a contradiction it resolves by conceiving itself as a thing for other things and passively regaining its ability to cooperate outside the domain of the laws of the market—where the capitalist imperative of permanent activity rules supreme.

Yet the wish to be thinglike can also be read, finally, as an attempt to leave the commodity behind. Reification, after all, produces not things but commodities. Commodities are not things but rather undead entities, hence their notorious tendency to wink and wave, to draw attention to themselves. My nephew's model trains and toy cars are accordingly not animated things but commodities that do not conceal what they are. To regain the thing would mean to rid oneself of the commodity. To the extent that we ourselves become commodities, rather than merely living beneath their dictate, we then want to not just *attain* things, but to *become* things ourselves—or at least sleep with them.

X

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7
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11
One cannot but think in this context of the post-privacy movement, which not only misapprehends—reads literally—the longing to become a thing, a pure intersection of relations, but moreover politicizes it, declaring privacy to be obsolete.

12
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Michael Taussig

The Stories Things Tell And Why They Tell Them

> I never thought that a thing like a burned match, or a scrap of paper in the mud, or a fallen leaf, or a rusty worthless nail might have a soul. The Yorikke taught me otherwise.

—B. Traven, *The Death Ship*

1. It Is As If the Arrow Is Thinking

For seven months, Juan Downey lived in the Amazon forest with some Yanomami Indians. In 1979 he made a video called *The Laughing Alligator* about this experience. There are many stories in this movie, but to my mind the stories are secondary to the filmic quality of film, to rhythms of light and shade, flicker and sheen. The stories are secondary to the way the collage of images tells many stories simultaneously. And of course, there is always the face—the human face—and the nearly naked body, all filmed in loving close-up. In these sequences, sound is enormously important, all the more so when it is absent, as with the episode towards the end of the video where a young man binds a blue feather to the tail-end of an arrow braced tight against the smooth skin of his shirtless chest. The screen fills with the feather set into the shaft, twirled slowly in irregular stops and starts.

It is as if the arrow is thinking, inseparable as it is from the body as both tool and beauty. First the right hand moves back and forth along the naked thigh, back and forth, rolling fibers into a thread, which will be used to bind the feather to the arrow. The thigh is an anvil, a hard surface for rolling the fibers. Then the body becomes a vice, holding the shaft of the arrow tight in the axilla. Body and arrow are unified. Epitome of ease, the man sits on a low stool, his body the workshop of the world.

It is miraculous, this feather seemingly turning on its own, reflecting many shades of blue as the man slowly twirls the arrow while binding the feather to ensure smooth flight. You sense the arrow flying, taking you along with it. Everything seems so easy, unhurried, deft. Like God signing off on the creation of the world.

This is the methodical work of a magic at once technical and aesthetic, demonstrating Walter Benjamin's riff on Paul Valery's idea of the skilled artisan possessing a certain accord of soul, hand, and eye—that same accord that provides the basis for the storyteller as the artisan of experience.[1] The art of the storyteller that Benjamin saw as having its origin in the traveler and the artisan returning to his or her natal village is the same art that the

traveler Juan Downey makes about Indians for an audience in the metropole. And is not Downey an artisan too, an artisan with a clunky 1970s portable video camera that he takes into the forest? But in this case the power differentials—who is telling this story?—are continuously brought to the surface by self-mockery and good humor, as when the alligator of myth with fire in its belly is made to laugh and belch out its secret for the benefit of the Indians, who have tricked it into laughing. Thus does violence—the violence of the alligator, the violence of fire—pass into the realm of story, a story that makes us laugh too, revealing the close connection between laughter and violence, like the connection between the comfort and violence of fire itself.

Fire is certainly useful, especially for cooking the bones of the dead to a fine ash, which is mixed into beer and drunk by the survivors. What a way to go! Downey is now dead and in this movie he is on record as saying that he wants to be drunk like this too, to pass into the body of the Other as "funerary architecture."

So who is telling stories nowadays? And who is telling the story about stories? Is there in fact a Great Chain of Storytellers, despite Benjamin's claim that storytelling died away with the demise of craft and with the accelerated pace of life in the big city? He makes it seem as if the arrow has stopped thinking and has flown away. Can it not still be found where people work, not at binding feathers but where things, not people, assume the task of the storyteller?

Excerpt from the movie *Wages of Fear*, 1953, by Henri Georges Clouzot.

2. The Death Ship

Take mystery man B. Traven's 1927 account of a sailor on the Death Ship, a decrepit tramp steamer plowing the seven seas towards its rendezvous with death. Let us emphasize how Benjamin is as aware of the importance sailors play in storytelling as he is of the role of death in authorizing the storyteller. You get this in one swoop with the very title *The Death Ship.*

Publishers never knew the mysterious B. Traven other than as a post office box in Mexico City. There is a story that he was a German anarchist who escaped to Mexico after the Munich Soviet was routed in 1918. He identified with the plight of the Indians of lowland Chiapas on the Lacandon side, and in sturdy, laconic prose edged with humor, wrote stories about their lives during the Mexican Revolution. Sometimes it seems like he is one of them. Other times he seems like a figure in one of his novels, the seasoned revolutionary suspicious of all leaders, the Wobbly sympathizer who hung out with Sandino in Veracruz during the oil workers' strike, the one who advised burning all the municipal records. He saw the big picture in the detail, like the global market in the mahogany forests of the Lacandon where fifty years later another revolutionary movement began with the new Zapatistas.

Then in 1926, in the middle of writing these stories, he wrote *The Death Ship,* which has nothing to do with Mexico but concerns a droll US sailor at the end of WWI, stranded in Europe because he lost his passport and sailor's papers. Epitome of innocence with an endearing, almost childlike cunning (like a Brecht character or a figure in the fairytales Walter Benjamin wrote about in "The Storyteller"), this good man without papers, humble to a fault, can't help but bring out, to the point of humor, the mix of absurdity and inhumanity in the routines of the modern state, especially with respect to immigrants. Hunted down by the police of Belgium, then Holland, and then France, unable to take a job as a sailor for lack of papers, he is shunted from prison to prison, country to country. It is a farce. Does he complain? No. What he does is scratch his head in wonder as if on the planet Mars. He has become a thing amidst things.

Confined in a French prison, he is made to perform an absurdly tedious task. Month after month the prison authorities have him count and move things from one side of the room to the other and back again, forming little piles of 140 items each. What are these items? They are "very peculiar-looking nameless things stamped out of bright tinned sheet iron."[2] Nobody knows what they are. Some say they are parts of a dirigible to be used in the next war. Others say they are parts of a machine gun, while others say they are for submarines, tanks, or airplanes. Nobody suggests that they might be something useful to mankind. Keep counting.

It makes the people around him especially sore when he tells them he is American; he insinuates that because America saved Europe in WWI, they should help him, not imprison him. Then he realizes his error, tells them he is German, and they love him. This is especially true when he is imprisoned in Spain, the poorest of all the countries in which he is held captive, yet with the one with the most generous people.

Fishing off the wharf in Barcelona, our make-believe German is hypnotized at the offer of a job on a rusty tramp steamer that does not ask for papers. The water surrounding the ship is stained with rust and paint peeling off the hull. This is the Yorikke, the Death Ship. At once womb and tomb, it appears to have been painted white way back in the time of Abraham of Ur of the Chaldees, but it is now layered over with as many different colors as are known to exist.[3] Her masts are like "branches reaching out from a fantastic tree in North Dakota in November."[4] When he first sees her, our sailor drops his fishing line. He cannot believe his eyes and bursts out laughing. But then the ship starts to tremble, frightened of going out to sea. "I could not remember," says the sailor, "ever having seen

anything in the world that looked so dreadful and hopeless, and so utterly lost, as did the Yorikke. I shivered."[5]

The flag is barely a flag, pale, flimsy, and shredded. The ship's name can barely be made out on the hull, nor that of its home port. As for the name Yorikke? What sort of name is that? Just like Exxon Valdez, I guess. Or B. Traven. None of the sailors on the Yorikke have names, passports, or nationalities. Here too you become a thing amidst things.

It is our sailor's job to stoke the furnaces and work the winch on deck that hauls up the ash. For the life of him, he can't work the winch. It is antiquated, cumbersome, violent, and unpredictable—so long as you treat it as a thing without a soul, that is. If you lose control, it will smash you and itself, which essentially means crippling the ship. Another sailor shows him the trick to work the winch: "Pushing the lever in or pushing it out one thirty-second of an inch too far made all the difference." Our sailor resolves to "say Gracious Lady to her. Maybe if I consider that winch a person, then she will do it and work with papa."

"Hook on!"

"Heave up," came the call.

"Hello Duchess, come, let's do it together. Come, come, come, up with the shirt."[6]

So there is a lot of deceit here, deceit and conceit, or at least *a* conceit—a conceit that rolls over into a trick, as with a shaman's trick, which lies midway between sleight of hand and art. After all, what is a trick? (Take the wing of an airplane, for example.)

First the worker is out to seduce the machine, which, naturally, is now a she-being. Indeed a duchess. This intimates a love relationship, erotic at that. It is also as if an adult is cajoling a child, perhaps a sick child, with flattery and, naturally, a good deal of make-believe. In which case he is seducing the child for the child's sake, not necessarily his own.

In any event we need now to focus on the trick explained and demonstrated to the sailor, which is very technical, concerning that one thirty-second of an inch. This requires a skill as highly attuned as the man binding the blue feather. In both cases, control of the body is paramount. The ship plunges and heaves. The man braces his legs. He is stiff but flexible, his legs are like pylons but his arms have to be relaxed, striving to move but one thirty-second of an inch and no more.

We need to focus on the concept of the trick and its relation to magic and to things that tell stories.

We might think of a trick as something fraudulent. But then, as with a modern conjuror, fraud too requires an exact mimesis of nature. Think of the airplane wing. Think of the blue feather ensuring that the arrow flies straight. So we need to be thinking of the trick as something scientific and real, bearing a scrupulous understanding and manipulation of things, including the human body in relation to such things. But the trick slides, it seduces, it cajoles ("Hey Duchess!"), it knows and enjoys the leap beyond the thingness of things.

Is this why the sailor goes to such lengths to inform us that the winch is the same winch used by old man Noah? It belongs to pre-Flood times: "All the little goblins of those far-off times which were to be destroyed by the Flood had found refuge in the Yorikke, where they lived in all the corners and nooks. The worst of these little evil spirits had taken up quarters in this winch."[7] The stoke-hold is dimly illuminated by two heavy iron lamps—the same ones this ghostly ship carried when she was sailing to Carthage from Tyre in "the old days." You can see lamps like these in the British Museum. But those on the Yorikke use wicks made from rags in the engine room and are fueled by spent oil from the ship's engines, which of course did not exist in "the old days."

"The old days" is actually a talismanic phrase and phase that ushers in prehistory and hence the enchanted world in which things spoke to man. That is Schiller's understanding, and it goes along with what is felt to be a certain lack or loss of poetry and ritual in workaday life. But, you ask, has that really disappeared? Does enchantment not resurface under certain conditions, maybe extreme conditions, in this world of machines, corporate control, and consumerism that we call modernity?

Here you might do well to think of an intellectual and artistic strategy like the one I take from Benjamin, that of demystification *and* reenchantment—facilitated, in my mind, by humor, as we find with our sailor such that prehistory gushes forth in the present, altering the existing distinctions between land, animals, and people. This is the same "return of the repressed" I come across with much of South American shamanism at times of menstruation, pregnancy, sorcery, and sickness.

The sailor's story is an outstanding instance of this return of the repressed, and hence of what Benjamin was getting at with his idea of a *profane illumination*, at once mystical yet down to earth. When suggesting that the storyteller borrows his authority from death, Benjamin says that death sinks the story into nature—or, to be more exact, into natural history. Yet such is the movement inspired by death that the story lifts off from natural history into something supernatural. Benjamin writes: "The lower Leskov descends on the scale of created things, the more obviously does his way of viewing things approach the mystical."[8]

This must be why this ship of death tells stories to her crew. Nobody on the ship speaks the same language but they all tell stories to each other. Yet the best stories are the ones the ship tells. "The crew may leave a ship," points out B. Traven, but "their stories never leave."

> A story penetrates the whole ship and every part of it, the iron, the steel, the wood, all the holds, the coal-bunkers, the engine-hall, the stoke-hold, even the bilge. Out of these parts, full of hundreds and thousands of stories, tales and yarns, the ship tells the stories over again, with all the details and minor twists. She tells the stories to her best comrades—that is to the members of the crew. She tells the stories better and more exactly than they could ever be told in print.[9]

Let us pause for a moment and note the chronology of cause and effect here. It is the sailors who tell each other stories—stories about the ship or stimulated by the ship—and then the ship itself comes alive, hoards the stories, retells them, and makes up its own stories, which are presumably compounds of the stories of countless sailors told over millennia. It is thus storytelling that animates the ship and keeps it going—storytelling and the coal the stokers shovel into the furnaces.

Our sailor say that a ship can function fine with a crew but no skipper, while a ship will never sail with a skipper and no crew. This is why the ship always takes the side of the crew, he continues, because the crew cares for the ship while the skipper's responsibility is to the company that owns the ship.[10]

The crew lays claim to a different kind of possession than the owners and the officers. Theirs is an intimacy that comes about through their work. In *The Death Ship* it is not the sparkling sea and ravishing sunsets that feature in the sailor's tale, but labor below decks. The work-site is minutely described in a patient, detailed, down to earth way that, without fuss or fanfare, nevertheless has a visionary and mythical edge. Why is this? How can such opposed philosophies—materialist and spiritual—be not only reconciled but mutually reinforcing?

When introduced to his workspace below decks, where he will shovel coal into the furnace for fifteen hours a day, the sailor looks down into it and muses:

> The depth appeared to have no limit. At the bottom below I saw the underworld. It was a smoke-filled hell, brightened up by darting spears of reddish light which seemed to dash out of different holes and disappear as suddenly as they had come…As if he had been born in this thick smoke, the naked shape of a human being stepped into the center of the hall. He was black from a thick color coal dust which covered all of his body, and the sweat ran down him in streams, leaving glittering traces in the soot of his body. He stared motionless in the direction from which the reddish lights came flaring out. Now he moved heavily about and seized a long iron poker. He stepped a pace forward, bent over, and suddenly it looked as if he were swallowed up by the sea of flames which enwrapped him.[11]

The most dangerous problem concerns the grates in the furnace. Heavy metal bars, weighing between eighty and one hundred pounds, have to be placed on the grates to hold the coal. The problem is that because the grates are very old, the bars are liable slip out of place and cause the ship to lose way, unless the bars are retrieved from the white-hot coals. Heavy seas aggravate this situation because the Yorikke demands extra steam and the workspace bucks like a horse.

> The stoke-hold was ridiculously small. The space between the boilers and the back of the stoke-hold was considerably smaller than the length of the fire-channels beneath the boilers. Pulling out the poker from the furnace could not be done straight away, because the end of the poker hit the back of the stoke-hold long before the whole poker was out of the fire. Therefore the fireman had to go sideways and jerk the poker up and down to get it out. He had to do a real dance about the stoke-hold to handle the poker properly.[12]

He had to dance—to trick the fire.

In heavy weather the fireman was thrown about. He could fall forward face first onto the red-hot poker or backward onto white-hot slags. Other times he would lose his clogs (they had no real shoes or boots) and step onto a hill of embers.[13]

Yet—and yet!—the sailors take great pride in their work. As our sailor notes, "They feel as proud of a job well done as the Harvard guys feel when they have won a football game."[14] Only no one cheers for this soot-blackened gang.

It is hard to understand this pride in utterly degrading, exploitative work. And of all the degrading jobs on the Yorikke, two stand out: keeping a straight course and providing power, which I take to parallel telling a story and stoking coal. "Some day when you know its all over," a fellow worker explains to our sailor, "you wish to have the true satisfaction of having done at least something while you were alive on this crazy earth."

