LEEDS ARTS RESEARCH CENTRE

OURHOUSE EPISODE -1: TIME

NATHANIEL MELLORS

OUTPUT INFORMATION

Title:
Ourhouse Episode -1: Time

Output Type:
M – Exhibition

Venues:
Harris Museum, Preston; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

Year of first exhibition:
2016

Research Groups:
Curating

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION STATEMENT

Ourhouse (2010-) portrays an English country estate that plays host to a range of absurdist narratives satirising the upper-class decadence of the Maddox-Wilson family. This latest episode, Ourhouse Episode -1: Time incorporates Mellors' research into Upper-Palaeolithic studies. In a key surrealist move, time is decreed a physical material with its own economy, an unevenly distributed resource.

The method represents a slight departure from earlier episodes of Ourhouse. A 60-minute prequel to the story so far, Time switches the action to the estate's 'northern wing': Preston Bus Station. This Brutalist icon is invaded by Neanderthals, who abduct and eat the main character in a ritual that uses the tropes of late capitalism to satirise austerity and wealth separation.

Written, directed and co-produced by Mellors for permanent acquisition by Harris Museum, Preston, on the occasion of his winning the Contemporary Art Society Prize (2014), Time is co-produced by the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, who, since exhibiting the work in their inaugural 2017 Triennial, also acquired it for their permanent collection. An interview with Mellors appeared in the Triennial catalogue, and another with Tala Madani appeared in the NGV magazine. The Triennial received national and international press coverage, having a record-breaking 1.2 million visitors. Other supporters include Stigter van Doesburg, Amsterdam; Monitor, Rome; The Box, Los Angeles; Matt's Gallery, London.

The fifth episode of Ourhouse, Time's significance lies in blending experimental approaches to film-making with mainstream production methods. The entertainment value of a middlebrow TV sitcom is rethought along anthropological lines. Deployed within a combination of installation art, sculpture and free improvisation, the cast embodies a new vision of our culture industry in which the credibility of an actor's performance rests on the incorporation of their thespian skills into a wider, more elastic ensemble.

“ Nathaniel Mellors, a British artist known for his satirical and absurd works, is not exaggerating when he speaks of “pulling out some deeper weirdness” in his “unique” new commission for Preston’s imposing Harris Museum and Art Gallery. Effectively won through the [£40,000] Contemporary Art Society Annual Award, Mellors – whose current Ourhouse series has featured the likes of Harry Potter actor Richard Bremner and Gwendoline Christie, of Game of Thrones and Star Wars – will reimagine the notorious, brutalist bus station in the Lancashire city as a knackered cinema where cannibals and Neanderthals battle. ”

Ben Miller, *Culture 24*

“ In this latest episode of *Ourhouse*, Mellors takes a running jump and lands outside of the confines of good taste. The film relishes in body functions and the obscene, which is not to say that it is merely puerile but should be viewed in the Rabelaisian tradition of grotesque and scatological realism…Mellors’ commission for the Harris is a visceral viewing experience, a successful attempt at plumbing what he calls ‘a deeper weirdness. ”

Holly Grange, *Corridor8*

“ Mellors’s Ourhouse Ep. 1: Time is the ambitious latest instalment in the artist’s video series, which revolves around the eccentric Maddox-Wilson family and their TARDIS-like stately home, ‘Ourhouse’. Shot locally, Time is a prequel to the series’ previous four episodes and further distorts the time continuum by absorbing a Brutalist bus station as Ourhouse’s ‘Northern Wing’ and venturing into pre- and post-history to let loose Neanderthals and futuristic cannibals on present-day Preston… Mellors squeezes millions of years of human history into 30 minutes, backwards…the cast [regressing] to the very start of life on Earth, still stranded atop Preston’s bus station. ”

Beth Bramich, *Art Monthly*

Still from Nathaniel Mellors (2015-16) *Ourhouse Episode -1: Time*

“Love Nathaniel Mellors’ film and intend to come back and watch it all. Thank you!”

Gallery Visitor, *The Harris Museum*

“ Innovative, top quality new commission that drew us to the exhibition. ”

Gallery Visitor, *The Harris Museum*

“ Really love the decision to show long video works; makes me want to come back again and again. ”

Gallery Visitor, *The Harris Museum*

“ Good fun to spot the Preston locations used in the film. ”

Gallery Visitor, *The Harris Museum*

APPENDIX

REVIEWS & ARTICLES

Beth Bramich, ‘Nothing Happens, Twice: Artists Explore the Absurdity of Life’, *Art Monthly*, April 2016, Issue 395.

Maeve Connolly, ‘Televisual Objects: props and Prosthetics’, *Afterall*, Summer 2013, Vol 33 Issue.

Bob Dickinson, ‘Pleistocene, Holocene, Anthropocene’, *Art Monthly* 389, September 2015.

Jacob Fabricius, ‘Nathaniel Mellors Interview’, *Art Review,* https://artreview.com/features/feature_nathaniel_mellors/

Holly Grange, Nathaniel Mellors, Ourhouse Episode -1: Time’, *Corridor8,* April 2016, https://corridor8.co.uk/article/review-nathaniel-mellors-ourhouse-episode-1-time-harris-museum-and-art-gallery-preston/

Ben Miller, ‘Warring Neanderthal and cannibal factions to battle in cinema drama at brutalist Preston Bus Station’, *Culture 24,* November 2014, https://www.culture24.org.uk/art/photography-and-film/art507560-warring-neanderthal-and-cannibal-factions-to-battle-in-cinema-drama-at-brutalist-preston-bus-station

PRESS RELEASES

Contemporary Art Society, ‘Nathaniel Mellors Wins the £40,000 Contemporary Art Society Annual Award 2014’, http://www.contemporaryartsociety.org/news/nathaniel-mellors-wins-the-40000-contemporary-art-society-annual-award-2014/

The Box Gallery, ‘Prequel Dump’, http://www.theboxla.com/artist.php?id=6080

The Harris Museum, ‘Nothing Happens, Twice: Artists Explore Absurdity’ http://www.harrismuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/1018-nothing-happens-twice are the work of Cy Twombly, on whom Barthes wrote two important essays, or Henri Michaux's proto-tachiste paintings of the 1930s and 1940s. In her 'Remembering Barthes' essay of 1980, Susan Sontag, reporting on her subject's note-taking, connected his 'aversion to marking-up books with the fact that he drew, and that this drawing, which he pursued seriously, was a kind of writing'. Without citing Sontag, Bishop and Manghani make much of the claim that Barthes' drawings are primarily a form of writing, seemingly trapped by what must ultimately be an acceptance of the established professional, their (accurate) portrayal of Barthes as an amateur perversely cementing his status as a writer. But the paintings' impetuous charm is also their power; Barthes' refusal to exhibit them was a critical tactic intended to withhold these 'squanderings' from the slow death of indiscriminate commodification.

Burgin's digital projections, each occupying a single dark space, are mostly monochromatic and can feel icily analytical after Barthes' riot of colour. Their panoramic, unceasing movement holds its own seductive edge. Shown in the UK for the first time, all three of Burgin's works concern the phantasmagorical re-presentation of vanished buildings, including the soon-to-disappear John Hansard Gallery itself in *Belledonne*, 2015, which also incorporates imagery of the sanatorium in which Barthes spent three years recovering from tuberculosis as a young man. The other two pieces, *A Place to Read* and *Prairie*, both 2015, reflect upon, respectively, a now-vanished Istanbul coffee house and the destruction of Chicago's *Mecca*. These 'photographs that move' – as Burgin refers to them – exemplify, especially within the present configuration, the opposite of the emphatically static images Barthes theorised on in *Camera Lucida*, 1980. In Burgin's *image repertoire* time never ceases to unfold; we may enter or leave these luminous loops whenever we please without detriment to our engagement with their carefully concocted mimetic field. The incredibly complicated technique of digital montage developed by Burgin is idiosyncratic if not unique, and thereby far removed from Barthes' traditionalist mark-making. Where does Burgin stand as regards the unqualified status of the amateur? 'I'm on the side of the Wizard of Oz when he argues for the superfluity of ... decorations of all kinds', Burgin notes in the catalogue; 'Barthes himself ... had none of the academic qualifications that his intellectual peers would routinely have [held]'. ∎

PETER SUCHIN is an artist, critic and curator.

