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Roderick Maclachlan's new work, *Disappearance*, extends his established analogue media practice (*Paint Can Reflected*, 2008) to work with the physics of light in order to explore the mutability of the archive and the image as object. Maclachlan presents a materialist montage that collides the perfect repetition of the video loop with analogue projection, both inviting and disrupting a return to a McLuhanesque medium as message. Despite the heavy material presence of the television-light-lens-video-sound assemblage and the rough-and-ready feel of the projection booth that provide the entry point into the work, the ghostly images that emerge transform that assemblage into image. That is, *Disappearance* resolves the mass of the television set into the seeming weightlessness of the mirrored image, which parallels the transformation of the mass of human, animal and plant bodies in the forest into televisual images. But Maclachlan insists upon a further turn in that these images don't speak of representational regimes but instead, through the specific glassy and monumental quality of the reflected image, return the viewer to consider the image as object. As such, *Disappearance* responds to Hito Steyerl's suggestion that 'if identification is to go anywhere, it has to be with [the] material aspect of the image, with the image as thing, not as representation' (2010).

In animating the archive as a 'radioactive fossil' (Marks 2000: 84-85) Maclachlan's use of pre-cinema technology precisely calls up the tension between our proximity to the image as thing and the distance between our bodies and the entwined bodies of Attenborough and the apes. It is that distance, the projected image's inability to deliver what we thought for so long that it promised – the presence of that which is 'represented' – that enacts a different set of politically charged presences. The projected bodies of the forest, the animals and the youthful Attenborough have already disappeared beneath political strife, war, environmental devastation, the temporality of the event itself. Yet, these bodies remain bound up in and performed by the stubborn persistence of a period Toshiba portable TV and the archive, a video trace only made possible by the geo-political and military-industrial-entertainment energies that continue to destroy these habitats. Media presence kills the things it loves and yet, problematically, it also offers new possibilities through their objectification.

Where the television image once promised endless reproduction, here the projected image of the screen image has a more complicated relationship with presence and absence. The projected bodies – *on* screen and *of* screen - threaten to disappear beneath the layered constellation of the circles of light that are both the agents, and the material trace, of the event of projection. That this is an ongoing event of disappearance rather than a completed act is signaled by a series of movements – once again, both *on* and *of* the image-object. The slow left-right swivel of the television set on its pedestal becomes a projected disorientation, a subtle unsettling. While what is seen is a projected image, the audio is emitted from the television set itself and that separation of signal and noise points to the impossible possibility of being in two places at once that media offers. Zooms, pans, low-angle shots and the fragmented geographies of the edited sequence visually challenge any sense of naturalist space.

There are multiple gestures that point to perhaps the only presence that can make a difference here: the entanglement and 'carnal density' of 'the body filmed, the embodied viewer / artist / filmmaker, ...the body of the film itself' (Russell 1999: 160-62) and the technological bodies in which these are all bound up and which can only be activated in the space of the event. Repeated shots of apes and monkeys reaching out to grab trees, leaves, to groom one another and to enfold Attenborough call up McLuhan's 'extensions of man'

and invite comparison with our own acts of viewing and participation. Attenborough refers to the 'warm body of the mother' ape, which is reflected in the warm body of the television. However, just as we can't feel the warmth of the mother ape herself, the only television we can approach here is the cold projected image on the wall. Promises of intimacy are offered and then refused. Attenborough tells us that 'there is more meaning in the exchanging of a glance with a gorilla than any other animal I know'. But only Attenborough knows this. Where the image-object can return a look of sorts, the only direct exchange of glances here is with other humans in the gallery space. *Disappearance's* deliberate distancing of the representational narrative of the video from its projection and its staging of the immediate proximity of technologies and image-objects demands that the viewer orientates herself to a world in which bodies are deliberately complex, entangled assemblages and the boundaries between them are uncertain.

References

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