> What I mean is, to stand by the wheel, say, in the dirtiest weather hell and devils can think of and then, in such weather, keep the course straight. That is something which nothing in the whole world can be compared with. No honorable trade, no matter how thick and honey it may be, is like that. Damn my soul.[15]

And this applies especially to stoking the furnace, the lowest, dirtiest, and hardest job on the ship. It is stoking that provides the energy that pushes the boat forwards and makes it obedient to the man at the wheel. Maybe it's a shame that a good sailor has to shovel coal, but "it has to be done to keep the can going and somebody has to do it," continues the fellow worker. "It gets to be fun!" To throw six hundred shovels of coal and do it fine even in heavy weather "so that the fire stares at you in admiration, you feel so happy you just could go and kiss that mountain of coal."[16]

Well, that is one way of looking at the situation, and it coexists with a loony sense of reality—operatic yet serious—as the gods rear up, especially Imperator Caesar Augustus, to whom our sailor pays mock obeisance: "Don't you worry, you will always have gladiators." *Happy?*, asks our sailor. "I am the happiest man on earth to have the honor to fight and die for you, you god imperator."[17] Other times it is Imperator Capitalism. The idols have returned.

The fire stares back in admiration. The stoker prays to the grate-bars not to fall. The Yorikke teaches our sailor a big lesson for which he is grateful: "to see the soul in apparently lifeless objects."

> Before I shipped on the Yorikke I never thought that a thing like a burned match, or a scrap of paper in the mud, or a fallen leaf, or a rusty worthless nail might have a soul. The Yorikke taught me otherwise. Since then life for me has become a thousand times richer, even without a motor car or a radio. No more can I ever feel alone. I feel I am a tiny part of the universe.[18]

The extremity of work creates an animistic world. How and why this happens is, as they say, another story, an old, old story, a fairy tale made of the merging of the ancient world of the great Flood with the sickness that is the modern world. When Benjamin cites Valéry on the coordination of hand, soul, and eye required by craft, he refers to the same world discovered by the sailors on the Death Ship. The sailors are not taken in by loyalty to the factory or to the system. Instead, they come to see work and the materials of their work in terms of justice to the qualities of things, to what has been called "the parliament of things" unknown or exploited by current modes of production.[19] It is the extremity of their situation which leads to this discovery, just as shamans and great storytellers find their measure in death, and humor.

The "liberating magic which the fairy tale has at its disposal does not bring nature into play in a mythical way, but points to its complicity with liberated man," writes Benjamin.[20] But it would be hard to call our sailor "a liberated man." He is not liberated when he shovels coal sixteen hours a day, shoeless and starving. He is not liberated when his ship sinks, leaving him, like Ishmael, adrift in the storming sea. It is his pal who is liberated, if that's the word, floating in the water alongside him, liberated through death, eventually finding that one place to which you can go where they don't ask for your papers or passport. Our sailor, however, is left in the midst of the great nothingness that is the empty sea, once again a thing amidst things, like he was in the French prison counting pieces of tin. "The storyteller," concludes Benjamin, "he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story."[21] That is certainly true today, for the few who even get the time to tell a story, let alone experience one.

Yet to put it this way overlooks the brio—the animation—at work in every line of this tale. For what seems truly at stake is not only the exploitation of people and things but the conviction that the product of labor belongs to the worker, not the capitalist—"belongs" not so much as property but as something engaged with, for it is the worker who understands work, not the bosses, and it is the worker who keeps the infrastructure of the world going—keeps the ship on a straight course with a good head of steam regardless of official papers.

And this is why things are animated aboard the Death Ship.

Excerpts from the film *Wages of Fear*, 1953, by Henri Georges Clouzot.

3. Wages of Fear

Things come alive in the 1953 film *The Wages of Fear*, the title of which takes us once more into the world of wage labor. Here it is not a death ship but a death truck that is the focus of attention, as four men drive two trucks laden with dynamite over mountainous roads in a Latin American country to extinguish a fire in an oil well. As the unrelenting tension keeps us on the edge of our seats, many things come alive, especially the tires of the trucks, tires that so frequently fill the screen that they deserve to be listed in the credits as *dramatis personae.*

I say tires but what I recall most vividly is a single tire, a generic tire, filling out the screen with its tireness, the Platonic form of a tire. Much has been made of the viewer's body entering into the cinema screen, and just as

much has been made of the opposite, of the image entering into the viewer's body. This film is all that, in spades. Your body strains to assist those mighty tires that inch by inch make their way across inhospitable terrain. Your body bends sideways to imitate a circle, urging on the tire which, believe it or not, you feel communicating with you. Blood pounds in your ears, in synch with the staccato rhythms of the powerful diesel motor of the truck. "There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language," writes Benjamin. (314) You become the tire. You become the truck. Of course, the fear-ridden drivers covered with sweat are important too. They are alive too. But they have become rigid with fear. Their thoughts, like ours, are on their terrifying cargo, which has the capacity to come alive in one terrible explosion. This is why your imagination finds succor in the repeated close-ups that fill the screen. The dark treads in the tire are like nests, homes away from home. A silly thought of mine, no doubt, yet the treads offer some comfort, a certain grip on life, hence more life, more alive, more movie, than anything else in the film.

It is contagious, this transformation of mere things, such as tires, into living beings. All things start to tremble and metamorphose into animate being. Now the truck shows its true colors. It is no longer a mere truck—if it ever was—but a prehistoric monster with its haunting siren and lights hanging off it like globular eyes that not only see but devour. Always we are surrounded by the throbbing of that diesel motor. When one of the trucks has to drive on a wooden ramp jutting out over the edge of the mountain, which the men have constructed so the truck can navigate around a sharp curve, the wooden beams come to life. They bend. They snap. And down below we espy the lazy river that spells certain death. Those tires again. They spin. They skid. The truck shakes itself in one galvanic movement. A cable supporting the ramp catches on a hook at the back of the truck. Agonizingly, as the truck inches up the ramp, the wire slowly bends, the metal hook bends, you hear it scream, the truck advances slower and slower, the metal hook bends some more and, as in spring time, nature comes alive, only its not daffodils blossoming but nature raw in tooth and claw that comes tearing out at us as the whole damn ramp disintegrates in front of our eyes. Suddenly freed, the wire snakes up high into the air, a whiplash into the sky

Along with the trucks carrying dynamite, the other great animated being in the film is oil. (Here we become ever so mindful that this entire movie can be seen as an allegory of the satanic promise of oil.) Oil comes to life when one of the two trucks explodes, leaving a gaping hole in the oil pipeline running alongside the road. Slowly and quietly, out pours thick, black, sluggish oil. It is alive too, is it not? It contains the aliveness that shall drive the machines of the West. It is alive in the sinister way it oozes relentlessly like black treacle to fill up the crater in the road caused by the explosion. (What do I mean here, calling it sinister? Only humans are sinister, right?) This lake of oil is alive, a rising force that cannot be stopped. It rises higher and higher.

It is already three feet high, black and glistening. It is alive as it claims like an invisible hand the man walking backwards through it while he guides the driver of the remaining truck through the black lake. The driver cannot stop. Forces more alive than he compel him to gun the engine. The truck passes over the body of the man walking backwards, who has slipped and fallen into the oil. He surfaces, twisted like an old log, only the whites of his eyes showing in a body completely covered with sticky black oil. He has become a thing. The oil is alive. Not he. Only his eyes are alive. Not he. He has become natural history.

Now the truck is truly medieval, like the Death Ship, a creature emergent from ancient history and passing, as Benjamin would have it, into natural history on its way to elsewhere. The radiator is enormous, like the portcullis of a castle gate or the gaping mouth of a giant sea clam. Across the massive front bumper is the word EXPLOSIVES in huge letters, no longer a word but a sign. The hulking machine comes at us, a ghost ship advancing across a lake of oil. The thingest of things, trucks and oil, have becomes mythical beings. The driver cannot stop. The oil is rising too fast. Where are those tires now, those more alive than alive tires, covered with oil, deep in oil, finding their way across the hidden bottom of the crater? Here they are, emerging from the lake of oil, shaking themselves free as the body of the man crushed by those very same tires rolls sluggishly like an old log adrift on the oil.

4. Story and Trick

Shamans make mighty conjurors, we are told. They can throw voices, talk to spirits, travel the skies, and walk the depths of the ocean. They can extract strange objects from their bodies or from the bodies of the sick, and just as easily make those objects disappear. In the twinkling of an eye. They can cure and they can kill through seeing, and such seeing, so I am told, in many parts of South America, is a bodily substance—like the down of newborn birds in Tierra del Fuego—that fills the body of the shaman. Seeing is a substance and such seeing changes fate. Seeing is the feathers of newborn birds. What does "is" mean here?

Note that conjuring is not distinct from these supernatural acts but is the same thing. The trick turns out to be more than a deceit. More like a mimesis imitating natural forces, a play for the spirits. We saw that with the winch on the Death Ship.

Conjuring questions being. The nature of being is suspended. It is not clear what is object, what is a subject.

With its love of rapid disappearances and appearances out of nowhere, with its turning of insides into outsides and vice versa, shamanic conjuring helps us understand a little better how this theater of being presents being as the

transformation of being into the beingness of transforming forms. That is animism. Anything but constant.

Stories and films can do this too, as with a blue feather, a stoker on a death ship, and men ready to take on any risk for money as in *The Wages of Fear*. Things come alive in a continuous, if staggered, series of transformations, as happens of course with work, and with the coordination of hand, soul, and eye. Benjamin wrote that this coordination was the essence of craft, including the craft of making a story—as I have tried to do here.

X

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1
Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 107-–08.

2
B. Traven, *The Death Ship* (1934; repr. Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991), 79.

3
Ibid., 106.

4
Ibid., 107.

5
Ibid., 112.

6
Ibid., 172–73.

7
Ibid., 173.

8
Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 106.

9
Traven, *The Death Ship*, 131.

10
Marx and Engels fought bitterly with the anarchists under Bakunin and preferred to destroy the First International (1864-–1876) rather than let the anarchists take over. Engels famously asked something to the effect of, “How can you have a ship without a captain?” or “When there’s a storm, how can the ship get through without a captain?” B. Traven supplies the answer, as did the pirates in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who we read about, sailors who rebelled against their captains. What ships provide otherwise is ruthless, authoritarian discipline. Read Melville.

11
Traven, *The Death Ship*, 176-–77.

12
Ibid., 191.

13
Ibid.

14
Ibid., 202.

15
Ibid., 265.

16
Ibid., 267.

17
Ibid., 183.

18
Ibid., 207.

19
It might seem that because the work is so inhuman, the things of the workplace become human—or, if not human, at least animated, especially with respect to their ability to tell stories. On the Death Ship, beleaguered sailors speak with beleaguered machinery, slaves together on a journey to the end of time.

20
Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 102.

21
Ibid., 108–09.

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.

[figure fullpage 2012_06_Jacobs-Capitalism-Slavery.jpg
Ken Jacobs, *Capitalism: Slavery*, 2006. Film still from video projection, color, silent, 3 min,
transferred to DVD.]

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 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.

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

Vincent Monnikendam, Mother Dao, the Turtlelike (Moeder Dao, de schildpadgelijkende), 1995. Film, 35 mm, color, sound, 88 min, transferred to DVD.

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, 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

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

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.

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

IV.

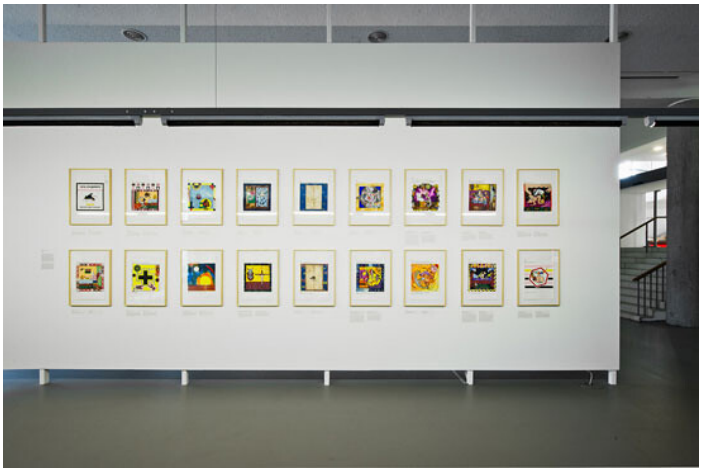
There are usually two additional things I mention when presenting the next part of the exhibition. One concerns the Western history of the concept of the "soul." It was only in medieval scholastic theology that the soul was imagined as something firmly situated in the interior of a subject, and hence 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



Installation view of Roee Rosen's "Vladimir's Night" by Maxim Komar-Myshkin, 2011/2012. Gouaches and text on paper.

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 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."

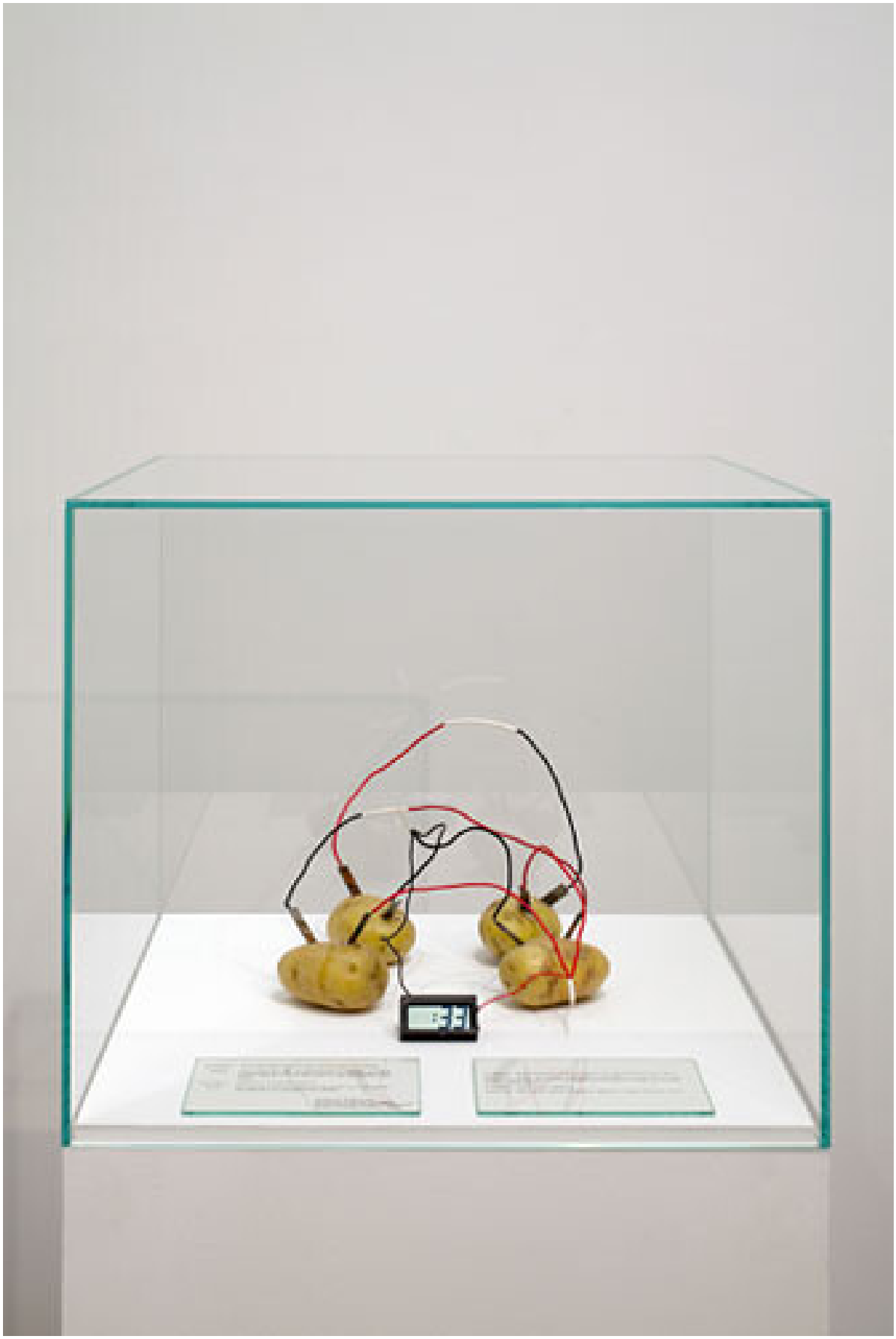
Tylor and his contemporaries had successfully exported this animism—and the neglected social dimension of relationality for which it stands—to the spatio-temporal outside of an imaginary archaic past whose remnants could be found among contemporary primitives, the common name for non-modern irrational 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



Victor Grippo, Tiempo, 2da. versión, 1991. Potatoes, zinc and copper electrodes, electric wire, digital clock, painted wooden base, glass vitrine and text.