Nothing Happens, Twice: Artists Explore the Absurdity of Life

Harris Museum and Art Gallery Preston

6 February to 4 June

It is funny what's funny the second time around. In Samuel Beckett's one-act play, *Play*, 1963, a man and two women reflect on the breakdown of their overlapping love affairs. The characters' lines are interspersed but disconnected from one another, and all delivered at breakneck speed. The pace is relentless but for a few unexpected eruptions as words catch in the man's throat and cause him to – hic! The twist is that as their desperate confessions seem to be nearing some conclusion, the play resets and wholly repeats. And so the words that whizzed by are reperformed and the acute placement of the bodily interruptions bring the farcical nature of love and lies to the fore. Taking Beckett's theatre as its theme, 'Nothing Happens, Twice' is a group exhibition about the absurdity of life, featuring the premiere of a major new film by Nathaniel Mellors (winner of the Contemporary Art Society's annual award) alongside *Play* (shown here as a filmic interpretation directed by Anthony Minghella in 2001), new commissions by Sally O'Reilly, Pavel Büchler (Interview *AM*387), Common Culture, Cally Spooner and Hardeep Pandhal as well as existing works by 11 other artists, including Mel Brimfield, Hilde Krohn Huse and Mladen Stilinović.

Mellors's *Ourhouse Ep. 1: Time*, 2016, is the ambitious latest instalment in the artist's video series, which revolves around the eccentric Maddox-Wilson family and their TARDIS-like stately home, 'Ourhouse'. Shot locally, *Time* is a prequel to the series' previous four episodes and further distorts the space-time continuum by absorbing a Brutalist bus station as Ourhouse's 'Northern wing' and venturing into pre- and post-history to let loose Neanderthals and futuristic cannibals on present-day Preston. The catalyst for all these anachronisms is the invention of a radical new theory of time by patriarch Charles Wilson; when he uses his theory to travel into the past, he unwittingly sends himself and his family falling back through time, devolving into ever lumpier and gruntier forms as Mellors squeezes millions of years of human history into 30 minutes, backwards. The climactic shot sees the cast regress to the very start of life on Earth, still stranded atop Preston's bus station, a set of four Perspex cubes with strands of the characters' hair flopped on top and flaps of flesh suspended inside. Like *Play*, *Time* cries out for an immediate second loop to remember how it all began.

For an exhibition about theatre, live performance is notably absent. As with Mellors's central work, it falls mostly on moving-image works to provide the – pre-recorded – action. Mel Brimfield's 2013 video *Mouth* apes Beckett's iconic *Not I*, 1973, with a monstrous, flapping pair of lips, here spouting snatches of hackneyed vaudeville routines that derail into nonsense before they reach their off-colour punchlines. Elsewhere, Hilde Krohn Huse's *Hanging in the Woods*, 2015, documents a performance that slides out of the artist's grasp, leaving her hopelessly tangled and dangling naked from a tree. Among these bodies – and body parts – the exhibition's inanimate elements struggle to capture the overstimulated eye. Two newly commissioned sculptures by Büchler attempt to bring the before and after effects of drama into the gallery by putting props centre stage. *Once again -*, 2016, a bowtie stuffed into a reception bell in order to prevent its 'briiiiiing', calls to my mind the aftermath of an apoplectic Basil Fawlty solving yet another problem by grabbing at Manuel's throat. Conversely, Büchler's four stacked tripods sculpture (*Waiting to Happen*, 2016) falls flat, the construct appearing just a fraction too stable to evoke the desired potential for catastrophe.

Where the experiential falters for Büchler, it succeeds for O'Reilly's audio sculpture *The Harris Garulatrix*, 2016, due to its novel entry point: a speaker embedded in the sole of a ladies' brown leather shoe. The shoe, and more specifically its orifice, is a site of high dramatic tension; only with one ear held close to the insole can an uneasy listening experience take place. From within, the *garulatrix* – a Latin

Nathaniel Mellors
Ourhouse, Ep.-1: Time
2016 video

Mladen Stilinović
Artist at Work 1978

term referring to a female who scolds – can be heard casting a displeased eye across the strange assembly she finds herself part of, sighing wearily over the vagaries of contemporary art and clucking derisively at any pretensions that 'the viewer' might have. She suggests, less than gently, that you might as well give up and go. Likewise, artist collective Common Culture enact the Beckettian dichotomy of giving up and keeping going in *I Can't Go On, I'll Go On, I Can't Go On, I'll Go On*, 2016, by inviting a real-life comedian to perform on stage for an audience of none. The comic's routine deflates over the video's 40 ever-lengthening minutes, as does the will to watch what becomes an increasingly rambling narrative of forgotten and repressed experiences. Only a vague empathy for performance anxiety holds the audience in uneasy association with the screen.

Curator Clarissa Corfe borrows the exhibition's title from critic Vivien Mercier's deft description of *Waiting for Godot* as 'a play in which nothing happens, twice' and this deadpan distillation appears to have been a guiding principle for the sensibility, and sense of humour, in the selection of works. The fact that many of Beckett's plays translate seamlessly to screen offers a coherent rationale for bringing together a range of video works, but *Play* in particular underlines the intense specificity of Beckett's character studies. While not all the works are as off-putting a prospect as a 40-minute comedy routine with no punchline, there is a clear struggle to balance Mellors's fully realised narrative, which was developed in reference to Beckett's back catalogue, with the surrounding exhibition's often more tenuous relationship with the playwright's work. In relation, the most successful works can be read as skilled vignettes, satires and subversions, the weaker as variations on a loose theme. In this context, the images and actions that sustain are those that capture something essential to the absurd: the exact moment where situations slip from our control, like a hiccup that hovers in the air after someone has clamped their mouth shut. ∎

BETH BRAMICH is a writer based in London.

The Imitation Game

Manchester Art Gallery 13 February to 5 June

Alan Turing's legacy continues to be felt in Manchester, with this exhibition taking inspiration from the Turing Test while simultaneously AL and AL have put Turing centre-stage in their current exhibition at HOME (Reviews *AM*394). Thankfully, both go beyond Manchester's typically fetishistic attitude towards the individuals who make up its recent past (think of the recent spate of naming streets and buildings after Tony Wilson or Factory Records) and, while thematic overlap is unavoidable, the exhibitions differ substantially.

Turing's eponymous test proposed a method of examining whether a machine could successfully imitate the intelligent behaviour of a human being, which has since become one of the most important concepts in the philosophy of artificial intelligence. It is this fertile area that the exhibition aims to cover, with the various participating artists providing their own examples of machines that imitate life.

Paul Granjon's *Am I Robot*, 2015-16, cheerfully greets visitors on the exhibition's first floor, a small robot amiably trundling

Beth Bramich, 'Nothing Happens, Twice: Artists Explore the Absurdity of Life', Art Monthly, April 2016, Issue 395

Nathaniel Mellors, *Truson's Venus : Venus of Truson (prehistoric, photogrammic original)*, 2012, resin Venus sculpture on wooden plinth with wall-mounted photogramme, part of the installation *Ourhouse E3 feat. BAD COPY*, 2012. Installation view, Matt's Gallery, London, 2012. Photograph: Peter White. Courtesy the artist; Matt's Gallery, London; MONITOR, Rome; and Galerie Diana Stigter, Amsterdam

Televisual Objects: Props, Relics and Prosthetics

– Maeve Connolly

Maeve Connolly examines television as an object of artistic enquiry in recent exhibitions by Nathaniel Mellors, Shana Moulton, and Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, identifying a common interest in the role of television as mediator of both material and social relationships.

