

**Modernity's Looking Glasses.
Exchanging Perspectives on Animism
Symposium, December, 13 and 14, 2011, 6 to 9 p.m.**

The symposium brings together six speakers whose contributions address the potential implicit in the concept of animism to open up new perspectives for an analysis of the present and possibilities for historiography. Discussing the issue from a variety of angles, they seek to define where we stand: if animism—as an image of what runs counter to dualist rationality—marked crucial front lines of modernity, how have these lines shifted over the course of the twentieth century, and where are they becoming productive today? A lecture on the animation of things in Aby Warburg (Spyros Papapetros), a discussion comparing the history of animated film to that of the museum (Edwin Carels), and a talk interweaving the history of science and aesthetics by looking at liquid crystals, which defy the schema of life vs. non-life (Esther Leslie), stake out the field of aesthetic reflection. Against the backdrop of the critique of reification in critical theory, Dierich Diederichsen takes a look at the displaced front lines in the debate over subject-object relations, whereas the transformation of the legacy of psychoanalysis marks the point of departure for Angela Melitopoulos's and Elisabeth von Samsonow's contributions and conversation.

**Tuesday, December 13, 2011
6 p.m.**

**Introduction and Moderation
Anselm Franke**

**6.15 pm
Spaces of Wonder
Edwin Carels**

What is at stake when animation leaves behind the limited confines of the cinema screen to surface in the white cube or a museum? Over the last decade, animation-related art has increasingly become embraced by the musea and the gallery system. Large thematic exhibitions that blend historical artefacts and optical illusions with contemporary art are also increasingly numerous and popular. This dialectic between art and animation however already started long before the invention of film. Before and along with the development of the magic lantern, diverse types of 'scripted' spaces for exhibition were already animating their viewers. These parallel manifestations of both animation as an autonomous art, and the thematization of optical technologies as a topic for exhibition were present from the time when the notion of a museum first developed. More than purely a filmic practice,

animation needs to be understood as the staging of an agency: the manipulation of intervals, not only between film frames, but also between objects in space. This concept of agency, combined with notions such as scripted spaces (Norman Klein), devices of wonder (Barbara Maria Stafford) and the evolutive concept of the white cube (Brian O'Doherty) are essential when trying to grasp different manifestations of animation in the context of the Wunderkammer, the magic lantern performance, early avant garde animation, kinetic art, structuralist cinema or digital animation.

7.15 p.m.

The Life of Things

Spyros Papapetros

“Du lebst und tust mir nichts! [You live and do nothing to me!]”: a statement in which a human subject, specifically an 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? 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 interlocutor that is condemned to say or do “nothing”? The series of examples included in this presentation narrate the outcome of this outwardly self-assured, yet inwardly anxious statement; they illustrate an episodic history of response to the vivification of objects. From Darwin’s story of his dog barking at a rolling parasol to turn-of-the-century anthropological accounts of children assailing objects that had accidentally hurt them, animism is experienced as the recurrence of an infantile or “primitive” behavior within the adult life of modern metropolitan citizens. The lecture will also demonstrate how turn-of-the-century art history projected ethnographic theories of animistic practices on Renaissance and modern artworks while endowing inert images with the semblance of liveliness (*Lebendigkeit*) or animation (*Belebung*). Finally the presentation will also examine a series of objects from the exhibition, such as Jimmie Durham’s displays of stone artifacts, through the lens of turn-of-the-century theories of life in the inorganic world and monist conceptions of nature.

8 p.m.

Liquid Crystal Life

Esther Leslie

The crystal has long been attributed a kind of life. The liquid crystal, its younger relation, assumes even more liveliness, as entity, but is also the mechanism whereby life, its representation or illusioning, is mediated, on the surface of screens. This paper considers the liquid crystal as an animated form and animation as a by-product of liquid crystallinity. Its various scenes for consideration include the glow of the LCD screen reflected on the face of a user; the history of the human discovery of the liquid crystal; the various efforts to capture the animated motion of liquid crystals, as in the work, for one, of Jean Painlevé; the intimate relations between CGI and liquid crystals; and the efforts to decrystallize, ransack, destroy, and redeploy liquid crystals out of the screens, in order to expropriate stolen negentropic energies.

Wednesday, December 14, 2011

6 p.m.