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.

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.

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.

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 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.

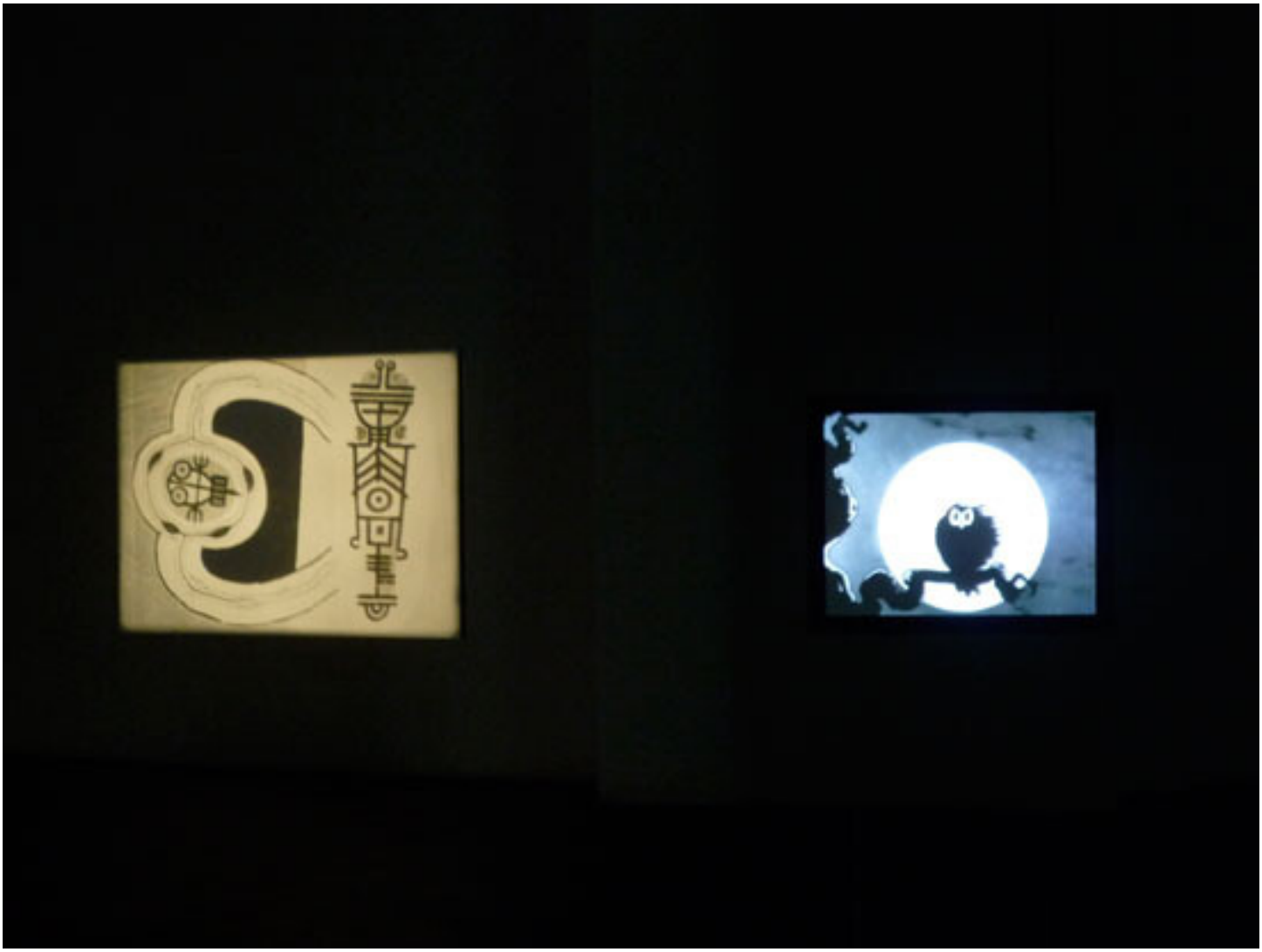
VIII.

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



Installation view of Len Lye's film, Tusalava, 1929, and Walt Disney, The Skeleton Dance, 1929, from the series "Silly Symphonies." Photo: Arwed Messmer.

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 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.

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.

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.

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

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"

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

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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Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato

Assemblages: Félix Guattari and Machinic Animism

Today, it seems interesting to me to go back to what I would call an animist conception of subjectivity, if need be through neurotic phenomena, religious rituals, or aesthetic phenomena. How does subjectivity locate on the side of the subject and on the side of the object? How can it simultaneously singularize an individual, a group of individuals, and also be assembled to space, architecture and all other cosmic assemblages?

—Félix Guattari

1. Animism and Psychosis

Jean Claude Polack: A body, whatever it is, can defend its limit; it can refuse a particle from the outside, whatever it is.

Among psychotic people, and notably among schizophrenics, this practically daily commerce with particles of the self or perhaps with non-living bodies, or bodies outside the self, does not pose a problem at all. It's like a natural exercise. And if you don't understand it, a schizophrenic might think of you as a bonehead: "Oh really, you don't get it?"

Maurizio Lazzarato: That is what you prove in your work in the clinic.

Jean Claude Polack: Yes, of course. There is a certain very particular "animist" sensibility that one could call delirium. Of course it is a delirium by our standards; it is something that cuts psychotics off from a social reality that is completely dominated by language—that is, from social relations—thus effectively separating them from the world. But this brings them closer to the other world from which we are totally cut off. It is for this reason that Félix maintained this laudatory view of animism—a praise of animism. And obviously this leads us to speak about art. For Félix, art was the strongest means of putting something such as the Chaosmos into practice.

Barbara Glowczewski: It has been an obsession throughout the history of thought to define what is natural and what is not, to the point where people think that if there is no spoken language, then we are dealing with something necessarily animal. Thus people have forbade children who grow up without speech to continue to express themselves with signs, including deaf people. For 100 years the Vatican forbade the use of sign language, even though it is a language par excellence. It is not

animal. It is constructed and thus defines a form of culture among the deaf. On this question of what is human, throughout occidental history we have always categorized gestural movement as animal even though it can be very coded—and this is true also for dance and for all bodily practices. And it became true for all the peoples that we encountered during colonization. We assumed that their languages were not languages because they contained "animal" sounds. This is what the first anthropological texts are about. It was unthinkable that languages could exist that were not Latinate. For early anthropologists, where there was no writing, there was no syntax. But these languages proved themselves to be very rich. Even today there are nearly eight thousand languages in the world and six thousand of them are spoken only by aboriginals, meaning by peoples without a state.

The trace is the only proof we have that an action took place. So it's the truth par excellence. We are beyond any symbolic system, beyond a system of positions between signifier and signified. We are in the truth of action. Obviously there are a thousand ways to interpret it, but the fact is that the aboriginals read the earth through its traces. This constitutes their culture: reading the trace like a detective, searching for clues. So when Deleuze spoke about becoming animal in the way he developed the idea with Guattari, he meant it in this sense of sitting on watch. It's not only the predation—the fact of trying to catch prey or to be aware of not being caught. It's also about knowing how to read traces.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: What interests me is the possibility of reintroducing the past of the subject, which doesn't have to be idealistic, but a materialistic theory of the subject—the subject as a material subject. This way of thinking about animism is similar to that of the native Amazonians, a people I know well. They believe that the human and non-human share a common base in humanity, whereas we believe that they share a common base in non-humanity. We believe, for example, that what people have in common with animals is material: a body. Among the native myths always begin with a time when every living being was human. But in the end the aim is to explain how certain beings stopped being human. These beings left humanity to become animals or objects. With our myths, it's exactly the opposite. In the beginning we were all animals or pure material. Certain of us then became humanized. So we have the heroic tales of humanity conquering nature, which is an alterity from the point of view of culture: culture as modern soul, something that distinguishes us from the rest of creation. Whereas among the Amazon Indians, it's exactly the opposite. In their view, we are all in the world. Humans merely have a particular materiality. What makes us human as such is our body, not our soul. Our soul is the most common thing in the world. Everything is animated, you see: animism.

In animism, the soul is the seat of otherness. It is what connects us, brings us together with the rest of the world. It is precisely through the soul that we are connected, that we speak to each other, literally, whereas distinction comes through the body. You have to create a body. This is very important in the world of the Amazon Indians. All the techniques used to form a body: adornment, makeup, tattoos, incision, painting—all of this is to make a body that is different enough from the general base of humanity or soul, which raises the possibility that all entities in the world can communicate.

Erik Alliez: For Félix, the notions of nature and culture, while reuniting and growing together, take away the essential. And the essential is the signifier that can only think in machinic terms. It is here that spiritualization is relieved by deterritorialism, and this deterritorialism is necessarily machinic. But what I want to say is that to enter the world of Félix is to accept in the beginning, as in the middle, that one does not really know what either animism or the machinic is.

After the late sixties, his discovery of Hjelmslev is a constant leitmotif. There is no real distinction between content and expression. We have to think in terms of the substance of expression. The fluctuation of signs is like the fluctuation of material things. "I want to imagine"—I quote from memory—"a molecular passage through signs." If we aren't Hjelmslev specialists, the only way to grasp his ideas is to understand that if there is no real distinction between expression and content, and if we have to think in terms of the substance of expression, we are literally in an animist world. Suddenly, that was it, that was really the way Félix functioned. He understood the explicit echoes, if you like, in *A Thousand Plateaus,* and this is really the thing for Félix. The idea that is most real is the place, where the most abstract and the most concrete come together. Immediately we are there (in this constellation). That means that if there is no real distinction between expression and content, we are in a semiotics of intensities. And surely *the* fundamental category of Félix is the idea of an a-signifying semiotics. From that point, you also understand how he can both frontally attack the animist structure and totally disengage himself from any kind of structuralist formalism, while establishing the concept of the machinic.

2. Beyond Occidental Subjects

Jean-Jacques Lebel: In this scene the participants are living the other part of the Self, the free psyche (one can say the unconscious, Gilles and Félix's mechanic unconsciousness). Here a ritual action—being a collective engagement of enunciation, like a happening or the game of Kadabriski shown here—permits the others, speaking in the Nietzschean sense, to merge, to express themselves freely and not to be held off or sedated. But to display oneself and then: tiredness, repose, and a return to the other half of the Self. It is a schizophrenic exercise. It shows artists, characters, humans trying to use their

bodies as a living laboratory. That means that their ideas and beliefs, their discourse, language, and activity are not constructed through a pre-established ideology, but through a sensory experience of the real.

3. The Right to Madness, or, The Clinic of La Borde

Erik Alliez: That is *La Borde*! It is a domain of experimentation. It means that we should not play with words, but take them seriously. It means that experimentation brings an entire politics into play. And this policy of taking words seriously comes back to dealing with the signifier. The people in the film are in a bad condition that is probably getting worse. Signifiers won't heal them, that's for sure. Because in the best-case scenario we can produce a totally formalized interpretation of a symptomatic causality. But they, what did they do? Nothing! Because they lack the capacity for thinking. They're not just neurotic, they're real psychotics.

Peter Pelbart: *La Borde* was a polyphonic laboratory. And it's true: someone who suffers from psychosis is completely deterritorialized from the subject, immediately. In other words, the subjectivities and the subjectivations have absolutely nothing to do with the identity of the subject before us. As if this allows all sorts of entities from elsewhere to proliferate.

Jean Claude Polack: Within deterritorialism, what allows you to see clearly is not a mode of identification, but rather a mode of palpable experience, a pathic mode. As the phenomenologists say, there are these "becoming others": "becoming machinic," "becoming animal," "becoming imperceptible." These becomings do not involve a fusion but rather a gradient exchange, an exchange between subjectivity and other parcels of nature. Maybe that is what can be called world subjectivity. That does not mean that everything is globalized and the same, but it says that you can find there, in this process, the possibility evoked by the philosophers: that man and nature are not two opposing poles, one against the other in conflict. It is maybe in this vein that Marx said: we have to vanquish nature, to overcome nature, allow mastery of the possible. And there is another way to think of it, along the lines of Félix's ecologism. His three ecologies say that no, there is also a sort of permanent exchange, the capacity of making micro- and macro-cosmic experience of nature in its different aspects: mineral, vegetal, animal, and so forth. So this has something to do with animism, and if this permanent exchange is possible, then this interaction is possible. That's not really a term Félix uses, but if it is possible, it is possible in all directions. That means you have to accord to trees the capacity to do something to us, to work on us. We have to accord to animals the capacity to delude us, to modify us, to seduce us, to conquer us.

Peter Pelbart: When this pathic non-discursive logic exists, we are connected with something else. There are these mental objects that Félix speaks about. He says that in part Freud discovered them, but enclosed them immediately inside the oedipal triangle and submitted them to the structural logic and despotism of signification, and all this has to be re-liberated. And when it is liberated, it makes a sort of ungovernable profusion. It proliferates everywhere and populates the world in another way. I guess it creates other possible worlds.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: If I understand what you're saying, and if I understand Guattari, the first thing to do is to cut off the relation between the subject and the human. Thus subjectivity is not a synonym of humanity. The subject is a thing, the human is another thing. The subject is an objective function that one can find deposited on the surface of everything. It is not a kind of special object—the subject is a way to describe the action of a thing. That is how it is for Amazonians. For them, the subject is a way to describe the behavior and attitude of things, just as for us, objectivation is a way to describe things in this sense. We imagine science being scientific when it is able to empty the world of all intentionality. The scientific description of the world is a world where everything is describable in terms of material interaction between two particles. For Amazonian societies it is exactly the contrary. The question always is *who* and never *what*. Because all things have intention—generally very bad intention. It is the theory of great suspicion, greater than the suspicion of Nietzsche or Bourdieu … So there are more subjects than humans. Subjectivity is a fusion of multiplicity, not of unity. It produces not a unity of consciousness or a function of integration. It is a function of dispersion. Subjectivity is not a transcendental synthesis but rather—to use someone else's words—a disjunctive synthesis. And for me this is animism. It's a world which at its root is anti-monotheistic. It opposes everything that belongs to monotheism, meaning mono-atropism, mono-subjectivism, and the idea that ONE is the form that being must assume in order to be of valuable.

4. Animism and Resistance

Suely Rolnik: If one thinks about an animist or a postcolonial or precolonial subjectivity, one is not centered on a "self" and can no longer talk about a subject, because the idea of the subject means a modern subject governed by identitarian principles and reduced to such potentials. But if we activate other capacities of the body and of subjectivity during processes of subjectivation, this is no longer anthropocentric nor logocentric, and we cannot talk about an object and a subject. In his early writings, Freud said that life is a kind of "germinative plasm." One can translate that differently and say that "germinative plasm" means that life is basically the power of differentiation, the power of creation. This capacity is what allows us to invent and think reality, to

Installation view of Assemblages. Three channel video work by Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato.

continuously find ways in which life can take shape and actualize itself and fight the reactive forces that impede this process. It is exactly this ability that existed in many cultures that have been repressed by Western Europe,

which include of course all indigenous cultures of Africa and Latin America, as well as the Hasidic Jewish culture before the inquisition, meaning the main thread of Jewish philosophy in Jewish Hasidic culture. Even though there are different lines of thought here, we should follow Spinoza and remove the idea of a monotheistic and transcendental God, and restore our ability to think in and look through immanence. All of these cultures had this capacity. African cultures were suppressed by three centuries of slavery, indigenous cultures have been basically destroyed, and the Mediterranean Jewish culture was destroyed during the three centuries of Inquisition in Spain and Portugal. So from a visible and macropolitcal point of view there is the repression and censorship of these cultures, and from a micropolitical point of view there is an inhibition of potentialities and of vital power, an inhibition of experiencing the world through affect, an inhibition of accessing sensation in order to put thought at the service of the process of actualization. All this remains under repression. I call this kind of repression colonial repression. I think about this problem from a micropolitical point of view and I think that Félix has helped tremendously to make this connection. Perhaps he is the philosopher who has helped us most because he was both an activist philosopher and clinician. So the problem is then to activate this power and capacity in ourselves.