Opening in early April 2012 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, the exhibition 'Remote Control' was scheduled to coincide with a significant moment in the history of television broadcasting in the UK: the commencement in the London region of the national switchover from analogue to digital signal. Although the switchover was framed as a transition rather than termination, Simon Denny's installation *Channel 4 Analogue Broadcasting Hardware from Arqiva's Sudbury Transmitter* (2012) presented the remains of analogue broadcasting in a vaguely ominous manner. Placed in the lower gallery, the obsolete transmission hardware dominated a section of the exhibition that included a series of wall-mounted monitors, displaying video works produced since the late 1960s.[1] Even though the installation required viewers to sit close, printed signage warned exhibition visitors to avoid touching the transmission machinery on the grounds that it might be dangerous. By placing Denny's hardware installation and the videos – many of which were devised for broadcast – in proximity to each other, 'Remote Control' both posed questions about the nature of televisual objecthood and drew attention to television's ongoing reconfiguration as an object of artistic inquiry.

'Remote Control' is just one of several recent exhibitions responding to changes in the form and experience of television,[2] but it is distinguished by a particularly strong emphasis on technological obsolescence, both in relation to broadcast infrastructure and television as a consumer object. In addition to the hardware installation, Denny contributed a wall-mounted sculpture, *Analogue/Digital Transmission Switchover: London* (2012), incorporating a 3D flat-screen television and artificial eyeballs, comically alluding to 'advancements' in television technology. The ground-floor gallery also included Matias Faldbakken's *TV Sculpture* (2012), produced by pouring cement from a plastic jug into packaging for flat-screen TVs. These are not the first artworks to develop a sculptural approach to television as a consumer object. During the 1950s and 60s, artists including Nam June Paik and Günther Uecker produced sculptural works incorporating either functional or non-functional receivers.[3] In 1963, a TV set figured prominently in Konrad Lueg and Gerhard Richter's action *Leben mit Pop — eine Demonstration für den kapitalistischen Realismus* (*Living with Pop — A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism*), staged at the Berges furniture store in Düsseldorf, in which the artists posed as living sculptures among an array of consumer objects that included a TV set tuned to a broadcast marking the resignation of Konrad Adenauer that evening.[4]

1 Simon Denny discusses his involvement in the exhibition in a video posted on YouTube by the ICA on 5 April 2012, available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hj165gFPbds (last accessed on 3 March 2013).
2 Examples include 'Broadcast Yourself' at Cornerhouse, Manchester (2008); 'Changing Channels: Art and Television 1963—87', Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna (2010); 'Channel TV', a collaboration between Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof, Hamburg, centre d'art cneal, Chatou, Paris and Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg (2010—11); and 'Are You Ready for TV?', Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2010—11).
3 For a discussion of works by these (and other) artists engaging with television in the 1950s and 60s, see Christine Mehring, 'TV Art's Abstract Starts: Europe, c.1944—1969', *October*, vol.125, Summer 2008, pp.29—64.
4 See Andrew S. Weiner, 'Memory under Reconstruction: Politics and Event in Wirtschaftswunder West Germany', *Grey Room*, no.37, 2009, p.98; and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Readymade, Photography, and Painting in the Painting of Gerhard Richter', in Daniel Abadie (ed.), *Gerhard Richter* (exh. cat.), Paris: Musée National d'Art Moderne, 1977, pp.11—58, reprinted in B.H.D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2000, pp.365—404.

David Hall's *This Is a Television Receiver* (1976), one of the iconic videos shown at 'Remote Control', is also concerned with television as a material object. Rather than focusing upon the relationship between television and commerce, the work envisages the receiver as a site for the articulation of the authority invested in public service broadcasting. Devised for broadcast, it features a close-up of BBC news presenter Richard Baker, stating, 'This is a television receiver.' Using analogue means, the statement has been rerecorded several times, so that the image becomes progressively distorted. As Sean Cubitt points out, the curvature of the glass of the CRT[5] television screen becomes more apparent as a consequence of the angle of the rerecording, emphasising both the material properties of the receiver and its function within a larger institutional formation.[6]

Even though 'Remote Control' did not proclaim the end of broadcasting, the focus on the analogue switchover called to mind an earlier wave of exhibitions, loosely marking the centenary of cinema in the late 1990s and framed through reference to processes of industrial change, such as the displacement of film by digital technologies.[7] Cinema, and specifically the film theatre, is often valued within art discourse because of its historical and cultural associations with public sociality.[8] Television, in contrast, has frequently been framed by theorists of art as a threat to the public sphere, with David Joselit suggesting, for example, that US network TV functions 'against democracy'.[9] According to Raymond Williams, writing in the mid-1970s, the radio receiver was one of several 'consumer durables' (others include the car and home electrical appliances) that enabled the 'mobile privatisation' of social life. The term is used by Williams to describe 'apparently paradoxical yet deeply connected tendencies of modern industrial living: on the one hand mobility, on the other hand the more apparently self-sufficient family home'.[10] Yet Williams is also careful to situate broadcasting within a complex of changing social needs and cultural practices, noting that it functioned effectively as a social connector, partly because it borrowed from recognisably public cultural forms, including vaudeville, music hall and theatre. Within the US context, this debt to vaudeville was apparent in 1950s sitcoms, while sponsored anthology drama shows, such as *Goodyear Playhouse* (1951—57), mobilised the cultural prestige attached to theatre and offered the illusion of a night on the town without the inconvenience of leaving home.[11] During the same time period, many dramatists were also drawn toward British television, in both its commercial and public service variants, as a potential site of formal experimentation and social critique, precisely because broadcasting had the capacity to reach a broader social demographic than theatre.[12]

Today, television-themed exhibitions are part of a larger engagement with television's history and form in contemporary art, and while some artists have drawn attention to the physical remains of outmoded technologies and changing practices of material consumption, others are specifically interested in television's role in the production of a sense of shared space and time through live performance.[13] These apparently disparate facets of the televisual turn in contemporary art intersect in three exhibitions from 2012 that address television's role in mediating both social *and* material relations: Shana Moulton's 'Prevention' at Gimpel Fils gallery in London, Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch's 'Any Ever' at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris and Nathaniel Mellors's 'Ourhouse E3 feat. BAD COPY' at Matt's Gallery in London.[14] In these projects, the artists

5 CRT, or cathode ray tube, was the technology used in the first television sets to be commercialised and the most common until the late 2000s, when it was supplanted by flat-screen television sets.
6 See Sean Cubitt, 'Grayscale Video and the Shift to Color', *Art Journal*, Fall 2006, p.49.
7 Examples include 'Spellbound: Art and Film' at the Hayward Gallery, London (1996); 'Art and Film Since 1945: Hall of Mirrors', Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1996); and 'Scream and Scream Again: Film in Art', Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (1996).
8 I have argued this in my text 'Temporality, Sociality, Publicness: Cinema as Art Project', *Afterall*, issue 29, Spring 2012, pp.4—15.
9 See David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2007.
10 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974), London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2003, p.19.
11 See Lynn Spigel, *TV by Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, p.88.
12 See John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British Culture*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
13 Examples of the second category include the televised performance *This Unfortunate Thing Between Us* (2011) by Phil Collins and the video *In Camera* (2012) by Liz Magic Laser, adapted from Jean-Paul Sartre's 1944 stage play *Huis Clos* (*No Exit*).
14 These exhibitions were on view, respectively, 9 October—17 November 2012; 18 October 2011—9 January 2012; and 18 April—27 May 2012.

Maeve Connolly, 'Televisual Objects: props and Prosthetics', Afterall, Summer 2013, Vol 33 Issue.

Simon Denny, *Channel 4 Analogue Broadcasting Hardware from Argiva's Sudbury Transmitter*, 2012, broadcast transmission hardware waste from analogue to digital TV transmission switchover. Installation view, 'Remote Control', Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 2012. Photograph: Stephen White. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

explore how television has shaped relationships between people and objects, both within and beyond the home, through the staging of interactions between characters on screen and through the interplay of objects in these filmed universes and within the gallery space.

