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Meridians

Ken Jacobs' video *Capitalism: Slavery* from 2006 was the first work that visitors to the travelling exhibition *Animismus* (2010- 2013) got to see. The work is based on the stereoscopic effect produced by the rapid alternation between the two photos simultaneously accompanied by a slight shift in perspective on the scene: this method of creating animation with entirely basic means, similar to the principle of a flick book, is one of experimental film pioneer Ken Jacob's specialties. The method creates a hallucinatory visual experience that simultaneously draws the viewer into a delirious pictorial space which is always characterized by its 3-dimensionality at the same time. Jacobs uses historical visual material as the starting point here, the motifs of this material forming an exemplary scene which is simultaneously animated and fixed to the spot, brought to life by movement whilst remaining trapped in endless repetition at the same time. Jacob's work can be described as a form of media archeology whose subject is the relationship between technology, the human sensorium and the respective historical images themselves.

In this way, a form of hallucinatory remembrance of the moments of original encounter between bodies, technologies and media is created from which a new reality emerged. In the case of *Capitalism: Slavery*, the motif used is an American cotton plantation complete with black laborers and a supervisor on horseback in the background. The movement between the images, which generates the quasi-animation effect due to the slight shifts in perspective, becomes an analogy for the repetitive gestures of the harvesting work being carried out by the plantation workers. The plantation is a primal scene not only of capitalism, colonialism and slavery, but also subsequent factory work and Taylorism, from which nothing less than a new physis and a new world subsequently developed. The illusionary machinery of cinema is thus also brought into connection with the machinery of production, into the historical continuum of fixation and animation, subjugation and mobilization, and objectification and reification from which the animation of the world of commodities and hegemonic subjectivities emerges, as well as subjectivities of resistance, carriers of the memory of a difference whose resistance will always be

a resistance against naturalization and forgetting. The difference invoked by this – or indeed by any – historical memory of resistance becomes an ontological difference, a difference set against an order of being that will always demand that the possibility of being different be wrested from reality. The extent of this resistance is measured not least by its ability to resist the ghettoisation of this “other” as fiction.

Ken Jacob's work is a work on the pictorial space of history, a search for such dialectic images carried out in much the way Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history also sought to mobilize them. This pictorial space of history is all about production and its historic variables. It is a pictorial space of immanence which can only be forced open from the midst of mediality, from the midst of the dialectical turning points which mediate between the forced and essentialized oppositions that once again become a continuum here, the points of symmetry which enable the asymmetries to be revealed in the first place. Seeking this pictorial space means visualizing history to the greatest possible extent, fixing the effects of mediality at the point where they form a meridian at the zenith of the horizon. One might imagine that it is on this meridian where mediality as such appears in all its registers in the first place, in that every image becomes a reversible figure – the sort of figure where the figure and its background image are mutually dependent and yet also interchangeable, which display a difference in the respective motifs present at the same time, only one of which can be perceived at a particular moment, and in which the shift in viewpoint thus makes the implication of the viewer apparent within the pictorial space.

Ken Jacob's work is precisely this sort of visualization of the pictorial space of history where sensorium and technology and past and present become reversible figures, background and figure alternate and the same sort of sense of presence on the part of the viewer is created in and by the image. The body becomes an effect of the image, the image an effect of the body: from this starting point, the historical space opens out along the meridian of permanent reversible figures towards its Other by being negated as the sort of verified history in which all differences and oppositions have been laid down. This meridian is the meridian of mediality par excellence, the nexus of mediation between the active and the passive in the

broadest and most general sense, the case of the medium, in other words, where it becomes temporarily impossible to distinguish between making and being made, thus allowing it to emerge as a variable of historical production. Can such a hypothesis of a meridian of reversible figures inside images be applied to an archive in methodological terms and their sense of presence thus be gauged? Can an archive be traversed by a meridian of this kind? With this in mind, I would like to use the sort of delirious, hallucinatory pictorial space which Ken Jacobs is only able to create by inscribing us as viewers into the meridian of animation and fixation as a methodological vehicle for a journey through the archive. The resulting program brings together three distinctions which represent boundaries and differences carefully watched by institutions, discourses and aesthetics and yet still subject to historical transformation, particularly with respect to the production of “modernity”. Can the various transformations of these boundaries be grasped by means of film examples from the last 40 years? What different strategies and concepts exist and have existed to translate a demarcation and that which it both includes and excludes into a dialectical pictorial space? The first such distinction is the difference between normality and pathology or madness, the second that between modernity and pre- or non-modernity.

The historical moment which comprises perhaps the most far-reaching and radical critique also to be found in the Arsenal archive is the anti-psychiatry discourse. There has been no critical discourse since the anti-psychiatry movement that would have been able to encounter the challenge of ontological difference in more radical and comprehensive fashion. In addition, the meridian of medial movements of reversal relating to schizophrenia, which is also at the core of anti-psychiatry’s critique, is only too well-known: schizophrenic is also a challenge to the very thinking of meridians of mediality. I would like to add another difference to the anti-psychiatry movement as practiced in experiments such as the Kingsley Hall Commune under the central influence of R.D. Laing (Kingsley Hall in the film *ASYLUM* by Peter Robinson) which forms the core of so-called ethnopsychiatry: the difference between modernity and its “other”, which used to be referred to as the primitive. Ethnopsychiatry confronts the challenge of ontological difference from within the colonial matrix, seeking to articulate an “outside” to this matrix from the

midst of the very differences which constitute it in the first place. This is a matrix whose mediality Jean Rouch dedicated his entire life to measuring. The concrete practice of healing does, however, require more than negation with respect to the systems which produce the symptoms as their respective medial and embodied effects in the first place. The practice of healing has to seek the negation of the negation, it is by its very structure affirmative, it must name and restrict its frame of reference in reference to the possibilities of transformation; it must place healing above the call for revolution. How can the fate of this critique be grasped, the remains of its radical challenge and dissemination of ontological difference, how can the archival body's sense of presence be expressed as a result of this? Taking this reflection as a starting point, it is possible to isolate what is inscribed as a structural problematic within the gestures of politicization which run through and animate the Arsenal archive, those gestures of politicization which seek to carry out a critique of exclusion based on dialectic film practice?