Animism is a mode of apprehending the world, a mode of conducting existence and thought. This ethics of thought is a fundamental task of thought, from an ethical, political, clinical, and aesthetic perspective in life. This is what colonialism represses par excellence, thus resistance occurs on the micropolitical plane.

Rosangela Costa Araujo: Capoeira and candomble mutually comprehend each other. Capoeira was considered the armed resistance wing of candomble, and candomble as capoeira's invisible hand. This is because, in the social imaginary of the time, capoeiristas also possessed the magic power of casting spells. When we work with Capoeira Angola, the challenge is to historically situate its roots in an Africa that is not the one brought into existence by slavery. We thus work with free men and women as our referents. When we reinvent this Africa, we search for African myths that allow us to compose a new history. Capoeira's process of formation is a process of autonomization. Autonomy depends on the recognition of different or opposite natures. These ancestral practices of resistance bring people back to the sacred, through the return to the body. It is inside the body that God lives, not outside. For the African peoples, God is inside the body, and it manifests with different Orishas, with energies that everyone carries with their own ancestral heritage.

Sueley Rolnik: African traditions developed in Brazil for five centuries and still exist today. If we think of the trance rituals, it is said that in the trance we receive the "entities," the Orishas, the deities. But everybody has several deities, the main deity and six others in hierarchical order. Through initiation we meet them gradually, one after the other. Everyone's Orisha—mine is called Oshosi—is a bundle of singular power. In these modes of subjectivation, what I articulate is how to give body and substance to the affects of the world that pass through me. What I express is not myself but a collective assemblage of enunciation, which is sensed through my body and which creates friction between sensations and my potentialites. And so what I express does not come from an individual enunciation. It always comes from a collective assemblage of enunciation. And that's why what I express brings forth this collective assemblage, and as such it has an effective power of contamination, of contagion, and of gathering those who share the same environment, empowering them to express themselves from this singular starting point, from this collective assemblage of enunciation.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: For me, anthropology is in fact the theory—to sound a bit like Trotsky—the theory of a permanent decolonization. A permanent decolonization of thought. That is anthropology for me. It is not a question of decolonizing society, but of decolonizing thought. How to decolonize thought? And how to do it permanently? Because thinking is constantly recolonized and reterritorialized. I have always thought that the notion of "a society against the state" is a profound notion and it has to be deepened. And this goes along with the idea of a society without interiority. This means that, finally, interiority is the state. I still like the wordplay: "the state is the self." Thus a society without a state is a society without the self, without interiority in this sense. This is animism, the idea that the subject is outside. It is everywhere. And that society is not a guard, that the state is neither guarding nor a guard, meaning that the society does not coincide with the state. That is the idea against the state. Against the state means a society without interiority, which only recognizes itself while being outside of itself. This is the idea of a society without a state. What does it mean to live in a society without a state, against the state? We don't have any idea. You have to live there to see how things happen in a world without a state. In a society that is not only lacking the state but, as Clastres thought, is against the state because it is constituted precisely on the absence of the state. Not because of the lack of a state, but upon the absence of the state, so that the state cannot come into existence. And animism has to do with that. Animism is the ontology of societies against the state.

X

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Rane Willerslev

Laughing at the Spirits in North Siberia: Is Animism Being Taken too Seriously?

In social anthropology, we have seen a development away from studies of the so-called old animism, in the traditional sense of E. B. Tylor,[1] toward what Graham Harvey has referred to as "the new animism."[2] Central to the approaches of new animism researchers is a rejection of previous scholarly attempts to identify animism as either metaphoric—a projection of human society onto nature as in the sociological tradition of Emile Durkheim[3]—or as some sort of imaginary delusion, a manifestation of "primitive" man's inability to distinguish dreams from reality, as in the evolutionary tradition of Tylor. Instead, the scholars concerned—including Philippe Descola,[4] Nurit Bird-David, [5] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, [6] Tim Ingold,[7] Morten A. Pedersen [8] Aparecida Vilaça,[9] and Carlos Fausto[10]—each in their own way seek to take animism seriously by upending the primacy of Western metaphysics over indigenous understandings and following the lead of the animists themselves in what they say about spirits, souls, and the like. By "taking seriously," I simply mean taking seriously what the indigenous people themselves take seriously, which the old studies of animism certainly did not.

In my book *Soul Hunters*,[11] I pushed in the same direction, arguing along phenomenological lines that animist cosmology is essentially practical, intimately bound up with indigenous peoples' ongoing engagement with their environment. Accordingly, animism is nothing like a formally abstracted philosophy about the workings of the world or a symbolic representation of human society. Instead, it is largely pragmatic and down-to-earth, restricted to particular contexts of relational activity, such as the mimetic encounter between hunter and prey.

This take on animism certainly has its advantages. First, it reverses the ontological priorities of anthropological analysis by holding that everyday practical life is the crucial foundation upon which so-called higher activities of thinking or cosmological abstraction are firmly premised. In addition, it allows us to analyze animist beliefs in a way that is compatible with the indigenous peoples' own accounts, which tend to be based on hands-on experiences with animals and things rather than on abstract theoretical contemplation. In other words, by going down this phenomenological path we would, for the first time, be able to take seriously the attitudes and beliefs that indigenous peoples have about the nature of such beings as spirits, souls, and animal persons and their relationships with them.

However, while it may at first appear to require no further comment, I want to question the empirical grounds on which anthropologists claim that the indigenous peoples take their own animist beliefs seriously. We may ask whether the new animist studies are overstating the seriousness of the indigenous peoples' own attitudes toward their spirited worlds. It is exactly here that we begin to glimpse the problem that motivates my writing this article. I am no longer convinced that seriousness *as*

such lies at the heart of animism. Quite the contrary, it seems to me that underlying animistic cosmologies is a force of laughter, an ironic distance, a making fun of the spirits which suggests that indigenous animism is not to be taken very seriously at all.[12] I think that we are facing a fundamental yet quite neglected problem here, and I will begin to explore it by drawing attention to a somewhat puzzling episode from my own fieldwork among the Yukaghirs, who are a small group of indigenous hunters living in northeastern Siberia.

Bear killed by the Yukaghir people, Siberia. Image courtesy of the author.

Laughing at the Spirits

I should explain that, as with most other arctic and sub-arctic indigenous peoples, the bear is of particular significance for the Yukaghirs. Not because its meat is important in their subsistence economy—they live mainly from hunting the moose—but because the bear is believed to be loaded with an unsurpassed spiritual potency. As Ingold has stated with regard to the attitude of circumpolar peoples in general toward the bear, "Every individual bear ranks in his own right as being on a par with the animal masters, indeed he may [...] *be* [equivalent with] a master" (emphasis in original).[13] The fact that the bear, of all the animals, is singled out as especially powerful is perhaps most clearly reflected in the elaborate ritual treatment of its carcass after it has been killed. Hunters generally try to disguise the killing as an unfortunate accident for which they are not to be blamed. They will bow their heads in humility before the dead animal and say, "Grandfather, who did this to you? A Russian [or a Sakha, a neighboring people] killed you." Before removing its skin, they will blindfold it or poke its eyes out while croaking like a raven. This will persuade the bear that it was a bird that blinded it. Moreover, while skinning the bear they will say, "Grandfather, you must feel warm. Let us take off your coat." Having removed its flesh, the hunters then deposit its bones on a raised platform, as the Yukaghirs used to do with an honored deceased relative. If the ritual is violated, all sorts of terrible misfortunes are said to be triggered. Yukaghir myths are replete with stories about hunters who fail to obey the ritual prescriptions and lose their hunting prowess as a result, so that the entire camp starves to death.[14] Likewise, other narratives describe how a disobedient

hunter is violently killed by a relative of the dead bear that seeks bloody revenge for its "murder."[15] It is because of these strict rules of etiquette governing the bear hunt that the following observation came as a complete surprise to me.

I was out hunting together with two Yukaghirs, an elderly and a younger hunter, and they had succeeded in killing a brown bear. While the elderly hunter was poking out its eyes with his knife and croaking like a raven as custom prescribes, the younger one, who was standing a few meters away, shouted to the bear: "Grandfather, don't be fooled, it is a man, Vasili Afanasivich, who killed you and is now blinding you!" At first the elderly hunter doing the butchering stood stock-still as if he were in shock, but then he looked at his younger partner and they both began laughing ecstatically as if the whole ritual were a big joke. Then the elderly hunter said to the younger one, "Stop fooling around and go make a platform for the grandfather's bones." However, he sounded by no means disturbed. Quite the opposite, in fact: he was still laughing while giving the order. The only really disturbed person was me, who saw the episode as posing a serious threat to my entire research agenda, which was to take animism seriously. The hunter's joke suggested that underlying the Yukaghir animistic cosmology was a force of laughter, of ironic distance, of making fun of the spirits. How could I take the spirits seriously as an anthropologist when the Yukaghirs themselves did not?

I experienced several incidents of this kind which, I must now admit, I left out of my books on Yukaghir animism, as they posed a real danger to my theoretical agenda of taking indigenous animism seriously. One time, for example, an old hunting leader was making an offering to his helping-spirit, which is customary before an upcoming hunt. However, while throwing tobacco, tea, and vodka into the fire, he shouted, "Give me prey, you bitch!" Everyone present doubled up with laugher. Similarly, a group of hunters once took a small plastic doll, bought in the local village shop, and started feeding it fat and blood. While bowing their heads before the doll, which to everyone's mind was obviously a false idol with no spiritual dispositions whatsoever, they exclaimed sarcastically, "*Khoziain* [Russian "spirit-master"] needs feeding." Direct questioning about such apparent breaches of etiquette often proved fruitless. One hunter simply replied, "We are just having fun," while another came up with a slightly more elaborate answer, "We make jokes about *Khoziain* because we are his friends. Without laughter, there will be no luck. Laughing is compulsory to the game of hunting."

Animism and False Consciousness

So what conclusion should we draw from this? Should we say that the Yukaghirs have lost faith in their ancient animist ideology as a result of the longstanding Russian and Soviet impact on their modes of thinking, with the implication that their joking about the spirits reflects a growing lack of belief in them? I don't think so. Instead, I turn to Slavoj Zižek for inspiration. Ideology, in its conventional Marxist sense, Zižek asserts, "consists in the very fact that the people 'do not know what they are doing,' that they have a false representation of the social reality to which they belong."[16] Clearly, this does not apply to the Yukaghirs, as they maintain an ironic distance from their official animist rhetoric and its requirements of treating the spirits with extreme respect. Indeed, it is precisely the discordance between this prescribed ceremonial rhetoric of marked respect and the hunters' practices of deception and manipulation that the jokes expose and that make them funny. Even so, after a good laugh, the hunters always insist on toeing the line, and they continue to behave according to the prescribed rules of ritual conduct. Thus, the formula proposed by Zižek for the workings of ideology in the cynical and hyper-self-reflexive milieu of postmodernism seems to fit the Yukaghirs as well: "They know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it."[17] The Yukaghirs, therefore, are not really naıve animists in the sense suggested by both the "old" and the "new" animist scholars, who assume that indigenous peoples blindly believe in the authority of the spirits. Rather, they know very well that in conducting their ritual activities they are following an illusion. Still, they do not renounce it. But if the Yukaghirs are no hapless victims of false consciousness, but are rather fully aware of the disparity between the rhetoric of spiritual authority and actual practices toward spiritual entities, then we must ask what the importance of such a gap is. In addressing this question, we need to turn to the key principle governing the Yukaghir hunting economy, the principle of "sharing."

The Dead End of Sharing

In many respects, the Yukaghir distribution of resources reflects a traditional hunter-gatherer economic model of sharing, in that they run a "demand sharing" principle.[18] People are expected to make claims on other people's possessions, and those who possess more than they can immediately consume or use are expected to give it up without expectation of repayment. This principle of sharing applies to virtually everything, from trade goods, such as cigarettes and fuel, to knowledge about how to hunt, but it applies most forcefully to the distribution of meat: "I eat, you eat. I have nothing, you have nothing, we all share of one pot," the Yukaghirs say [figure 3].[19] The important point for my argument, however, is that Yukaghir hunters engage with the nonhuman world of animal spirits in much the same way as they engage with other humans, namely, through the principle of demand sharing. In the forest, hunters will ask—even demand—that spiritual owners share their stock of prey. They will also address the spirits of the rivers and places

The sharing of meat. Image courtesy of the author.

where they hunt, saying, "Grandfather, your children are hungry and poor. Feed us as you have fed us before!" In this sense, their animist cosmology could be interpreted as an integrated system, an "all-embracing cosmic principle based in sharing" in which the forest is akin to a "parent" who gives its human "children" food in overabundance, without expecting anything in return, as has been suggested for hunter-gatherer peoples more generally by Bird-David.[20] The trouble is that in proposing this argument, Bird-David assumes that the official rhetoric of these hunter-gatherers faithfully corresponds to their activity of hunting. But this is not so—if it were, we would have aligned the Yukaghir with something akin to a "death wish,"[21] for surely a community that hunts simply by waiting for the forest to "feed" them, without making any effort to control their prey, would not survive long.

What this points to, then, is that the Yukaghirs' rhetoric about the forest being a "generous parent" is not meant to be taken too seriously. Rather, it is a sophisticated means of spirit manipulation, which is an inherent, even necessary, part of Yukaghir hunting animism. This becomes evident when we realize that a paradox is built into the moral economy of sharing, which makes it risky—lethal, in fact—to take the principle of unconditional giving at face value.

We have already seen that in a sharing economy people have the right to demand that those who possess goods beyond their immediate needs give them up. With regard to the hunter-spirit relationship, this means that as long as an animal spirit possesses prey in plenty, the hunter is entitled to demand that the spirit share its animal resources with him, and the spirit is obliged to comply with the hunter's demand. However, if the wealth divide between the two agencies becomes displaced, their respective roles as donor and recipient will be inverted, and the spirit will now be entitled to demand that the hunter share his resources with it, a claim it will assert by striking him with sickness and death. What this points to is that the condition of truly radical sharing with animal spirits is ultimately unsustainable and indeed self-destructive, as it sooner or later ends with the roles of donor and recipient being reversed such that the human hunters fall prey to the spirits of their animal prey. The hunters' response is to transform the sharing relationship with the spirits into a "play of dirty tricks" (Russian *pákostit'*), which effectively means turning the hunt into a game of "sexual seduction" by inducing in the animal spirit an illusion of a lustful play [figure 4].[22] The feelings of

Yukaghir hunter. Image courtesy of the author.

sexual lust evoked in the spirit lead the prey animal to run toward the hunter and "give itself up" to him in the expectation of experiencing a climax of sexual excitement, which is the point at which the hunter shoots it dead. However, after the killing, the animal spirit will realize that what it took to be lustful play was in fact a brutal murder, and it will seek revenge accordingly. The hunter, therefore, must cover up the fact that he was the one responsible for the animal's death. I have already described this procedure in relation to the bear ritual, where hunters will seek, by means of various tactics of displacement and substitution, to direct the anger of the animal spirit against non-Yukaghirs, humans and nonhumans alike. As a result, the hunter himself will not appear to have taken anything from the spirit, at least not formally, and no sharing relation was therefore ever established between the two. This in turn rules out the spirit's right to demand the hunter's soul. In this way, hunters seek to maximize benefit at the spirit's expense, while avoiding the risk of falling into the position of potential donor. This corresponds in effect to what Marshall Sahlins has called "theft," which he characterizes as "the attempt to get something for nothing," and which he argues to be "the most impersonal sort of exchange [that] ranges through various degrees of cunning, guile, stealth, and violence."[23]

Not Taking Animism Too Seriously

By way of conclusion, I want to make clear that I do not mean to suggest that through joking, hunters question the reality of the existence of spirits. Rather, their joking reveals that they do not take the authority of the spirits as seriously as they usually say they do or as their mythology tells them to. Joking and other types of ridiculing discourses about spirits play a prominent role in the everyday life of hunters, but not because they entail resistance to or subversion of the dominant cosmological values of the sharing economy. Virtually all Yukaghirs ascribe to the spirit world and the demand sharing principle, and they regard both as immutable and morally just. However—and this is the key point—they are well aware that this system must never become total. For the Yukaghirs, this would stand for "death," as it would give the spirits the moral right to consume them in a series of divine predatory attacks. To avoid this, hunters must constantly steer a difficult course between two moral realities, transcending the official animist rhetoric of

Moose killed by the Yukaghirs. Image courtesy of the author.

respect and sharing through equally animistic forms of theft, seduction, and deception. In this, the ongoing ridiculing of the spirits plays a key role, for it reminds hunters not to take the complex of myths, beliefs, and rituals too seriously, but instead to carve out an informal space from the official moral discourse of respect and sharing that is marked by the alternative ethos of thievery, with its own moral codex of seduction, trickery, and even murder. Hunters' playful relationships with the spirits thus allow them to escape from the latent dangers of total spiritual domination. In other words, they are quite serious about not taking the sprits too seriously. Laughing at the spirits is essentially a life-securing practice. Rather than being accidental to animism, laughter resides at the heart of it. If the indigenous animists are not supposed to take their own animist rhetoric too seriously, perhaps anthropologists should follow their lead.