Prosthetics, Relics and Props

Sculptural objects and environments in the three exhibitions function as ways to materially extend the fictional universes depicted on screen into the space of the gallery. This extension can be understood through Marshall McLuhan's ideas, which circulated widely in the early 1960s, at the point when television was becoming established as both a medium and an object of enquiry in artistic practice. McLuhan's concept of media as 'prosthetic' extensions seems especially pertinent to the analysis of the relationship between television and objects in contemporary art. Situating television in relation to a succession of prosthetic extensions, including the wheel, glass and mirrors, McLuhan describes a process he illustrates through reference to the myth of Narcissus, whereby the embrace or integration of an extension (such as a reflection of oneself) involves the numbing of perception, in a phenomenon analogous to the amputation of an organ, sense or function from the body.[15]

So prosthetic extensions are not necessarily expansions of agency or power, but rather a complex and ongoing process through which, as Steven Shaviro notes, 'media spread themselves out everywhere. Once we project them, they escape from our control and redound back upon us, drawing us into new relations.'[16] McLuhan also insists upon television as a *tactile* (as distinct from predominantly visual) medium, positing a connection between this quality and what he regarded in the early 1960s as a new awareness of bodily welfare, and a growing fascination with tactile and sculptural forms articulated in the design of cars and clothing.[17] Television's incorporation into the human 'system' as an extension seems to result for McLuhan in a displacement of the tactile into the environment, eliciting new relations with a whole range of objects and materials. While the phenomenon

15 See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York, Toronto and London: McGraw-Hill, 1964, pp.41–42.
16 Steven Shaviro, 'The Universe of Things', *Theory & Event*, vol.14, issue 3, 2011, p.6.
17 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, *op. cit.*, p.314.

of extension long predates electronics, he suggests that television and the computer have contributed to greater awareness of this process,[18] and considers the art of his time as a potential source of 'immunity' from new extensions.[19] This claim regarding immunity remains somewhat undeveloped in his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), but the concept of prosthetic extension may still be useful in understanding manifestations of televisual materiality and sociality in contemporary art. More recently, McLuhan's work has informed an analysis of the processes through which older media are retrieved and even preserved by newer media. His ideas are especially important for Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in shaping the concept of 'remediation', which describes the process whereby older media are refashioned, simultaneously surpassed and preserved, by newer (typically digital) media.[20] Although Bolter and Grusin focus primarily on the technological development of commercial media, the processes they describe clearly resonate with developments in contemporary art culture.

Bruno Latour, however, offers a different way of conceptualising television as an outmoded technology – one more directly concerned with the theorisation of human-object relations. He suggests that objects are habitually invisible as mediators of social relations in daily life, but can acquire a greater visibility when they become archaic or exotic as a consequence of distance in time.[21] According to Latour, sociology has tended to overlook the relations between human and non-human actors, insisting upon the social as a pre-existing category rather than engaging with 'the project of assembling new entities not yet gathered together'.[22] He proposes that these processes of bringing different bodies together can occur in many contexts, including the 'artisan's workshop, the engineer's design department, the scientist's laboratory, the marketer's trial panels, the user's home'.[23] Latour's own involvement in curatorial projects such as the exhibition 'Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy' (2005) would suggest that he also envisages exhibitions as sites where assemblies of new entities might occur, enabling objects to acquire a temporary degree of visibility as mediators.[24]

Yet is it impossible to conceive of the gallery or exhibition as a site for the gathering of 'new entities' without at least acknowledging institutional and economic forces specific to these contexts. In their text 'Matthew Barney and the Paradox of the Neo-Avant-Garde Blockbuster' (2006), Alexandra Keller and Frazer Ward coin the term 'prop-relic' to describe the various objects that appear in Barney's *Cremaster* films (1994–2002) and also exist as sculptural artworks to be viewed in gallery environments.[25] They use the term 'prop-relic' to differentiate Barney's custom-made commodities from the material 'relics' of performances by an earlier generation of artists, including Marina Abramović, Vito Acconci and Chris Burden, which take the form of films, videos, photographs and artefacts.[26] For Burden, they note, 'relics' described leftovers of performances, such as the glass he crawled over in *Through the Night Softly* (1973) and the nails hammered through his hands in *Trans-Fixed* (1974). In naming these objects 'relics', Burden sought to preserve their status as 'evidence' while making sure they were 'not to be seen as valuable in and of themselves'.[27] As Keller and Ward point out, the physical remnants of Barney's on-screen performances are not everyday items but custom-made commodities, the use-value of which is stripped away through attention to luxury, 'the utter and ostentatious waste of surplus capital' and material additions that do away with their functionality.[28]

For Keller and Ward, Barney's prop-relics are indebted to the merchandising economy that links spectacular exhibitions with Hollywood cinema. 'The *Cremaster* franchise – and it is a franchise', they write, 'exists at some level to produce the objects necessary to

18 *Ibid.*, p.47.
19 *Ibid.*, p.60.
20 See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2000.
21 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.80.
22 *Ibid.*, p.75.
23 *Ibid.*, p.80.
24 The exhibition, co-curated with Peter Weibel, took place at the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe from 19 March until 7 August 2005.
25 See Alexandra Keller and Frazer Ward, 'Matthew Barney and the Paradox of the Neo-Avant-Garde Blockbuster', *Cinema Journal*, vol.45, no.2, Winter 2006, p.9.
26 Barney coins the props used in his performances as a 'family of objects', see *ibid.*, p.4.
27 *Ibid.*, p.8.
28 *Ibid.*, p.9.

the films' articulation: *Cremaster* motorcycles, high heels, honeycombs and caber-tossing bars that are exhibited and sold. The model for this behaviour is twofold: the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's King Tut exhibit and *Star Wars*, both from 1977.'[29] Unlike *Star Wars* light sabres, however, the objects produced within the context of the *Cremaster* franchise are not designed to enable imaginative entry into a fictional world through physical interaction and play. In contrast, the sculptural objects created by Mellors, Moulton and Trecartin and Fitch manifest a strongly tactile quality even when they cannot be handled, a quality that resonates with McLuhan's notion of prosthetic extension.

Televisual Prosthetics in the Gallery

Shana Moulton's practice encompasses the production of videos, sculptural installations, objects and live-performance works – often structured around choreographed interaction with projected images. The prosthetic quality of her sculptures is difficult to overlook, since it is partly a function of the materials used in their production, such as assistive devices. For instance, *Medical Dreamcatcher (B)* (2012) consists of a walking frame wrapped in yarn and decorated in beads with a pillbox delicately suspended from its handle. When shown at her exhibition at Gimpel Fils, the functional properties of the object were amplified by its placement near the gallery entrance, as though left there by a visitor for subsequent retrieval. So while the form of the object clearly designated it as a non-functional sculpture, its tool-like qualities remained pronounced.

Many of Moulton's videos specifically highlight the affective properties of objects, whether they are viewed on television or handled directly by her as a performer. The narratives revolve around a character called Cynthia, a woman of indeterminate age who lives in a community after which the series *Whispering Pines* (2002–ongoing) is titled. Cynthia, who is played by Moulton, suffers from various stress-induced ailments and seeks solace in New Age therapies and celebrity-endorsed 'wellness' regimes, surrounding herself with objects such as wind chimes and neck braces that are supposedly imbued with health-giving properties. Television is more than a mere window onto the world for Cynthia; it is a source of advice and guidance, a mirror image to be emulated and a portal through which she can literally travel to other realms. In the ten-minute single-channel video *Whispering Pines 9* (2009), the interior of Cynthia's home is cluttered with folk-style fabrics and ornaments that surround a small TV, producing a sense of enclosure. Wrapped walking frame objects similar to *Medical Dreamcatcher (B)* are also visible, close to the TV set. While watching an episode of the US version of the television series *Antiques Roadshow* (1997–ongoing), Cynthia notices that an abandoned Native American ceramic object, which is appraised live by the experts, is found to be worth over 25,000 dollars. Inspired by this revelation, she locates a vaguely similar pot in her own home and embarks on a journey that takes her through a landscape animated by New Age and folk sculptures, finding her way into an ad hoc version of the show where her artefacts are an assortment of plastic massage tools, rather than antiques. Although without monetary value, they possess instead magical healing properties, and Cynthia is, at least temporarily, released from her ailments.

