

# 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 were presented in 2010 at Extra City Kunsthall 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.

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