X

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1
See Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (London: John Murray, 1958, 1871)

2
See Graham Harvey, *Animism: respecting the living world* (London: Hurst & Co.; New York: Columbia UP; Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2005).

3
See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* , trans. K. E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995, 1912).

4
See Philippe Descola, *La nature d omestique: symbolism et praxis dans l'écologie des Achuar* (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1986.)

5
See Nurit Bird-David, "The Giving Environment: Another Perspective on the Economic System of Hunter-Gatherers," in *Current Anthropology* 31 (1990): 183–96.

6
See Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 4 (1998): 469–88.

7
See Tim Ingold, "Totemism, animism and the depiction of animals," in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 111–31.

8
See Morten A. Pedersen, "Totemism, Animism and North Asian Indigenous Ontologies," in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7.3 (2001): 411–27; Okruga (The Odul (Yukagirs) of the Kolyma Region) (Yakutsk, 1996, 1930.

9
See Aparecida Vilaça, "Chronically unstable bodies: reflections on Amazonian corporalities," in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 11 (2005): 445–64.

10
See Carlos Fausto, "Feasting on people: eating animals and humans in Amazonia," in *Current Anthropology* 48.4 (2007): 497–530.

11
Rane Willerslev, *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

12
See Rane Willerslev and Morten Axel Pedersen, "Proportional Holism: Joking the Cosmos into the right Shape in North Asia," in *Experiments in Holism: Theory and Practice in Contemporary Anthropology* , ed. Ton Otto and Nils Bubandt (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010): 262–278.

13
Tim Ingold, "Hunting, Sacrifice and the Domestication of Animals," in *The Appropriation of Nature: Essays on Human Ecology and Social Relations* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1986): 257.

14
See Lutmila N. Zukova, I. A. Nikolaeva, and L. N. Dëmina, *Folklor Yukagirov Verhnei Kolymy* (Folklore of the Verkhne Kolyma Yukaghirs) (Yakutsk, 1989), pts. 1–2. Also see Nicolai I. Spiridonov (Teki Odulok), *Oduly (Yukagiry) Kolymskogo Okruga* (The Odul (Yukagirs) of the Kolyma Region) (Yakutsk, 1996, 1930).

15
Rane Willerslev, *On the Run in Siberia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 67.

16
Slavoj Zižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 31.

17
Ibid., 29.

18
Nicholas Peterson, "Demand Sharing: Reciprocity and the Pressure for Generosity Among Foragers," in *American Anthropologist* 95.4 (1993): 860–74.

19
Rane Willerslev, *Soul Hunters*, 39.

20
Nurit Bird-David, "The Giving Environment."

21
Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

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Rane Willerslev, *Soul Hunters*, 89–118.

23
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Alejandro Haber

Severo's Severity and Antolín's Paradox

After twenty years conducting archaeological research on the Atacama plateau of Northwestern Argentina, in the Antofalla territory of the south-central Andes (where I also live and teach), I wanted to undertake a test excavation near the recently modified stone fence of an agricultural plot. I asked Severo Reales, the owner of the plot, for permission, though I had already acquired legal authorization from the state anthropology bureaucratic agency. Severo said he had no problem at all and that he would come with us (a small group of students and myself) the first morning of work. The next morning, he came along with wine, liquor, coca leaves, and cigarettes; he dug a hole near the spot I wanted to dig and gave ritual food to the *antiguo*. After lighting a cigarette, he invited each person present to make an offering of some food while he addressed the excavation site: "Holy Earth Pachamama, beautiful old things shall be bred for Mr. Alejandro." Severo was severe enough: in addition to his words of friendship, he also provided me with a theory of relatedness, including relationships with *antiguos*, that is completely different from the theory of relatedness I assumed was valid.

According to Severo's theory, *antiguos* are not vestiges from a perfect past, but are rather still alive, and breed themselves under the soil; the past is not gone and distant; the past has not past in a perfect sense; and the relationship with the past is not mainly about extracting knowledge but about reciprocal feeding, care, respect, fear, and love. For Severo, archaeological objects—considered by the archaeological discipline (as well as heritage legislation and international agreements) to be its exclusive domain, variously named but always referring to vestigial matter originating in the more or less distant past—instead exist and act upon people in the present, demand obligations of them, and, rather than being accessible or inaccessible in absolute terms, modulate their relationships—including access and avoidance—through ritual.[1]

Severo's significant practice challenged my common understandings of the relationship I have with the *antiguos* of Antofalla. But he also challenged the central assumptions of the archaeological discipline, its apparently solid foundations, and together with them every piece of legislation (provincial, national, international, and multilateral) that shared with the archeological discipline the same basic set of assumptions: the materiality of the archaeological object; vestigiality from a past located at a distance along a time vector; the archaeological discipline as the medium for relating with an otherwise inaccessible past; asymmetrical knowledge as the normal relationship; and the illicitness (and displacement along the vector) of relations-other-than-disciplined.[2] It is not that there are simply other possible interpretations of history, but that history—the past and its objects—are interrelated and related with other things (people, the earth, the sun, the moon, food, and so forth) in completely different ways,

according to Other theories of relatedness. Those Other relationalities are made through and by the relationship to the Other.

Volcancito mining structures, Salar de Antofalla.

This Other is not the Other to the West, that is, the cultural Other to be placed at a different point along a vector of time, culture, or development, outside its own borders, out there to be reflected negatively in the configuration of a self-image and finally captured as an object of science, tourism, or social or international aid. Neither is it the negative of Western alterization, an alterization that would assume a local perspectival point for alterizing the West. The Other from the Other-to-the-West's perspective is both metaphysical and immanent in a particular moment, given that its relation to those animated powerful beings is itself the fabric of those implied in the relationality. These theories of relationality are based on local ontologies (local epistemes) and are grounded locally; but they are not isolated from the Western hegemonic episteme, which includes the archaeological discipline.[3] Severo knew quite well what I was thinking about the archaeological site, what my ontological assumptions were, what I was looking for, and what kind of praxis I would develop with respect to the *antiguos*. That is why he came to intervene before I started my excavation; he placed my relationship to the *antiguos* within the terms of the local theory of relatedness, and through our involvement in a ritual conversation with the *antiguo* he implicitly explained to my students and me what kind of relations they— *antiguos* —expected from us.

In doing so, he implied that from the locus of where we stood as archaeologists, we had no choice but to ignore the local episteme, and he intervened to put things in order. We were epistemically eaten by the local relationality. Archaeological objects are enmeshed with local theories of relationality, and are themselves actively related. The inter-epistemic relation is constructed in time as hegemony/subalternity. Subaltern local theory includes its own positionality with respect to the hegemonic episteme, a perspective on its relation to hegemony, but its main feature regarding the hegemonic episteme is that it can either incorporate Western beings (objects, concepts, gods) within its own episteme (*phagocitosis*[4]), or actively ignore hegemonic agents (*ignoration*[5]).

Phagocitosis and *ignoration* are two different attitudes to hegemony that preserve local theories of relationality. From local theory there is not an outer space of alterity where the self can draw its own contours and expand, as is the case with the modern West. Alterity as a condition of relationality is already thought and practiced among each being with another being. Parents and children, people and Pachamama, Upper winds and Lower winds, alive and defunct, and so forth, are relations of alterity already patterned through the local theory of relationality.

Antolín's Paradox

While in Antofalla, Antolín and his family asked me to excavate their plot. It was the first time I was asked to excavate by local people. They irrigate their plot by flooding it for one to several days with water from a canal. They told me that the water "gets lost through a hole." When they saw some large stones inside the hole, they presumed that it had something to do with archaeology; being the expert, it was "obviously" my duty. My inspection of the spot gave me the impression of a tomb, similar to the underground stone slab false-vaulted chambers common in the area.[6] (The presence of two large slab stones in the bottom of the valley suggested they were carried from the upper slopes where there are quarries with the same size and kind of stones.) Never fond of excavating tombs myself, and assuming that excavating human remains would arouse similar feelings, I talked to Antolín and his family about the possibility of the hole being a tomb before excavating. To my surprise, Antolín asked me whether the tomb would be Christian or Gentile (i.e., non-Christian), and showed no particular interest when I said that in my opinion it would be Gentile. He was almost upset when I suggested discussing the issue of excavating a tomb with the rest of the people in the community. He perceived my suggestion as challenging the exclusivity of his right to that plot of land; neighbors had nothing to say about what happened within his plot, and asking them would be admitting their intromission. Rights to a plot are a consequence of taking care of that particular place, a relation again enmeshed with the idea of reciprocal breeding, a meta-pattern that I called *uywaña*.[7] In time, the goodness of that relationship would be evident to everyone in terms of land well-tended: many and fat sheep, and a well-bred family.

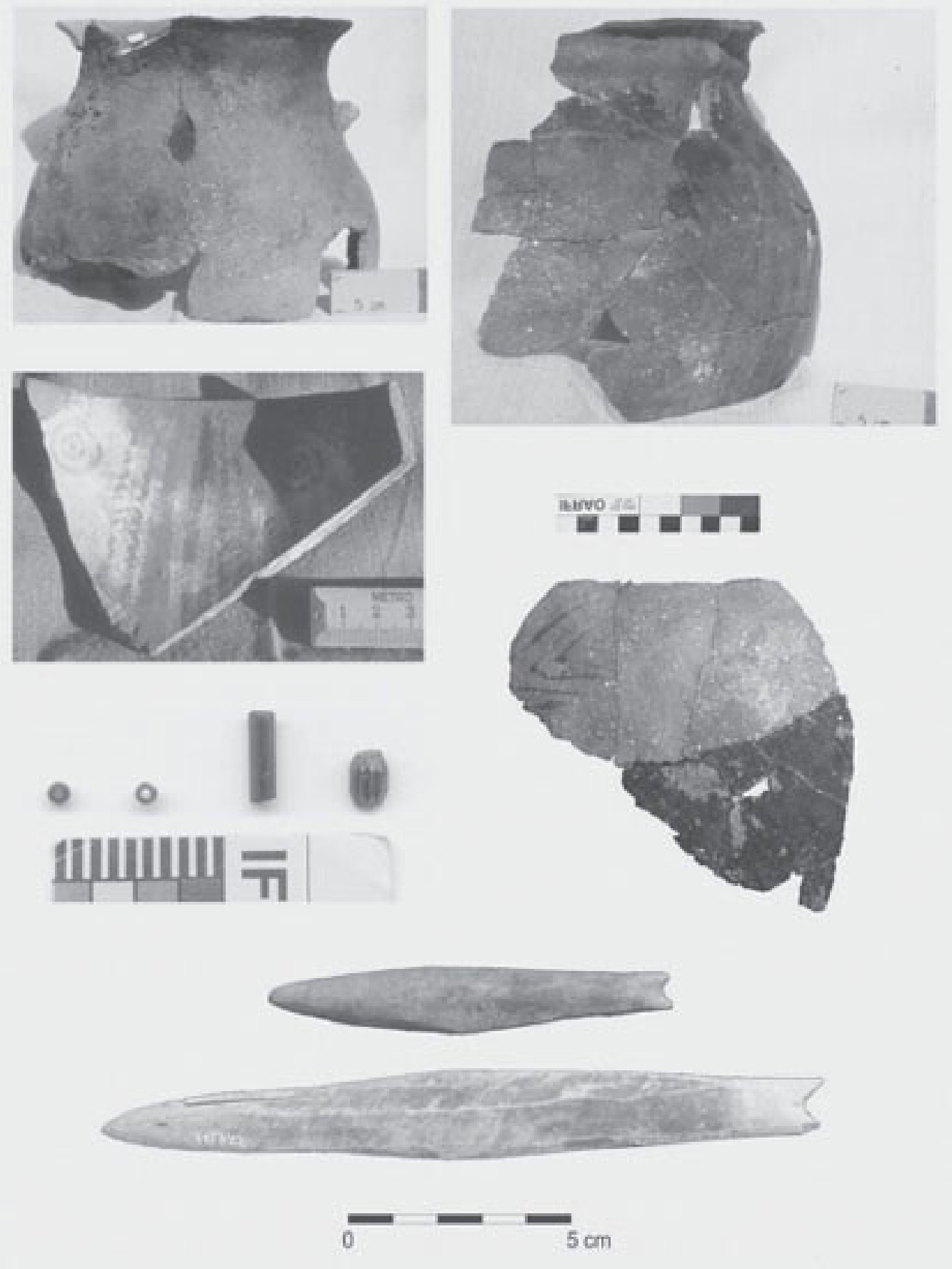
With our conversation in mind, I spent the following two days "excavating the hole," where I fortunately found nothing besides a broken pottery bowl, the two big slabs, and the idea that if it was indeed once a tomb, the amount of water running through it over the course of several years was mainly responsible for the displacement of the slabs from their original chamber-like positioning and the washing out of any organic remains. Having reported my conclusions and findings to Antolín, the job was not yet finished, given that the hole—by then neatly brushed and pictured—needed to be filled in to let the water flood the plot instead of running through it. I managed to leave the filling part to Antolín, who also wanted to take out the big slabs in order to use them in some building plan.

While I remained a spectator to the lifting of those two gigantic stones from a hole in the soil, I was again taken by surprise. The following morning, Antolín and two neighbors gathered around the hole prepared for the job, first pouring alcohol and coca leaves, sharing them with the earth, lighting a cigarette for her and for each person present. Taking out the stones from the earth demanded a ritual payment for them, in the very same spot where the possible tomb of a Gentile was unimportant to the very same people.

Nevertheless, I should say that the relationship to land enacted in this scene seems much closer to local than to Western Christian epistemes. These epistemes are meshes of relationships, ways of thinking and acting relationships among things, gods, and beings, not mere amounts of things. To be Christian or Gentile is a matter of identity, but Christianity as practiced within local indigenous epistemes is a kind of relationship that can illuminate the way we think about things and gods. In this second vignette, the *sacred* is not the tomb (nor the would-be tomb) but the earth that is asked to relinquish the big stone slabs. I suggest that we think the *sacred* (*waka)* not as things, but as relational agents who are themselves made in meshes of relationships, or meshes of relationships made through conversation among many agents. While the *waka* as a tomb can be the object of scientific knowledge and legislation (as the objects within the tomb are), the *waka* as a relational agent is a subject to be related with, not merely as knower, but as related being. The earth, that particular piece of soil in the familial plot, was a relational agent that took care of the family, providing them with food, and they gave her attention in the form of work and food in the form of ritual. Antolín's plot itself is a god that breeds his family through relations of *uywaña,* but it is not a god before those relationships but because of and through those relationships. Relationality in motion is itself sacred and pedestrian at once. The apparent paradox appears when relationships of *uywaña* take precedence over fixed objectual identities, and while Antolín is Christian in a local indigenous way, maybe he is not Indigenous in a Western way.