Television's incorporation into the human 'system' as an extension seems to result for McLuhan in a displacement of the tactile into the environment, eliciting new relations with a whole range of objects and materials.

Moulton's videos are characterised by a self-consciously DIY aesthetic; she often uses simple compositing techniques to integrate her own body into environments that incorporate both physical and virtual components, or adds animated graphic elements that move between 'real' and imaginary worlds. In some respects this home-made aesthetic recalls Joan Braderman's fairly crude use of chromakey technology to integrate her image with scenes from *Dynasty* (1981–89) in *Joan Does Dynasty* (1986), one of the many TV-themed videos featured in 'Remote Control'. But while Braderman speaks from a position outside the story-world, commenting upon the show's characterisations and

29 *Ibid.*, p.11.

Shana Moulton, *Whispering Pines 9*, 2009, video, colour, sound, 10min, still. Courtesy the artist

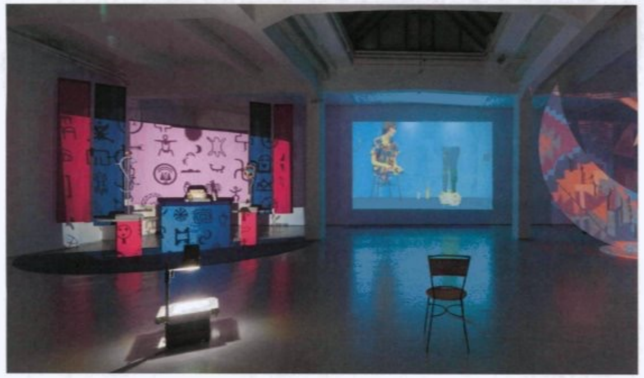
themes, Moulton, in the role of Cynthia, occupies a more ambiguous position, continually shifting between the physical space occupied by sets, props and sculptural objects and the worlds mediated by television.

Like Moulton, Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch presented, within the exhibition 'Any Ever', a fictional universe populated by their alter egos, manifest in videos, sculptural objects, stage-like environments and other materials. Trecartin first came to prominence with the single-screen video *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004), produced while he was still a student at art school and uploaded on YouTube two years later, thus becoming one of the first artists to use social media as a prime form of distribution for his work. Featuring Trecartin, his family and friends, the video centres on the struggles of gay teenager Skippy, and combines trashy video effects and home-made costumes with forms of verbal expression borrowed from daytime TV talk shows and reality genres. The videos included in 'Any Ever' deploy similar strategies: they share a number of characters, often in drag, who reappear in various melodramatic narratives concerning social, professional and familial relationships. Music is used throughout (often alternating between abrasive pop and instrumental 'mood' music), along with heavy-handed visual effects. Performers frequently deliver rapid, high-pitched and self-obsessed monologues to the camera, while wearing exaggeratedly 'tan' make-up, suggesting a parody of scripted or structured reality TV shows such as MTV's *The Hills* (2006–10). The characters are often depicted in a range of locations – such as bedrooms, loft studios, offices, gyms, limousines, hotels and landscaped exteriors – but in spite of the diversity of settings, they all function as backdrops for the same forms of egoistic discourse.

Realised in collaboration with Fitch, the exhibition is structured around seven video projections: the three-part *Trill-ogy Comp* (2009) and the four-part *Re'Search Wait'S* (2009–10).[30] Additionally, quasi-figurative assemblages, made in collaboration with other artists, are shown in brightly-lit galleries, separately from the videos. Importantly, the videos are housed in seven viewing environments devised by Trecartin and Fitch 'to be *inhabited* like a theatre stage'.[31] However, these are not conventional stages, because, as the seating faces the screen, there is no space that exhibition visitors might physically occupy in order to place themselves on view to others without blocking the projection. They do not function as auditoria in the traditional sense either, since the sound is relayed

30 *Trill-ogy Comp* (2009) comprises the videos *KCorealNC.K (section a)*, *P.opular Sky (section ish)* and *Sibling Topics (section a)*; *Re'Search Wait'S* (2009–10) comprises *Ready (Re'Search Wait'S)*, *Roamie View: History Enhancement (Re'Search Wait'S)*, *Temp Stop (Re'Search Wait'S)* and *The Re'Search (Re'Search Wait'S)*. The duration of the videos ranges from ten to fifty minutes.

31 'Ryan Trecartin/Lizzie Fitch: Any Ever' [press release], Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2 July 2011. Emphasis in the original.



Shana Moulton, *Whispering Pines 9*, 2009, two-channel video installation, mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view, 'Deterioration, they Said', Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich, 2009. Photograph: Stefan Altenburger. Courtesy the artist and Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst

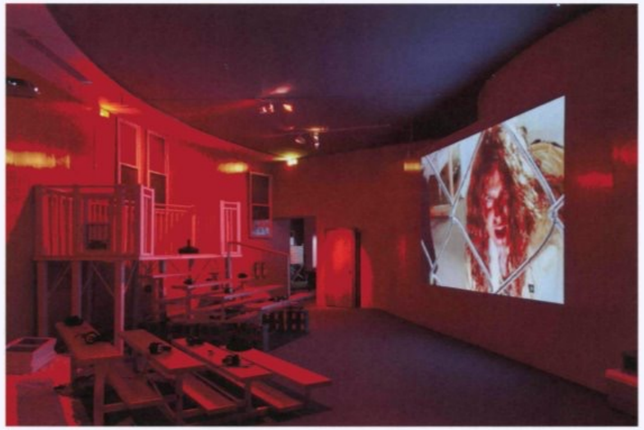
via headphones that are attached to selected seats, determining the distinction between functional and non-functional elements.

Although the settings depicted in the videos are not precisely replicated in the gallery, there are several formal correspondences between the fictional universes and the viewing environments. For example, *Sibling Topics (section a)* (2009) opens with a heavily pregnant woman who addresses her quadruplets, still in the womb, while performing physical exercise. This is followed by a similarly confessional account from the vantage point of her self-obsessed children, now young adults, who are variously depicted in dilapidated bedrooms, nightclubs and luxurious kitchens. *Sibling Topics* is displayed in the sculptural installation *Auto View* (2011), which combines dark upholstered seating with wall-mounted gym equipment and fragments of parasols devised for use in gardens. So this 'stage' is a strange hybrid, suggesting a fusion of several physical settings occupied by the characters. Through this assembly of materials, many mass-produced, Trecartin and Fitch's environments call to mind lifestyle-oriented retail environments. Their 'stages' suggest darkly distorted versions of the model rooms often found in furniture showrooms – spaces that invite both physical and imaginative interaction.

As quasi-domestic environments organised around the viewing of moving images, these stages might be theorised through reference to Lynn Spigel's concept of television as a 'home theatre'.[32] In *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (1992), an influential account of the organisation of domestic space around television, Spigel notes that this new technology was widely promoted in women's magazines, sometimes through advertisements that emphasised its capacity to function as a window onto the world. Through her analysis of TV sitcoms from the 1940s and 50s, Spigel also demonstrates that shows featuring performers drawn from the stage, such as *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show* (1950–58) and *I Love Lucy* (1951–57), brought the worlds of 'home' and 'theatre' together because they centred on families with real-life social bonds. Spigel emphasises the self-reflexivity of *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show*, which featured a 'real-life couple who played themselves playing themselves as real-life performers who had a television show based on their lives as television stars'.[33] Significantly, advertising messages were often integrated into these shows (rather than presented in commercial breaks) and performers would revert to their 'real' star personae to promote the products. References to advertising culture were also common in sitcom narratives; for example, one episode of *I Love Lucy* centres on Lucy's attempts to become

32 L. Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p.99.

33 *Ibid.*, p.159.



Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, *Under Sided*, 2011, unique sculptural theatre; and *Temp Stop*, 2009–10, HD video, colour, sound, 11min. Installation view, 'Any Ever', Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2012. Photograph: © Pierre Antoine. Courtesy the artists and Elizabeth Dee, New York

a spokesperson for a commercial product.[34] Spigel's research also highlights the self-conscious performance of domesticity in these shows, demonstrating that television – as both object and cultural form – was a site for the negotiation as well as the promotion of new modes of consumption.

