

frieze

Animismus
Generali Foundation
Wien

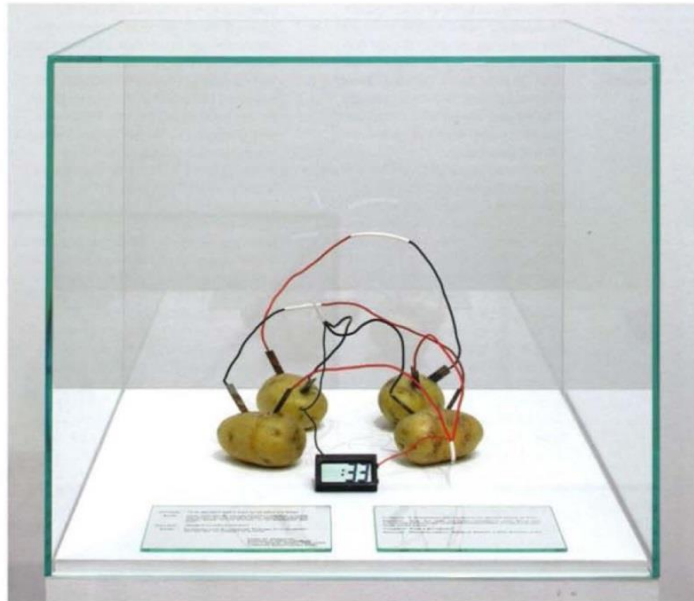
Dominikus Müller

The subtitle of the exhibition – the third in a series of four – gives an idea of the scale of this project initiated by Anselm Franke (and co-curated here in Vienna by Sabine Folie): 'Modernity through the Looking Glass' subjects animism to historical analysis, only to discover a chaotic and suppressed counterpart to the rule of pure intellect, as the mythological 'Other' and 'vanishing point' of modern rationalism. The co-curators planned to rehabilitate the concept of animism within this historical treatment, installing it 'beyond the return of the repressed' (to cite the title of Franke's programmatic catalogue essay) and thus beyond the standard modern dichotomies of subject/object, mind/body, conscious/unconscious. Rather than speaking about animism, the aim, as formulated in the essay, was to speak 'from animism'.

The exhibition offered a captivating, tightly packed survey that seemed to cover every conceivable aspect of the theme: from colonialism and psychoanalysis, via occultism, to the ambivalence towards animism displayed by art (as the only legitimate place of refuge for modernity) and by the museum (as a burial chamber). As a kind of self-reflexive opening statement, the show began with works addressing the 'mortifying' effect of exhibition culture: Candida Höfer's photographic series of ethnological museums (including *American Museum of Natural History New York I*, 1990 and *Ethnologisches Museum Berlin III*, 2003) and Jimmie Durham's pseudo-museum vitrines *The Dangers of Petrification* (2007), which gives simple stones labels describing them as petrified versions of random objects like a slice of apple or a loaf of bread. Next to these works, Victor Grippo's *Tiempo, 2da. versión* (1991) suggested another alternative:

Electricity generated with the help of four potatoes runs a digital clock, casting a seemingly inanimate object as an energy source.

This duality between stasis and motion was also exemplified by Luis Jacob's video *Towards a Theory of Impressionist and Expressionist Spectatorship* (2002): Jacob asked children dressed in colourful fabrics to pose in front of Henry Moore sculptures, thereby transforming the children into sculptures and bringing the sculptures to life in a single gesture. In Joachim Köster's *My Frontier is an Endless Wall of Points (After the mescaline drawings of Henri Michaux)* (2007) – an animation of drawings Henri Michaux made under the influence of mescaline



Victor Grippo
Tiempo, 2da. versión
1991
Verschiedene
Materialien
Mixed media

– jagged abstract forms dance across the celluloid. And in Daria Martin's film *Soft Materials* (2004) naked humans dance with non-anthropomorphic robots: As they learn from one another, their movements converge.

Franke and Folie supplemented the many video works in the show with reference materials: Vitrines featured books and texts such as Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) or Richard Brautigan's cybernetic hymn *All Watched over by Machines of Loving Grace* (1967). Adam Curtis's four-part BBC documentary 'The Century of the Self' (2002) traces the triumphant progress of both psychoanalysis and the Freud family right to the heart of modern PR.

This exhibition worked so well because the curators conceived it as an integrative machine: The selected exhibits fit naturally with each other, and the entire show, with the casual self-reflexivity of projections and vitrines, matched the sophisticated theoretical superstructure in the catalogue. The whole project reflected the increasing entanglement of objects and people, stories and commodities, in world- and époque-spanning networks.

Translated by Nicholas Grindell