The gods Severo asked to breed beautiful things for me were already related to the gods of the water and the earth, and with Antofalla people. *Wakas* are everywhere. They are not objects but animated things (gods) that act upon their relationship with other things (humans).[8] As in any conversation, any utterance is a reply to the other's real, imaginary of expected utterance.

Archaeological objects have power only in instrumental terms: as media for obtaining knowledge. The same can



Sets of objects that characterize the Indian occupation of the sixteenth and eighteenth in the northwest, recovered in Tebenquiche Chico.

be said for the collectors' version of *wakas*: they have power only as media for obtaining money or prestige. But for Antolín and Severo, *antiguos* and *wakas* in general are not media for obtaining another aim, and neither are *antiguos* there to represent some absent reality (like vestiges of the inaccessible past). Archaeological objects/sites don't mean the past; they are purposeful and powerful actors whose social relations are embedded within the rest of things in the (local) world.[9]

Time and space are not dimensions in the Western modern sense, but conversations among animated beings, relationality codifying alterity. In the Antofalla episteme, space and time are the same as "the place," that is, my lived-in place. And this idea of soil—not, as in the Western episteme, a dimension—is not even a thing as in Western thought of the others. *Pacha*, a concept of "space/time" and "this place" and the noun root of Pachamama, the so-called Andean Mother Goddess, makes sense only as a web of lived relationships in which one comes to being. But, again, not just as an object but as a sentient and powerful being, a god. Thus, the lived relationships within the cosmic community of beings, in which each being is bred, grows, reproduces, and dies, are themselves agentive and sacred. Life itself, being a god, acts upon each being through reciprocal and asymmetrical relationships of breeding and eating, creation and destruction.

Life cannot be simply known but must be lived; relationality cannot be simply known but must be related with. The inter-epistemic trip that begins undisciplining archaeology ends with its own epistemological/philosophical consequences. Local theories of relationality act upon the knower that comes from afar as much as the knower is related and becomes through those relationalities. In theoretical and political terms this implies a standpoint from which to decolonize oneself of Western modern assumptions codified in the disciplines of knowledge. As much as one moves from being *ignorated* to being *fagocitated*, the move undertaken within the local conversation implies a post-Western conversion.

X

This essay is a tribute to Severo and Antolín Reales's teachings, friendship, and care. Both of them, their families, their houses, and their village provided me with a place for thought, which is exploited in this text (and in many others). A place for thought is the most important thing a researcher can have.

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1
See Rodolfo Kusch, *América profunda* (Buenos Aires: Hachette, 1962), as well as Mario Vilca, "Más allá del 'paisaje.' El espacio de la Puna y Quebrada de Jujuy: ¿Comensal, anfitrión, interlocutor?" in *Cuadernos FHyCS-UNJu* 36 (2009): 245–259.

2
Alejandro Haber, "Animism, Relatedness, Life: Post-Western Perspectives," in *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* (2009): 19.

3
Ibid.

4
Rodolfo Kusch, 1962.

5
Londoño, *W. Fausto ignorado. Una etnografía sobre construcción e ignoración de la modernidad en la Puna de Atacama"* . PhD dissertation, Universidad Nacional de Catamarca, 2012.

6
Alejandro Haber, *Domesticidad e interacción en los Andes Meridionales* (Popayán: Universidad del Cauca, 2009).

7
Haber, A. "La casa, las cosas y los dioses. Arquitectura doméstica, paisaje campesino y teoría local", Encuentro, Córdoba. 2011.

8
Mario Vilca, "Más allá del 'paisaje.' El espacio de la Puna y Quebrada de Jujuy: ¿Comensal, anfitrión, interlocutor?" in *Cuadernos FHyCS-UNJu* 36 (2009): 245–259.

9
In the modern logocentric sense of *meaning* as an explanation, a description of a word or significance that is absent and represented by a signifier. In Severo's theory, *antiguos are* the past as much as the past is the *antiguos* : both are co-present, continuous, material and immaterial at the same time.

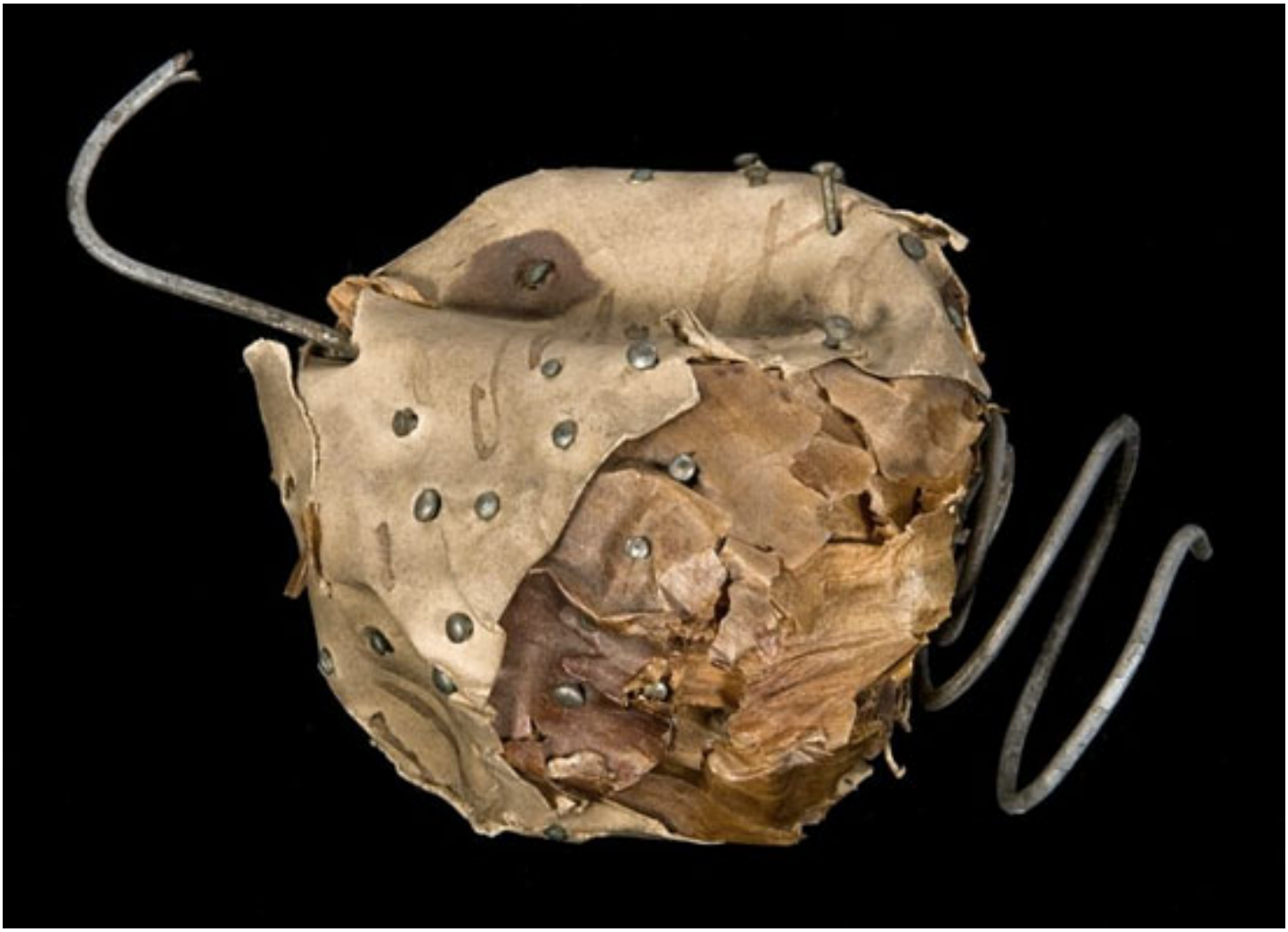
Cornelius Borck

Animism in the Sciences Then and Now

Animism began in the sciences, when the chemist and physician Georg Ernst Stahl coined the term for describing the specificity of living matter, its distinctive character vis-à-vis non living things. Its modern, almost inverted meaning, however, goes back to the Anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor who used it to characterize a worldview that does not discriminate—or at least, not properly—between living and non-living matter but believes in "universal animation of nature" (Tylor: Primitive Culture (1871), chapt. VIII). Tylor's concept of "animism" as a deviant worldview points to an irrevocable—and perhaps irrecoverable—separation of the spiritual from the material. If animism named the belief in having no separation between the material and the spiritual worlds, then the very coining of the term would indicate that such an inclusive worldview had already become anomalous by the time he introduced it in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871). Regardless of the concept's clear history and of the processes that motivated Tylor (1832–1917) to elaborate his theory of religion—though such a point of rupture would be difficult to locate historically—dichotomizing regimes that classify things and beings as either animate or inanimate, material or spiritual, can well be traced to different places and periods throughout history; they certainly predate the progressivism of the nineteenth century, which was a driving force in Tylor's theory. The same applies to alternative, holistic, or integrative worldviews, which are also shaped by vastly different places and perspectives—with some dating back to the beginnings of human cultures and others stemming from the current interest in animism.

With Tylor, however, these alternatives became widely associated with questions about evolutionary progress, and animism became the label for a primitive form of belief. The concept of animism hence entails a twofold discrimination: the differentiation between two classificatory regimes as well as between hierarchical divisions. Consequently, animism henceforth described a double loss, one of access to spirits (whatever they be and wherever they supposedly reside) and one of an understanding for people who communicate or interact with them.

Demarcating a premodern and allegedly primitive worldview, animism was the name for a distancing and exoticizing view from a "superior" European perspective. Classifying alternative worldviews as lower steps in a rigidly evolutionary schema helped to define (and exert) European superiority. In noting a lack of progress, and with deep ties to nineteenth-century progressivism, the concept of animism is constitutive of the very emergence of modernist epistemologies. Addressing foreign cultures as it did, the notion of animism fostered the European perspective on materialism, rationality, objectivity, and the all-in-all modern—in contrast to allegedly irrational, superstitious, and nonobjective worldviews. Among the many divergent and partly contradicting modern agendas,



Onion stuck with pins found in Somerset England, 19th century. Exhibit used by Edward Burnett Tylor as demonstration of sympathetic magic at the International "Folk-lore Congress," London, 1891.

the cultural evolutionary program gained its shape and sense of direction from a supposedly clear and obvious opposite. Whatever modernism's peculiarities or specificities, we can say with some certainty that the modernist program itself was not primitive.

It is this history that makes animism problematic and difficult. Animism is not just rooted in a historical context that now appears highly problematic—the very phenomenon that animism was supposed to capture cannot easily be detached from the historical baggage, from the very perspective from which it derived, from the strictly evolutionary focusing lens and the sense of superiority that was inscribed into it. Whatever animism did or referred to, its potential does not so much depend on the question of how to regain perspectives that have been discarded, but more on the problem of finding a perspective outside a separation of worldviews.

For the historian of science, animism is first of all a nineteenth-century category deserving critical scrutiny. Animism can obviously no longer be naively used to describe certain forms of religion; instead, the concept's colonizing strategy must be decoded. Any inability to comprehend someone or something relates back to the actor's limited capacities and should not automatically translate into incomprehensibility. In a truly globalized world, in which mediation and articulation become increasingly recognized as multidirectional, any effort to explain and declare someone or something as primitive must be considered as a problematic and objectionable strategy. This problematic legacy of animism has meanwhile been widely acknowledged. At the same time, however, Tylor's diagnosis of primitive culture did not question universal human intelligence, nor did he share the concern of his contemporaries about degeneration.

More importantly, and possibly more problematically, the critique of animism as a scientific concept hardly leads to a straightforward revival of its rejected content, even once

the pejorative labeling has abated. Attempts to swiftly take the concept as a guide to recuperate lost meanings will probably end in an unfounded nostalgia, as long as such aims do not account for the transformative powers of the modernism that still separates contemporary theorizing from pre-evolutionary thinking. This skepticism towards efforts to reanimate the world (regardless of the meaningfulness of such endeavors) calls for a more nuanced recognition of animism's embeddedness in the very concept of evolutionary progress and its epistemological implications.

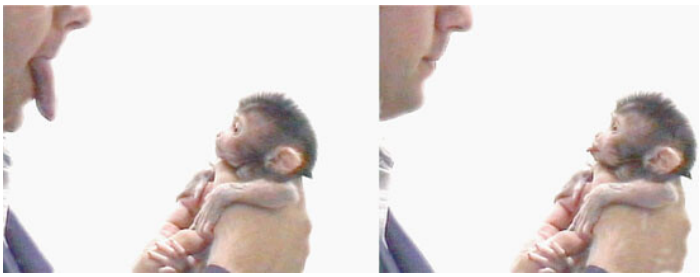
Possible sewel donated by Edward Burnett Tylor to the Pitt Rivers Museum, and recorded as specimen of a "Witches Ladder."

In this respect, a reflexive and critical engagement with animism opens a discursive space for reworking the history of modern ways of knowing from a postcolonial perspective. Designed for labeling allegedly primitive systems of belief, at the colonial periphery, in contrast to supposedly advanced and more rational European styles of knowing, animism inadvertently points to core problems of the modernist epistemology. Like animism itself, modern epistemology rests on fundamental, dichotomizing oppositions—nature versus culture, rational versus irrational, subject versus object, objective versus subjective, straight versus queer, and so forth. The concept of animism epitomizes the constitutive but highly problematic role of this dichotomization in modern epistemologies, particularly in the oppositions of foreign versus familiar and spiritual versus material.

In retrospect, it is easy to see how the concept was designed to function; after one hundred and fifty years, its ideological background has become tangible. Situating animism against this background, however, brings to the fore yet another important aspect: the approach appears to apply no less violently to the European condition than to the colonized perspectives. Of course, since the enlightenment, science and society were believed to develop rational faculties in people. But the rapid progress of science and technology themselves had left many bewildered when confronted with ever newer powers and strange inventions. For the historian of science, animism is indeed part of an epistemic transformation—though not of a move towards rationalism, secularism, and materialism, but of a larger and more complex transformation that also saw occultism and spiritualism rising to find a "home" in Europe.

Vitalism and spiritualism have an especially long history in the humanities and life sciences; with the beginning of industrialization, particularly the emergence of new communication technologies, speculations about knowledge beyond its ordinary limits became widespread and connected to the newest advances in science. It is

thus because of the historical confluence of animism with a heightened interest in occultism, as well as the emergence of the psyche as the new concept of subjective experience, that animistic activities and concerns come to be of particular interest. For the purposes of this short paper, it may suffice to mention how, around the end of the nineteenth century, the discovery of new waves and rays, for example, extended the realm of material forces ostensibly into more mysterious realms. At the same time, new media technologies fostered the possibility to communicate across time and space—with the emergence of new forms of "media" and specially designed events and sites for their transmission and reception. In the midst of these turbulent transformations, the rational subject of the enlightenment intimated a rather contested and problematic concept of the "psyche"—a painfully dominant space that developed throughout the twentieth century, forcing psychology and several other humanities into existence.