Trecartin's videos articulate a similar ambivalence with regard to consumer culture because his performers parody the forms of self-obsessed discourse that pervade reality television and social media, and the accompanying desire for attention that results in exhibitionist displays of the body. The presentation of these narratives within sculptural environments may be an attempt to amplify the affective qualities of the narratives, emphasising the material and tactile properties of the worlds on screen. Significantly, however, the printed plan accompanying the exhibition 'Any Ever' at the Musée d'Art moderne in Paris included English and French language information on the content of each video. So visitors could choose to observe the mediated and physical objects without utilising headphones, therefore maintaining a degree of affective distance from the modes of consumption displayed on screen and further evoked through the assembly of mass-produced furnishings. As a result, the prosthetic quality of Trecartin and Fitch's engagement with television was somewhat muted.

If Trecartin and Fitch share with Moulton a low-fi aesthetic and an interest in trash television, then Nathaniel Mellors's multi-part video work *Ourhouse* (2010–ongoing) more closely resembles a relatively high cultural form – the serialised drama.[35] Mellors's work is also strongly sculptural in its realisation and manifestation: episodes of the series are typically shown alongside sculptural objects and animatronic installations. In addition, *Ourhouse* explicitly develops a complex exploration of objecthood, signification and practices of naming through the interplay of objects and characters, both on screen and within the sculptural manifestation of his work in the gallery. The narrative centres on a wealthy British family living in a large country manor, and *Ourhouse Episode 1: Games* (2010) marks the unexplained arrival of a stranger who disturbs the existing symbolic and social order. Played by the artist Brian Catling, this character is incongruously dressed in casual sportswear, and the family fails to recognise his human status, instead

34 *Ibid.*, p.175.

35 For a discussion of cultural status in relation to serialised drama, see Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status*, New York and London: Routledge, 2012.

Nathaniel Mellors, *BAD COPY*, 2012, animatronic sculpture, part of the installation *Ourhouse E3 feat. BAD COPY*, 2012. Installation view, Matt's Gallery, London, 2012. Courtesy the artist; Matt's Gallery, London; MONITOR, Rome; and Galerie Diana Stigter, Amsterdam

labelling him 'The Object' or 'Thingy'. This problem of naming signals a breakdown of language, which is somehow linked to the nocturnal activities of the stranger, who is later seen, in *Ourhouse Episode 2: Class* (2010–11), surrounded by books, literally ingesting texts such as E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963).

As the drama unfolds, the texts and images consumed by The Object serve to dictate the course of the narrative, shaping the interactions between all other characters. For example, in *Ourhouse Episode 3: The Cure of Folly* (2011), after The Object is seen devouring books on Flemish painting, several strangers appear on the estate and proceed towards the manor in search of the 'stone of madness'. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes apparent that they are intent on re-enacting the scene depicted in Hieronymus Bosch's *The Cure of Folly* (c.1490, also known as *The Extraction of the Stone of Madness*), a painting that has been interpreted as a representation of false knowledge. Unlike the dream or fantasy sequences found in TV series such as *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) and *Six Feet Under* (2001–05), these disruptions in causality and spatial logic remain unexplained, perhaps recalling more experimental television dramas such as *Twin Peaks* (1990–91).[36] A scene from *Episode 2: Class*, for instance, features an absurd dialogue between two characters, Faxon and Uncle Tommy, during which a TV set propped on the bar seems to enable two-way communication. This is one of several direct references to television as object; in another scene, from *Episode 1: Games* (2010), Baby Doll and Daddy, her much older husband, discuss her sculptural work, including a lump of chewing gum attached to the wall with a cotton bud protruding. When asked what she was thinking about while making it, Baby Doll replies, 'Broadcasting.'

Some of the dialogue in *Ourhouse* clearly relates to conventional forms of human-object interaction associated with the consumption of popular culture and contemporary art, yet Mellors consistently emphasises the strangeness of human-object relations. This is achieved through the narrative device of The Object, the rituals enacted in various episodes and the display of animatronic installations such as *BAD COPY* (2012), shown alongside *Ourhouse Episode 3: The Cure of Folly* at Matt's Gallery. *BAD COPY* was developed from a double character played by the actor Roger Sloman, and consists of a large humanoid figure with two heads, positioned below a distorted mirror ball and three coloured horn-like structures, illuminated from within, suggesting containers for speech

36 For a discussion of *Twin Peaks* in relation to 'quality television', see ibid., p.42.

or sound. Although both heads face the projected images like potential viewers, one is borne aloft as though it might be a kind of trophy.

The show at Matt's Gallery also incorporated notably haptic alterations to the gallery environment in the form of two fleece- or fur-lined recesses in the rear wall that functioned as semi-enclosed seating areas for small groups of viewers. These nest-like spaces served a practical acoustic function, housing small speakers, while also calling to mind McLuhan's claims regarding the displacement of the tactile into the environment, proceeding from television's incorporation into the human 'system' as a prosthetic extension. This treatment of sound is also radically different from Trecartin and Fitch's use of headphones to create affective separation, dividing fictional worlds and sculptural viewing environments.

The Remains of Television

While Moulton's, Trecartin and Fitch's and Mellors's projects, like Simon Denny's, explore television's material and social remains, there are significant differences with regard to their treatment of objects in the gallery space. Denny's installation *Channel 4 Analogue Broadcasting Hardware from Arqiva's Sudbury Transmitter* involves the display of a material thing used to enable the transmission of television – so, in a basic sense, a televisual object, but one that was not devised to be televised: it is not a set to be inhabited by presenters, guests or audience members, and does not form part of a fictional world depicted on screen, which viewers might imaginatively inhabit. In contrast, many of the sculptural objects and environments encountered in the exhibitions by Moulton, Trecartin and Fitch and Mellors have either been used by characters or are devised

Nathaniel Mellors, *Ourhouse Episode 3: The Cure of Folly*, 2011, HD video, 34min, still. Courtesy the artist; Matt's Gallery, London; MONITOR, Rome; and Galerie Diana Stigter, Amsterdam

to somehow resemble the objects and environments visible on screen. So while Denny's work is mostly concerned with the obsolescence of television as a social technology, the exhibitions by Moulton, Trecartin and Fitch and Mellors appear to engage with television simultaneously as cultural form and mediating object.

The category of the 'prop-relic' has been proposed by Keller and Ward to describe the manifestation of exchange-value in objects that bear a symbolic relationship to filmed performances but have become dissociated from use. In sharp contrast, the sculptural objects and environments presented by Moulton, Trecartin and Fitch and Mellors strongly emphasise use and interaction (and even habitation in the case of Mellors's nest-like enclosures), thus privileging affective relations that bind the humans and the objects encountered in fictional narratives, while also extending these relations into exhibition spaces through sculptural installations and other display strategies. The three projects are certainly attuned to the important historical relationship that exists between broadcasting and domesticity – and additionally Mellors also shares with Trecartin and Fitch an interest in familial social dynamics as a recurrent theme in television, whether in the form of serialised drama or scripted reality TV. But by exploring the prosthetic qualities of media, they contest fixed categorisations of the social, offering new ways to think about television and its remains.

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Bob Dickinson on eco art

PLEISTOCENE HOLOCENE ANTHROPOCENE

Nathaniel Mellors
Neanderthal Container (Animatronic Prelapse) 2014

Public announcement: we are living in a new geological period, a period characterised by ecosystem failures, rising sea levels, freakish weather, climate-led migrations and the ending of many historical assumptions. How does contemporary art address the age that is being called the Anthropocene?

As ecosystems continue to bear the brunt of human activity and global warming becomes a reality, the neologism Anthropocene, or the 'human now', has become a buzzword (Artnotes *AM*382). Officially, we are still living in the Holocene era, but the Strategic Commission of the Geological Society of London has adopted Anthropocene as a term 'deserving further consideration' as an era or an epoch. Its origins are multiple: ecologist Eugene F Stoermer and atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen began using it independent of one another in the 1980s and eventually agreed to share the credit, although there are claims that Russian scientists were employing the term 20 years earlier.