Das zweite Leben der Dinge

Diedrich Diederichsen

(German)

Things are en vogue right now; objects, objectivity, and objecthood seem to help us solve our problems with the subject. We emancipate them (Bruno Latour), declare them to be within the reach of philosophy (in what is called “object-oriented philosophy”), and even accord them a form of sex appeal (Mario Perniola). But what are the consequences for what classical critical theory framed as the problem of a world of objects separate from us? Is reification no longer a problem because the contemporary form of alienation operates primarily along the paradigm of de-reification and compulsory subjectivation? How does the contemporary enthusiasm for the inanimate in music, philosophy, and (critical) theories relate to the psychedelic approach to the object that emerged fifty years ago to rival or complement the critique of reification proffered by the '68 generation and the hippie movement?

7 p.m.

Angela Melitopoulos in conversation with Elisabeth von Samsonow

(German)

François Tosquelles uses the play of positions in a soccer match involving psychiatric patients as an image to explain a psychiatric method with which he founded institutional psychotherapy. Working at the asylum of Saint-Alban during World War II, he conceived and realized the first open psychiatric clinic, which was simultaneously also a stronghold of resistance to the Nazi occupiers. The open atmosphere at Saint-Alban, the playful exchanges of positions between patients and therapists, and the resulting mobility of thought made Saint-Alban's institutional psychotherapy a nomadological war machine against National Socialism. Tosquelles' revolutionary psychiatry would later influence Frantz Fanon and the anti-colonial struggles in Algeria. Many of his ideas about resistance and nomadology resurface in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus*. Guattari's schizoanalysis carries his ideas about subjectivity and geography further. Astonishingly enough, Tosquelles' hypotheses can also be interconnected to the history of a soul that Elisabeth von Samsonow, using the figure of the Anti-Electra to describe it as a totemistic-feminist position, employs as the basis of a technological history of production. The history of technology, Samsonow argues, can be read in conjunction with that of totemism, in which the productions of living bodies and the invention of technological systems interlock. Samsonow's book *Anti-Elektra* portrays the neglect with which the male cultural history has treated the position of the girl as constituting an advantaged and inventive initial situation. It counters the Oedipal theater and allows us to recognize animistic (totemistic) tendencies in media representation. The open, unfinished image, the image being communicated, the image that serves as a vehicle for trance, the transfer of time, or synchronization, breaks with the notion of nerves and neural pathways and their implication of electronics as spiritless and demystified.

In the video installation *Déconnage* (2011), an interlinked archival survey becomes the motive of a cross-media transmission that places the archive and a contemporary perspective on it on a shared temporal plane. François Tosquelles, Elisabeth von Samsonow, and Jean-Claude Polack reflect on the activist practices of institutional psychotherapy and on Oedipal depoliticization, which is bound to fail as an attempt to preserve bourgeois narrow-mindedness. *Déconnage* spins resistive ideas and positions the horizontal, non-hierarchical, and ritualizing movement of an interlinked archival survey against a hierarchizing history of the signifier in modernity.

8 p.m.

Discussion with all participants

Moderation: Anselm Franke

CVs

Edwin Carels is a researcher in the arts at the University College Ghent – Faculty of Fine Arts. His topic is “Animation beyond Animation—a media-archeological approach to the use of animation in contemporary art”. For more than a decade, Edwin Carels has also been active as a film programmer and curator for the International Film Festival Rotterdam. He is also affiliated with the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp, MuHKA, where he curated thematic shows such as *Animism*, *The Projection Project*, and currently *Graphology*. He has developed solo exhibitions dedicated to and with among others Chris Marker, Zoe Beloff, Robert Breer, Quay Brothers, and Julien Maire.

Diedrich Diederichsen was editor of music magazines in the 1980ies (*Sounds*, Hamburg 1979–1983, *Spex*, Cologne 1985–1991), he contributes to magazines and reviews on (pop-)music, politics, art, theatre, cinema, and design since 1980. In the 1990ies he was teacher at several universities and academies in Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Offenbach, Weimar, Munich, Bremen, Pasadena, CA., St.Louis, MO., Gainesville, FL and was Professor for Cultural Theory at Merz-Aacemy, Stuttgart 1998 to 2006. He has a professorship in Theory, Practice, and Communication for Contemporary Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna since 2006. Recent Publications: *Psicodelia y ready-made* (Buenos Aires 2010), *Utopia of Sound* (co-ed) (Vienna 2010), *Rock, Paper, Scissors – Pop-Music and Visual Arts* (co-ed) (Graz 2009), *Surplus Value (of Art)* (Rotterdam, Berlin, New York 2008), *Eigenblutdoping* (Cologne 2008), *Kritik des Auges* (Hamburg 2008), *Argument Son* (Dijon 2007) For more infos see: <http://diedrich-diederichsen.de>