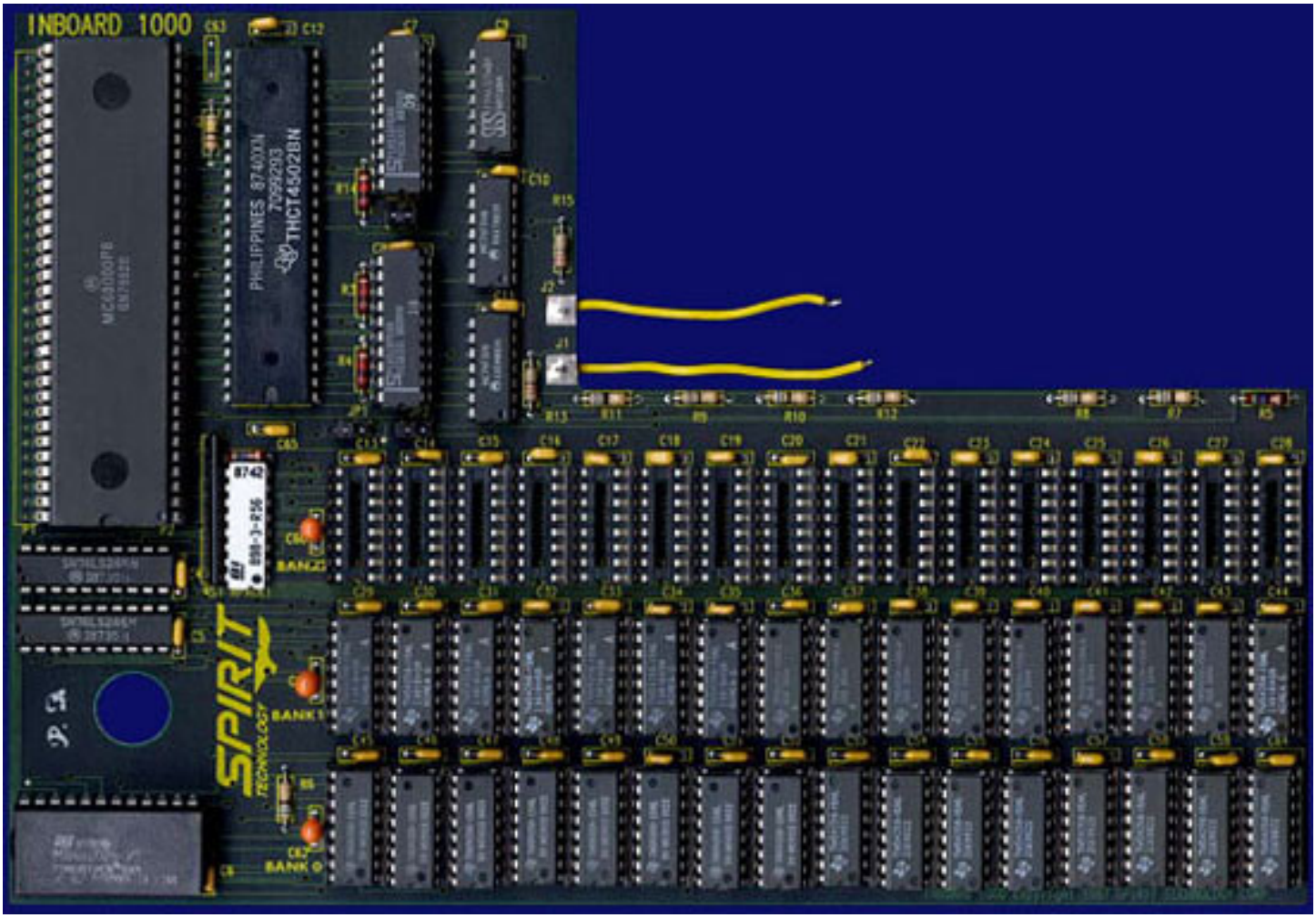
Neonatal macaque monkey imitating facial expressions. Photographs from study on mirror neurons.

Was the ban on animism a prerequisite for the emergence of the psyche? The history of ideas rarely follows such an oscillating logic, but the two were certainly intertwined. Given, that the very act of conceptualizing 'animism' for characterizing allegedly primitive forms of religion followed from a colonialist European perspective upon non-European cultures, given furthermore, that animism owed its plausibility to the newly established evolutionary framework, and finally given, that animism addressed implicitly also many epistemological problems back in Europe at the time, it becomes obvious that these problems were not solved simply by the invention of this concept. In fact, "animism" in its polemical and ideological sense did not and will not solve any epistemological problems; but it may acquire new meaning as a descriptive term for capturing the eerie qualities of scientific practices themselves. In this regard, it could be said that animism is the flip side of rationalism and the belief in techno-scientific progress. Here, animism acquires another layer of meaning—one that does not point to a strange form of religion but to the paradoxical and animating effects of endorsed technological and scientific practices. In addition to its potential for the history and philosophy of science and religion, animism may hence also serve as a descriptive, heuristic concept in the historical epistemology of the emergence of today's powerful nano-, techno-, and biosciences.

On the surface, modern sciences—including the humanities, biology, and life sciences—still appear to subscribe to a similar, if not the same, scientific epistemology that Tylor regarded as progress towards rationality, and that he celebrated as the evolutionary victory of Europe. Regardless of the many spiritualists, speculative esoterics, and mystics among the eminent scientists since Tylor's days, there is officially no space for spiritualism, religion, or extranatural powers within the sciences; they strictly follow their naturalizing agenda, searching across the material world for finer-grained analyses of the various powers at work. At the same time, however, and despite their modern, rational agenda to naturalize the world in the bright and cold light of scientific explanation and technological control, today's technosciences are characterized by ways of knowing and doing that hardly comply with this epistemology.

Today's technosciences constitute ever more entities with agency in relation to biological, individual, subjective, collective, or political levels of being. In this context, animism may demonstrate an unexpected potential as a conceptual tool for highlighting and describing precisely those deviations from modern epistemology that pass under its own guidance. In the name (or under the disguise) of a naturalizing epistemology, animation seems to flourish as a powerful topic in research, development, and interaction in both the social and spiritual worlds. Nearly twenty years ago, Bruno Latour alarmed us when he declared, "We have never been modern," and that there are all kinds of nonhuman actors in contemporary science and technology. Latour has been criticized for the animism implicit in this position and perhaps quite rightly so, because his "hybrids" remain nonspecific; they are too general, ignoring specificities and local circumstances. However, one could equally argue that, if anything, such hybrids are not animistic enough for evaluating the dynamics and efficacies of new ontologies in the technosciences. There is much that can be said here, but for the sake of brevity I will highlight just two examples of the animism of contemporary technoscientific practices.

Today's sciences constitute plenty strange techno-nature-cultural hybrids, take, for example, cancer genetics. More than one hundred years of cancer research has resulted in several new treatment options; leukemia in children is in many cases now regarded as a curable disease. Cancer research, however, has not been a smashing success across the board, regardless of insights including those from nineteenth-century pathology or twentieth-century endocrinology and immunology, among many others. The new horse in the stable is molecular genetics, and indeed very promising results have been reported, with strong correlations



Spirit Technology Inboard 1000 authored by Robert A. Waters.

between the disease and instances of mutation. Circumventing a very complex regulatory process, cancer has now been declared to be the effect of a gene. This is a clear case of magical thinking, as this can only operate within a framework that bridges directly from gene to disease when the many mediating factors, circumstances, alternative scenarios are not taken into account. Potentially more dangerous are the very concrete and real consequences of this fantastic theorizing. Breast cancer diagnostics transform a whole life yet to be lived into one that will fall under the spell of a gene, and with a threatening disease that may never occur placed as the imagined end of this life. There certainly are cases in which genetic testing has proven to provide significant, medically relevant, and existentially useful information, enabling those involved to get on with their lives (sometimes better than before).

Another current example of the animistic powers of modern technosciences can be found in the communicative powers of digital social networks. How exactly new media will change the political sphere, and the conceptualization of the political, is still far from clear, yet social media has already interrupted traditional processes of representational decision making. Facebook and Twitter have been identified as important means for bringing nondemocratic regimes into collapse, and most recently, as Facebook's lauded IPO offering demonstrated, to interrupt economic speculation. Where is power situated in these new forms of communication and interaction? Where can control be localized? Does the efficacy of these networks relate to the plain fact that all electronic equipment is utterly material?

A particularly revealing example of the animistic effects of an allegedly naturalizing epistemology can be seen in the wonderworlds of mirror neurons that connect humans and other primates through networks of empathy. This is not to say that mirror neurons are not real; on the contrary, they are the focus of studies and ever more experiments at the top neuroscience laboratories around the world, and have been analyzed in thousands of publications. Mirror neurons are the latest result in a sequence of investigations that once began under the imperative to debunk speculative and spiritualistic entities by means of dissolving them into strictly natural, material

processes—perception, feeling, reasoning, decision-making, and memorizing, once understood as results of neurophysiological processing.

The agenda still holds, but the tools to pursue it have become so powerful that they allow sophisticated questions to be addressed. Within the framework of the modern, naturalizing epistemology, these experiments no longer "reduce" speculative stuff to the hard facts of action potentials, gene expression, and causality; instead, they increasingly constitute aspects of social interactions as "real," as experimentally detected and objectively verified items. Materializations were once the results of séances and strange encounters with ghostly powers, and photography was mobilized to document these instances typically in the form of milky and plasmalike substances protruding somewhere from the "medium." One hundred years later, today's high-tech machines detect the results of social interactions as amorphous color blobs in the active brains of the participants. This is truly fascinating stuff, attracting large sums of funding; it is the latest tool to demonstrate that matter can be animated.

The list could easily go on. The patenting of DNA and its mutations has already been identified as new avenue for biocapitalism, an economization of the potentialities of biological substances; smart technologies turn everyday objects into responding allies that "learn" quickly and adapt to the special needs of their users; psychoactive drugs adjust behavior and learning abilities to social needs; the brain is, anyway, a universe of plasticity. I do not intend to say that all of these activities are the same, but rather that these examples share certain features that might begin to assemble an animist epistemology—of which some contours have already become recognizable, though its general shape and structure remain unclear. These examples allude to practices that constitute entities of new ontologies beyond the nature/culture divide. These new things are clearly constructed but are also nonetheless natural entities; they are very real, materially as well as conceptually, and their multiple effects move in several directions, from matter to self and throughout society.

The fantastic rise of functional neuroimaging recently provoked a clever MIT cognitive science student to accuse it of mingling "voodoo with science." The charge was made in defense of critical rationalism and proper methodologies; and the accused accordingly responded by asserting that their science followed the strictest methodological principles. In fact, "voodoo" is perhaps precisely where science and technology are heading—animation everywhere.

Etienne-Jules Marey, from the series Mouvements de l'air, 1830-1904.

X

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Tom Holert

"A live monster that is fruitful and multiplies": Capitalism as Poisoned Rat?

One must wonder now whether it is useful to keep to the animist strands and currents in popular beliefs about (as well as venerable theories of) political economy, capitalism, and the commodity—or is it actually quite futile? The question seems rather pertinent when it comes to posing Anselm Franke's *Animism* project clearly and polemically within contemporary anticapitalist, anti-neoliberal, and decolonizing struggles. I see it as a potential contribution to the productive confusion generated by haggling over certainties and consensus within these struggles, and I am particularly interested in those instances where capital, capitalism, and/or "the markets" are figured as living, acting entities endowed with agency. Moreover, I would like to ask how this assumed agency is imagined to be linked to animism as a discursive practice, as well as whether—at the very moment the concept, or indeed the word "animism," is introduced into discourses of politics, economy, and culture—a specific and efficient metaphor becomes activated, transforming and virtualizing our relation to capital.

We all know how metaphors of agency are used to describe, for instance, price movements "as action, as [...] internally driven behavior of an animate entity;" markets are regularly portrayed as agents that, although impersonal and nonhuman, nevertheless expect and react, appreciate and punish, sulk and rejoice depending on the behavior of economic actors both great and small.[1] In trade papers and stock market commentary, financial markets are often served up to us in anthropomorphic or animalistic metaphors: "The Nasdaq climbed higher," "the Dow fought its way upward," or "the S&P dove like a hawk."[2] Markets are "sensitive to social media moods," they have "mood swings too," they "rise on optimism," and have all kinds of "feelings." At the same time, markets are perceived as threatening, capricious, vengeful, and so forth; they are envisaged as being capable of arousing emotions in us, of acting on the affects of those whose fortunes depend on their alleged volatile moods.

Particularly in the current phase of capitalism, the one in which abstraction and destruction have converged to an extent that has no historical precedent, metaphors of body and soul are proffered to help comprehend the incomprehensible, intangible operations of contemporary networked financial markets. They also function as reasons for the most tangible and comprehensible structural inequalities, social catastrophes, and natural disasters that issue from them.

It may be a critical (de)constructivist commonplace to emphasize the discursive processes that lead to the "naturalization" of capital. However, it is worth mentioning that even if one critiques capitalism as a "'system' that profits by its reproduction" (Judith Butler), this way of speaking still tends to naturalize, even anthropomorphize, capitalism—of which one could say, it is precisely a "humanism" that uses humanity as an abstraction to

Gustaf Mantel, from the series of Living Movie Stills: American Psycho (2000), 2011.

propagate "the sphere of commodity exchange [as] a true Eden of innate human rights," as Karl Marx put it.[3] In other words: a world where freedom and equality rule because everybody relates to everybody else as a commodity-owner.[4] No wonder Louis Althusser pushed for Marxism as an anti-humanism. But would he have also accepted the idea of an anticapitalist, or "post-capitalist," animism?[5]

Here it may be useful to briefly revisit the concept of commodity fetishism, or what cultural theorist Steven Shaviro (following Michael Taussig) has dubbed "capitalist animism": the conception of the commodity being endowed with a soul. Shaviro rightly stresses that fetishism and animism are constitutive of capitalism and life under capitalism. He writes of "commodity fetishism" as a "set of ritual practices, stances, and attunements to the world, constituting the way we participate in capitalist existence." Shaviro further contends that "commodities [are] actually alive: more alive, perhaps, than we ourselves are … The 'naıve' consumer, who sees commodities as animate beings, endowed with magical properties, is therefore not mystified or deluded. He or she is accurately perceiving the way that capitalism works, how it endows material things with an inner life."[6]

Here, capitalism is a reproductive power that animates (endows) inanimate things "with an inner life," with an agency of sorts. And by being conceived as an animator of the inanimate, capitalism emerges as the source and the object of the very ritual practices that Shaviro asserts are fundamental to life under capitalism. (Toni Negri would term this the "real subsumption of life" under capital). The inner life of the commodity therefore corresponds to the inner lives of those who are subjected to the transformations of the valorization process, to the shift of surplus-value accumulation from the sphere of production to the sphere of reproduction, circulation, and exchange, thereby putting the entire lives of people to work.

According to this "anthropogenetic model" (Christian Marazzi), living beings are transformed into fixed capital and value is extracted from the production of forms of life.

In vintage Žižekian fashion, critic Mark Fisher responded to Shaviro's suggestion that consumers are, by default, animists by asserting "that there is [in fact] no 'naıve consumer' who 'believes' that commodities are animate beings. Asked if they think that commodities are alive or possess will, consumers will snort derisively. Nevertheless, they will continue to act *as if* commodities are animate entities." Consumers, in Fisher's view, "are [at the level of belief] hard-headed, disenchanted Anglo-Saxon utilitarians": they "can participate in capitalist

animism—because it is not they who believe, but the commodities themselves."[7]

These two versions of capitalist animism—the one which sees the practices under capitalism as structured by animist beliefs, and the other which renders the human actors as stern utilitarians while the commodity does the believing—affirm that the soul-searching of recent critiques of post-Fordism and financialization has resulted in a revival of the animist aspects of the theory of the commodity.