Whatever the origin of the term, its meaning is clear enough: the biosphere – the surface of the Earth's crust which interacts with the atmosphere – has been indelibly changed by humans, and the rate of change is speeding up globally, affecting weather, sea temperatures and drastically altering the icecaps. The process may have begun a mere 250 years ago with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, or perhaps 11,000 years earlier with the first farmers, only to accelerate in the 20th century with the effects of agribusiness, globalised fossil-fuel exploitation and radioactive pollution. Human action – ingenious as well as stupid – now infects the biology, meteorology and geology of the planet. Faced with the implications of global warming, contemporary artists and curators are well placed to mount thought-provoking responses to it, but what is less clear is whether the traditional, formal approach of gallery-based art, or the current fashion for biennales, can have any effect on public opinion let alone the workings of an ecosystem in any practical way.

When, for instance, Nicolas Bourriaud curated the 2014 Taipei Biennial, he titled it 'The Great Acceleration: Art in the Anthropocene'. Bourriaud, the author of *Relational Aesthetics* in 2002 and a champion of the philosophical movement Speculative Realism, described the Biennial (in the *South China Post*) as 'a tribute to the coactivity among humans and animals, plants and objects', adding: 'Aside from the coactivity in this exhibition, there is also another kind of coactivity that exists between politicians, artists and scientists, and this is the coactivity that can change the world.'

All of which sounded promising enough. In the event, the Biennial was strong on representations of 'our space-time', which included Joan Jonas's tribute to melting glaciers, *Reanimation II*, 2010-13, Po-Chih Huang's examination of migration and cheap garment-making, *Production Line – Made in China and Made in Taiwan*, 2014, Nathaniel Mellors's jokingly surreal film about the role and the possible arrival from space of one of humanity's lost ancestors, *Neanderthal Container*, 2014, Hung-Chih Peng's twisted cruise liner, evoking ecological crisis and extreme weather, *The Deluge – Noah's Ark*, 2014, and Yu-Chen Wang's

series of drawings, sculptural installations and a fictional fragment imagining post-apocalyptic life-forms, *This Is The End*, 2014.

Ten of the 52 artists were Taiwanese, but despite this the Biennial was considered by some reviewers to have felt too international, and could have been presented anywhere in the world. Perhaps this was partly because the Taipei Biennial takes place in one central location rather than being spread city-wide, and also perhaps because it did not (or could not) include several socially engaged art projects occurring elsewhere in former rural areas of Taiwan that in recent times have gone through extreme social and environmental change. Currently on show at Manchester's Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art (CFCCA), under the title 'Micro Micro Revolution', three such projects are documented. They exemplify the approach artists have taken in response to the situation in northern Taiwan where traditional communities have struggled to exist alongside (or within) expanding zones of unregulated industrialisation. Curator Lu Pei-yi defines the approach taken by these artists in terms of them 'stepping back' from foregrounding their own personalities.

Mary Mattingly
The Waterpod Project 2006-10

Mary Mattingly
Wetland 2014-

Instead, the artists devote their time to coexisting with communities such as the Amis Tribe, an urban aboriginal people that in 2008 were faced with the prospect of their village, Sa'owac, being demolished to make way for a cycling route along the Dahan Riverbank. Two artists, Hsu Su-chen and Lu Chien-ming, moved in and helped them resist and reconstruct. This work, known as the Plant Matter New Eden Art Project, 2008-, brought together environmental issues, living rights and the marginal condition of Amis people in the area, and resulted in the village being rebuilt and the election in 2014 of an Amis councillor. At CFCCA, an example of one of the village's new houses is on show in the gallery and on the opening night their tribal chief performed a traditional blessing on the building before leading visitors in a loud and energising few minutes of song and dance.

Another project at CFCCA, *500 Lemon Trees*, 2013-, is by Huang Po-chih, who sees his role as a combination of artist, farmer and entrepreneur. He raised money by subscription to plant lemon trees on fallow farmland in Hsinchu County. After two years, the first harvested lemons were made into Limoncello, bottled and sold under the project's own label. A third project, *Plum Tree Creek*, 2010-, a cultural action by Wu Mali and Bamboo Curtain Studio, focuses on an area on the margin of the Taipei Basin and the mouth of the Danshui River, where water is badly polluted and streams culverted or drained off. The artists are working with local people on the premise that 'all the environmental problems are actually caused by cultural problems', and are trying to 're-connect the broken land with the water'. In 2012 the scheme became part of New Taipei City's Grand River masterplan.

What these examples of new Taiwanese art have in common is long-term, low-level involvement by artists eager to strengthen a local community's ability to improve their environment and renew their sense of identity by reviving traditional cultural attitudes towards the natural world. In parallel, the Chinese artist Xu Bing also worked with hundreds of local school children in 2013 when he brought his *Forest Project*, 2008-, to Taiwan, to aid the village of Sandiman which had been damaged in Typhoon Morakot. The project, which originated in Kenya, raises funds to plant trees by exhibiting and selling children's tree drawings, their value boosted by Xu's own copying of the original artwork. Throughout these initiatives, the influence of Joseph Beuys – who is referenced in CFCCA's exhibition guide – is never far away, especially his works like *7,000 Oaks*, 1982, a five-year tree-planting project for Documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany, where Beuys and a host of helpers united art, nature and democratic decision-making as a way of regenerating 'the life of humankind within the body of society' and to 'prepare for a positive future in that context'.

Despite the fact that environmental catastrophe receives increasing media attention, and has since the late 1960s been a subject for contemporary artists ('Art and Catastrophe',

The recent films and installations by Ursula Biemann examine in detail the extent to which governments and corporations are exploiting the environment and the way human lives have to adapt as a result.

Ursula Biemann
Egyptian Chemistry 2012 video installation

Ursula Biemann
Deep Weather 2013 video

*AM*362), it remains a sticking point with wealthier democracies that the entangled, accelerative effect of the Anthropocene condition is, unfortunately, not of serious concern to the majority of voters – especially since the bank-induced global economic downtown of 2008 deflected attention away from environmental issues and towards more immediate financial concerns. And although Green political parties have found a voice in many parts of the world, governments exhibit a schizophrenic mentality in continuing to prioritise economic growth even while accumulating evidence points to its detrimental effects. By the time the truth sinks in, it is thought by some academics that the impact of the Anthropocene on future populations will include 'climate trauma': widespread mental illness in the form of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress. One of the people who supports this analysis is Camille Parmesan, lead author of the Nobel prize-winning Third Assessment Report on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, who left the US to live in the UK because it was so hard to convince US audiences that climate change is a reality.

This is why the demonstrative, praxis-based possibilities raised in the work of some contemporary artists puts them in a position to pose deep, ethical questions about the implications of the Anthropocene, not least those concerning the nature of death, as outlined by writer and ex-soldier Roy Scranton in his 2015 book *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization*. Scranton, who witnessed the complete social collapse of Baghdad following its invasion by US forces in 2003, then saw the process repeated two years later after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. About climate change, Scranton declared: 'This civilization is already dead,' and that all we can do is 'adapt, with mortal humility, to our new reality.'

One response to this is Mary Mattingly's recent series of works, including two collaboratively built and run boat-based ecosystems, *Waterpod*, 2006-10, in New York, and the Philadelphia-based *Wetland*, 2014-. Mostly made of found materials, *Waterpod* was constructed on a barge containing living space, rainwater purification equipment, solar-generated power, raised planting beds to grow fruit and vegetables, and chickens to provide eggs. It became as much an experiment in living together for those on board as a demonstration of sustainability. *Wetland*, a 'floating sculpture' resembling a partially submerged building, contains vegetable gardens, composting systems, water and waste recycling systems, as well as space for workshops and performances, enabling it to connect with local communities and serve as 'symbol, social space, stage and shelter'. Both projects demonstrate how a nomadic micro-community might survive 150-odd years from now, after the deluge, floating around a broken, post-industrial Eastern Seaboard coastline. Mattingly cites Buckminster Fuller as an influence on her work, and the *Waterpod* has carried a series of geodesic domes of the sort popularised in the 1950s and 1960s by the designer and inventor who also conceived the idea of 'Spaceship Earth'. Perhaps the remark on his gravestone, 'Call me Trimtab', explains more about the way Mattingly's projects are intended to work, however – the trimtab being the miniature rudder on aeroplane wing-flaps and elevators, as well as on the rudders of ships; in other words, the rudder that moves the rudders.