Anselm Franke is a curator and writer, based in Berlin. He was the artistic director of Extra City, Kunsthall Antwerp, from 2006 to 2010 and co-curator of Manifesta 7 in the region of Trento-South Tyrol in 2008. Previously, Franke acted as curator of KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin until 2006, where he organized exhibitions such as *Territories* (2003), *The Imaginary Number* (2005, with Hila Peleg), and *B-Zone: Becoming Europe and Beyond* (2006), and codeveloped the project *No Matter How Bright the Light, the Crossing Occurs At Night* (2006). At Extra City, he has curated exhibitions such as *Mimétisme* (2008) and *Animism* (2010), as well as several solo presentations. He has edited and published numerous publications and is a regular contributor to magazines such as *Metropolis M*, *Piktogram*, and *Cabinet*.

Esther Leslie is Professor of Political Aesthetics at Birkbeck, University of London. She has written two books on Walter Benjamin, a study of animation and critical theory, titled *Hollywood Flatlands* (2002), and a book on synthetic colour production as a vehicle for exploring the poetics of science in the context of German history, *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry* (2007). She edits three journals: *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory*, *Radical Philosophy* and *Revolutionary History*. She runs a website together with Ben Watson, www.militantesthetix.co.uk

Angela Melitopoulos works in time-based arts and produces video essays, installations, documentaries, photographs, and sound works. Her work engages with issues of duration,

mobility, memory, mnemotechnics, and micropolitics. The combination of montage, archive, and performance is central, and she seeks to realize new, experimental formats. Melitopoulos curates art spaces, exhibitions, and workshops and publishes articles. She has been a visiting professor at various universities and academies. Since 1989 she has been collaborating with the sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato on films, media art projects, and publications. They were close to Félix Guattari and recorded a one-hour interview with him before his death in the summer of 1992, which is included in their video installation *Assemblages* (2010).

Spyros Papapetros is an art and architectural historian and theorist whose work focuses on the historiography of art and architecture, the intersections between architecture and the visual arts, as well as, the relationship between architecture, psychoanalysis and the history of psychological aesthetics. He is currently an assistant professor in the history and theory faculty of the School of Architecture and a member of the Media and Modernity Program at Princeton University. A former Fulbright scholar, Papapetros is the recipient of numerous fellowships by the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal, and the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, among others. During 2002-2003, he was an associate fellow at the Warburg Institute in London where he researched the unpublished manuscripts of Aby Warburg. He is the author of *On the Animation of the Inorganic: Art, Architecture, and the Extension of Life* (forthcoming by the University of Chicago Press, Spring 2012) and the editor of *Space as Membrane* by Siegfried Ebeling (London: AA Publications, 2010). Papapetros is also the co-editor of a forthcoming book based on the symposium *Retracing the Expanded Field* that took place in the Princeton School of Architecture in 2007 on the intersections between architecture and the visual arts during the last three decades. He is currently completing a second personal book project under the general title *MICRO/MACRO I: World Ornament—Adornment on a Global Scale* on the historiography of architectural ornamentation and bodily adornment from the mid 19th to the mid 20th century.

Elisabeth von Samsonow is a philosopher and artist, based in Vienna. Studied philosophy, Catholic theology, and German philology. Her early research was dedicated to Renaissance philosophy, in particular its occult, neo-Platonic, non-Aristotelian forms. Several works are concerned with the philosophy of Giordano Bruno. In 1996, she became professor of sacred arts at the Academy of Visual Arts in Vienna. Today she works there as professor of philosophical and historical anthropology. Her teaching and research focus on philosophy and the history of religions, the theory of collective memory, the relationship between art and religion past and present, and the theory and history of the perception of women, as well as female identity, sacral androgyny, and the modern dissolution of the self. Besides numerous articles in international publications, the following books have been published, among others: *Die Erzeugung des Sichtbaren. Die philosophische Begründung naturwissenschaftlicher Wahrheit bei Johannes Kepler* (1986), *Fenster im Papier. Die imaginäre Kollision der Architektur mit der Schrift oder die Gedächtnisrevolution der Renaissance* (2001), *Anti-Elektra. Totemismus und Schizogamie* (2007), *Myth and Fashion* (2009), recently *Egon Schiele: Ich bin die Vielen* (2010) and *Deleuze and Contemporary Art* (2010).