It was Walter Benjamin, in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," who suggested that commodities are inhabited and guided by a "soul." Commodities acted and behaved as if they took part in a passionately affective relationship with human beings as actual or potential consumers: "If there were such a thing as a commodity-soul ... it would be the most empathetic ever encountered in the realm of souls, for it would be bound to see every individual as a buyer in whose hand and house it wants to nestle."[8] Otherwise, the commodity—while it may still speak and whisper—is depleted of empathy and compassion, to use Benjamin's words.[9]

"Commodity-soul" (*Warenseele*) had been coined by Marx—"in jest," as Benjamin commented. Marx also once used the term "value-soul"/"soul of value" (*Wertseele*). Furthermore, Marx speaks of the metempsychosis or transmigration (*Seelenwandrung*) that takes place when productive labor combines raw material with the means of production to produce a new product. The *soul* of the commodity is to be understood as the relationship between exchange value and use value as it is embodied in the commodity. The commodity actually exists (as commodity) quite abstracted from its materiality, in a spectral oscillation, as a thing hovering between sensuousness and supersensuousness in the "physical immanence of value" (William Pietz).[10]

In Marx's view, the commodity- *Ding* is generated by its exchange value, that is to say, as social process and relation. In this sense, to speak of the commodity-soul is to speak of value (abstracted labor) as an animating force dwelling in the "value-body" (*Wertkörper*) that incarnates it. Since the commodity value "deflects the incorporated creative life towards equivalence within an exchange" (Nancy), the "soul" of the commodity is the paradoxical *animus* of a living corpse, a zombie-soul. Consequently, Franco "Bifo" Berardi suggests that we speak of "thanato-politics": "the submission of intelligent life to the dead object, the domination of the dead over the living."[11] Indeed, there is a well-established tradition in cultural theory and cultural production of allegorizing the "thanato-politics" of the commodity soul through the figures of the alien or the zombie.[12]

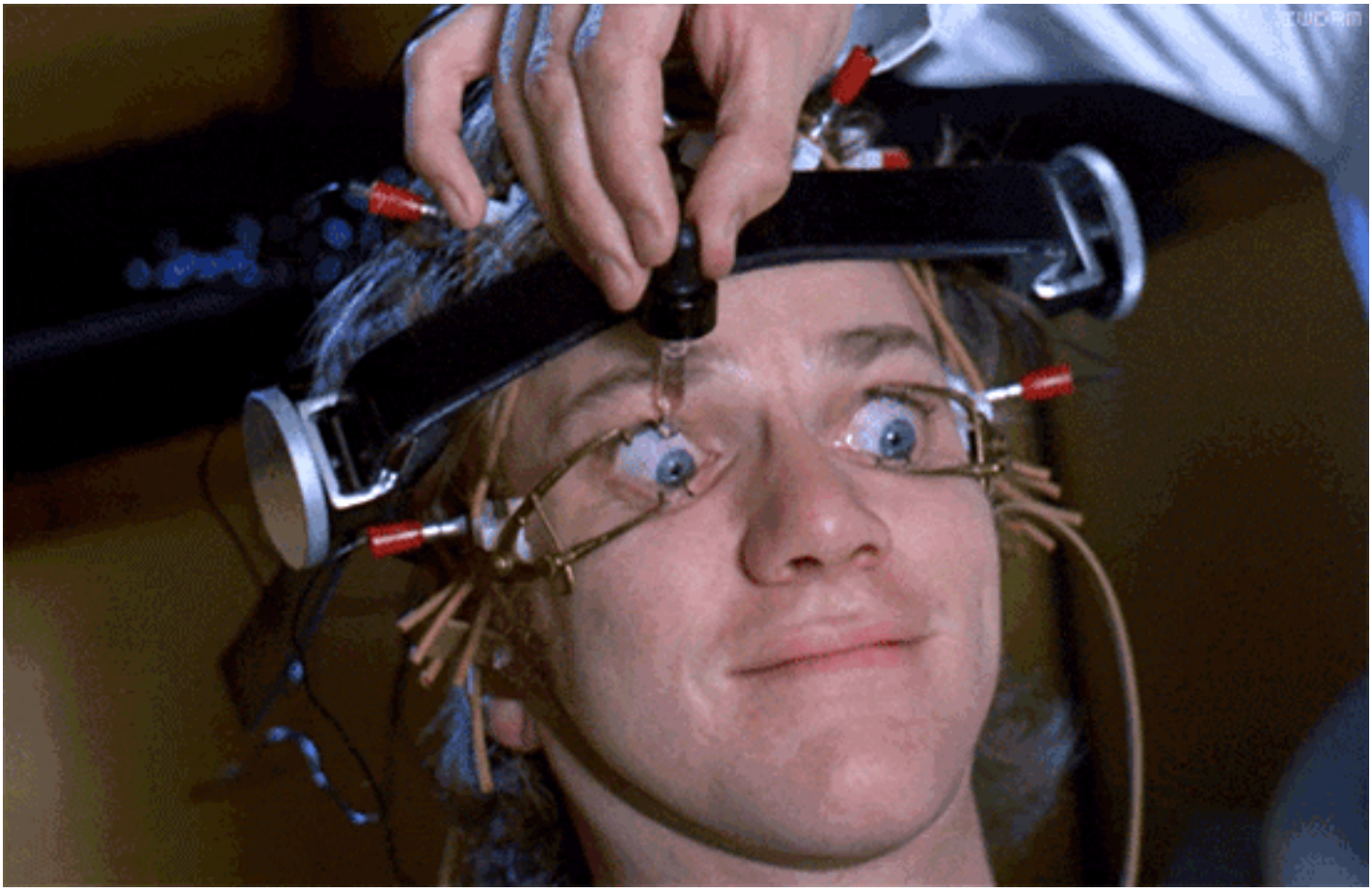
Of course, the notion of the "commodity-soul" must be understood in the context of Marx's polemical theory of the "fetish character of the commodity" in *Capital Volume 1*. Here, he turns the materialist histories of "primitive" religions he discovered in enlightenment scholars such as Charles de Brosses against the idealist social philosophies of his time.[13] Entering the "misty realm of religion," he proposes a phenomenology of the "monetarization of social life" (Pietz).[14]

Marx thus draws an analogy between religious fetishism (including animism)—where "products of the human brain seem to be independent beings endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations with each other and with the human race"—and capitalism—the "realm of commodities" where the "products of people's hands" interact independently from their makers. "This," he writes, "I call the fetishism, which sticks to the products of labor as soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities."

The most important step in this process of fetishization was the rise of central banks and the emergence of money as credit-money, "an object that seems to embody its own temporal existence in its capacity to bear interest."[15] William Pietz has pointed out that the "magical moment of fetish formation" introduced in the first chapter of *Capital* sees Marx actually illustrating a crucial "modal shift," "the mysterious transubstantiation of common social practices into custom or law sanctioned by the community as whole," a "transition of general form into *universal* form." This universal form exists as a material object. Capitalist production has therefore become "a mode in which social value is fetishistically materialized."[16]

Summarizing a complex argument about the fundamental level of fetishized relations, Pietz writes that "'capital' is the substantive name for the unity of a socially (if unconsciously) organized material system of growth and reproduction whose effective components and visible forms are things, people, and money."[17] The principles and rules that capitalism imposes on the social field have become universal. Capital has invaded and transformed the world on a global scale. It has, as Marx claims, only "one single-minded life impulse," which is "the drive to create value and surplus-value." This "life impulse" (*Lebenstrieb*) is also dubbed, in the same paragraph, "the soul of capital" (*Kapitalseele*). And this soul feeds off the dead, since "capital is dead labor, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks." Capital is thus envisioned as a horrifying, shape-shifting, dialectical entity that combines cannibalism with autopoiesis, that consumes life in order to consume itself. It is "a live monster that is fruitful and multiplies" (Marx).

The eerie rhetoric Marx deploys to render the frantic self-digesting and self-creating activity of capital has of course not gone unnoticed. The best known example of reading Marx as a gothic novelist is arguably Jacques



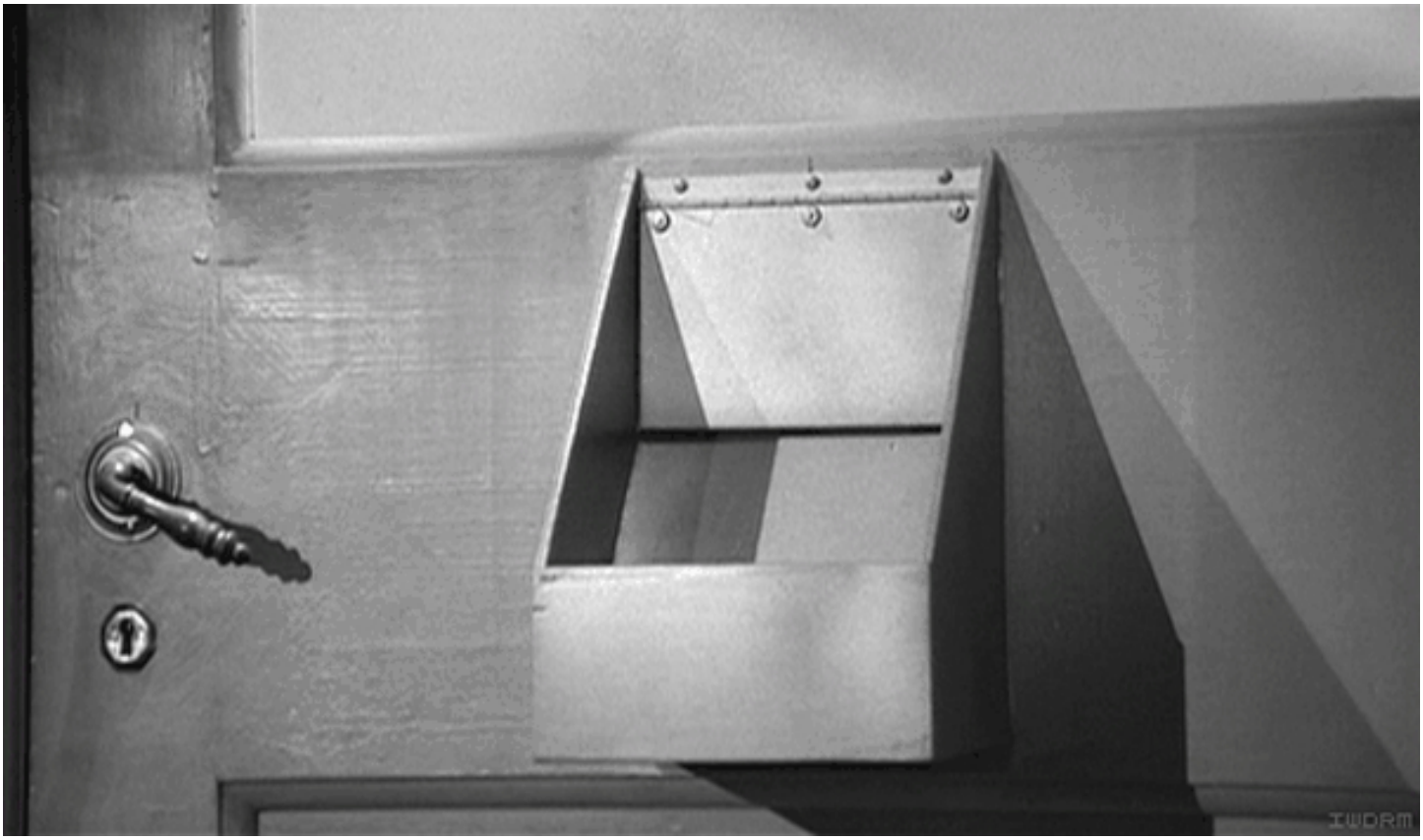
Gustaf Mantel, from the series of Living Movie Stills: A Clockwork Orange (1971), 2011.

Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. The pervasive presence of "fetishist phantomaticity in general and its place in *Capital* " and its importance as a "theoretical moment" that reaches beyond the exegesis of Marx led Derrida to claim that what is at stake is "everything which *today* links Religion and Technics in a singular configuration."[18]

And it is clearly *technics*—digital technology, electronic infrastructures, databases, computing, and so forth—that constitute contemporary capital and enable the all-embracing real subsumption of life under capital that we witness today. Increasingly, capitalism is pictured as "an Alien monstrosity, an insatiable Thing that appropriates the energy of everything it touches and, in the process, propels the world toward the inorganic." The latter are the words of artist and writer Gean Moreno from his recent essay on "the inorganic."[19] Moreno proposes an animist turn in the critique of capitalism as an all-devouring, depleting, and dissoluting force, "a vast inhuman form, a genuinely alien life form (in that it is entirely non-organic)." He asks, "What if we propose that capitalism has something like agency and that this is manifested in ecophagic material practices? Capitalism eats the world. Whatever transformations it generates are just stages in its monstrous digestive process." Finally, Moreno suggests that we investigate this alien life according to "an anti-anthropomorphic cartography, a study in alien finance, a *Xenoeconomics*," to find the cracking or tipping points of capital's inorganicism.[20]

Though this is not exactly terminology from my own lexicon, I am tempted to follow these suggestions a bit further, for they seem to address the question of animism as inspiration and conceptual hub of subversive (and quite likely *aesthetic*) strategies of fighting the metastable and uncontrollable/entropic order of contemporary capitalism. Moreno's suggestions are promising because they explicitly acknowledge capitalism as the "live monster," the *beseelte Ungeheuer*, whose very liveliness is to be explored in the inorganic. Or would we, by doing this, depart from the very space in which it appears appropriate and reasonable to speak of animism at all? To put it another way: Does the "post-capitalist animism" of a humanized world once envisioned by Michael Taussig continue to be a viable perspective under the rule of the inorganic?[21] Or is this rule itself simply to be pitied?

When Marx wrote of the "live monster that is fruitful and multiplies," he used, in the German original of the passage (the reference was dropped altogether in the English



Gustaf Mantel, from the series of Living Movie Stills: Young Frankenstein (1974) , 2011.

translation), a well-known quote from Goethe's *Faust*. "*Ein beseeltes Ungeheuer, das zu 'arbeiten' beginnt, als hätt' es Lieb' im Leib*" is taken from the chorus of a song that appears in the scene in Auerbach's cellar. The song tells the story of a kitchen rat that is poisoned by the cook, who sadistically watches the creature die a torturous death. In the English translation of this scene the situation is horrifying, even more so than in the German original:

> By torture driven, in open day,
> The kitchen he invaded,
> Convulsed upon the hearth he lay,
> With anguish sorely jaded;
> The poisoner laugh'd, Ha! ha! quoth she,
> His life is ebbing fast, I see,
> As if his frame love wasted.
>
> CHORUS
>
> As if his frame love wasted.

Is this perhaps the fate of Capitalism that Marx had in mind? To die like a rat poisoned by a torturing cook? Who could this cook possibly be? Who has the power to kill the Capitalism-rat, "just to watch him die" (Johnny Cash)? With the knowledge of the lyrics of the song from Auerbach's cellar, Marx's image of the frantic liveliness of the monster may be read as the picture of a vivacity doomed to end deplorably. It's a fantastic image in all senses of the word. An image for the 99 percent? "As if his frame love wasted."

X

This essay was originally delivered as a paper during the workshop/panel "Animism and Capitalism" in the course of the "Animism" conference at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, March 16-17, 2012.

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Chaimowicz' 1972 installation *Celebration? Realife* (2007), a collection of chapters on visual culture and politics (*Regieren im Bildraum*, 2008), and a reader on the visual culture of pedadgogy (*Das Erziehungsbild. Zur visuellen Kultur des Pädagogischen*, 2010, ed. with Marion von Osten). Holert's last film *The Labours of Shine* was included in the 2012 “Animism” exhibitions at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, and e-flux, New York.

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2
See ibid.

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Judith Butler, "So, What Are The Demands? And Where Do They Go From Here?," *Tidal* 2 (March 2012): 8-11, 11.

4
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5
The latter concept was created by Michael Taussig. See his *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 99.

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9
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11
Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Soul at Work: Form Alienation to Autonomy* , trans. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 188.

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See, for example, Lars Bang Larsen, "Zombies of Immaterial Labor: The Modern Monster and the Death of Death," *e-flux journa*l 15 (April 2010), http://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/zombies-of-immaterial-labor-the-modern-monster-and-the-death-of-death/ .

13
See Pietz, 130.

14
Ibid., 146.

15
Ibid.

16
Ibid., 147.

17
Ibid., 148.

18
Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* , trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 167.

19
Gean Moreno, "Notes on the Inorganic, Part I: Accelerations," in *e-flux journal* 31 (January 2012), http://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/notes-on-the-inorganic-part-i-accelerations/ ; and Moreno, "Notes on the Inorganic, Part II: Terminal Velocity," in *e-flux journal* 32 (February 2012) http://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/notes-on-the-inorganic-part-ii-terminal-velocity/ .

20
Ibid., Part I.

21
Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 99: "Post-capitalist animism means that although the socioeconomic exploitative function of fetishism ... will supposedly disappear with the overcoming of capitalism, fetishism as an active social force inherent in objects will remain. Indeed it must not disappear, for it is the animate quality of things in post-capitalist society ... that ensures what young Marx envisaged as the humanization of the world."