Another of Mattingly's artistic antecedents is Bonnie Ora Sherk, whose San Francisco-based 'environmental performance sculptures' such as *Portable Parks I-III*, 1970, and Crossroads Community, also known as the *Farm*, 1974-80, were attempts to reactivate 'dead spaces' caused by sprawling freeway systems and other forms of urban blight. The *Farm* in particular became a long-term 'ecological wonderland', involving other artists and practitioners including the Raw Egg Animal Theatre, who together with local visitors tended gardens and livestock. Sherk continues to inspire and run 'A Living Library (A.L.L.)', 1981-, a series of instructive gardens to be found on various sites in New York and San Francisco.

The above examples of work by Mattingly and Sherk are experiments demonstrating how people might one day live. But in large parts of the world today, people have no choice about the way the Anthropocene is forcing them to find new ways to survive. The recent films and installations by Ursula Biemann, particularly *Deep Weather*, 2013, and *Egyptian Chemistry*, 2012, examine in detail the extent to which governments and corporations are exploiting the environment and the way human lives have to adapt as a result. *Deep Weather* looks at the 'Ur liquids': oil and water. In northern Canada the extraction and steam-processing of tar sand creates huge, chemically polluted lakes, destroying the physical ecology and its 'psychic'

Bob Dickinson, 'Pleistocene, Holocene, Anthropocene', Art Monthly 389, September 2015.

Evangelia Basdekis
The Silence of the Monkeys 2015

Bonnie Ora Sherk
Portable Park II 1970-71

equivalent for local First Nation people. In Bangladesh, by contrast, rising water levels caused by extreme weather and melting ice in the Himalayas force people and essential facilities like schools and hospitals to adopt an increasingly amphibian lifestyle. With water also its main theme, *Egyptian Chemistry* looks at the history of Nile engineering schemes initiated by successive Egyptian governments, contrasting President Nasser's socialistic Aswan Dam hydroelectric project (which destroyed the lands and culture of the Nubian people who were displaced by the project) with Hosni Mubarak's Toshka programme, begun in the 1990s, to build canals taking water from Lake Nasser to irrigate the Western Desert and turn it into farmland to be given away to students. As Biemann puts it, this still incomplete (and agriculturally flawed) scheme aims to 'turn sterile lands … into field laboratories for new forms of human life'.

Biemann's work points towards what the eco-philosopher Timothy Morton terms the 'interobjective', meaning situations formed by relations between more than one object – be it oil, water or sunlight – giving rise to immense 'hyperobjects', one of which is global warming itself. Morton thinks that the distribution of global warming over time and space makes it so vast that it defies all our established ideas about what a thing is in the first place, therefore meriting the term 'hyperobject', other examples of which include tectonic plates and nuclear radiation. According to Morton, the ecological crisis that the world is experiencing is 'the time of hyperobjects' because it is the moment when these massive entities make 'decisive contact' with humans. While Biemann's observations also relate environmental degradation to overconsumption, and Mattingly's work foregrounds cultural surplus and waste (especially her sculptures made of domestic possessions, like *Terrene*, 2012, and *Pull*, 2013), another artist, Pinar Yoldas, takes us deep inside the science of rubbish and what new life-forms might be emerging from it, touching again on Morton's notion of the 'interobjective'.

An Ecosystem of Excess, 2014, is a series of realistic sculptures representing invented creatures and digestive systems that might one day evolve from life on the Pacific Trash Vortex, a huge gyre of floating plastic marine debris (PMD), another example of which exists in the North Atlantic. Yoldas's 'creatures' include Pantone Birds that eat plastic bottle caps and Pacific Balloon Turtles with inflatable body parts. It all sounds like the kind of thing that could have been dreamt up in the mind of the late JG Ballard, but Yoldas's project was informed by a scientific paper, 'Life in the Plastisphere', published in 2013 by microbiologist Dr Erik Zettler, whose team at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, Massachusetts, used electron microscopy to examine microbial communities living on the North Atlantic PMD gyre. Local to the gyre, varieties of these bacteria show evidence of 'active hydrolysis of the hydrocarbon polymer'. In other words, they digest plastic. While it is thought that within 40 years all of the world's coral reefs will be dead, another kind of reef made from plastic may be teeming with new life forms.

These speculative biologies also have roots in the 20th century, notably in the work of Richard Lowenberg, whose collaborations with musicians and technologists during the 1970s and 1980s specialised in 'environmental monitoring, sensing and transducing', homing in on 'amplified plant energy' or turning natural processes into sound. *The Secret Life of Plants*, 1976, combined signals from plants and humans, presented by the artist as a form of music using synthesisers, manipulating technology to link disconnected living things. Again, these works were as much about human collaboration as presentation, leading to the artist's proposition in 2005 for a 'slow tech' movement to combat the damaging psychological effects of rapid technological development. Nowadays, Lowenberg describes himself as a tele-community planner and ecosystems designer.

It remains problematic that the Anthropocene is a concept that is defined and articulated by humans, when the crisis it represents impacts on the non-human while also generating 'hyperobjects' like global warming. This is why object-centred ontologies are proving to be of interest to some artists (Features *AM*368, 371, 374, 375), one recent project in particular being noteworthy because of its use of the human body. In *The Silence of the Monkeys*, 2015, the performance artist Evangelia Basdekis seeded her hair with lentils, wheat, corn, black-eyed beans and barley, which over time were allowed to germinate using the artist's own sweat. This meant that during the germination period the artist's body was 'marginalised' because she could not work or participate in social activities, and she even thought herself (if 'self' was part of the consideration) to be 'in rebellion against daily life and routine' and 'useless for contemporary society or for the capitalistic model of surviving'. Basdekis sees this as part of a protest at the artificial gap between humans and nature, which has involved (on the human side) the history of stereotyping nature either as romantic and transcendental or as an inexhaustible source for exploitation. At the same time, in giving life to the seeds, the artist went through a kind of death through marginalisation and self-negation. During the performance's finale, at AD Gallery in Athens, the artist's hair – sprouting abundant green shoots – was cut off, and the shoots it gave life to were replanted in soil.

Addressing the fundamental questions presented to us by the Anthropocene, including Scranton's on how to face death, or Biemann's on eco-death versus human survival, or Yoldas's on new life forms evolving out of plastic waste, we are entering what Scranton calls 'humanity's most philosophical age'. In pondering this, it is an understatement to say that artists have their work cut out. The Anthropocene is both a metaphysical concept and concrete reality: tomorrow's fossil record will reveal one story only, that of the rise and demise of the human race. What will remain preserved of the art of the Anthropocene is anybody's guess. ■

BOB DICKINSON is a writer and broadcaster based in Manchester.

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How a small report in a 1953 issue of ArtReview hid a big history

The Companionable Franz West
How the late Austrian artist's convivial, shitpositive vision of sculpture reinvented public art – his retrospective is on view at Tate Modern through 3 June
By Rosanna Mclaughlin

Isuma in Venice
At the Canadian Pavilion, the Inuit artist collective disputes the ideas of nationhood and representation on which the Venice Biennale was founded
By Mark Rappolt

Looking at Pictures with William Eggleston
An interview with the pioneering American photographer, whose work is on view at David Zwirner, London
By Fi Churchman

Michael Lin & Richard Lin
Mark Rappolt on the subtleties of inter-generational artistic dialogue
By Mark Rappolt

FEATURE

Nathaniel Mellors Interview

By Jacob Fabricius

The 7 Ages Of Britain Teaser, 2010, HD video. Courtesy the artist, Matt's Gallery, London, Monitor, R...

Mix a childhood spent in front of the TV with the British industrial music scene and an MA in sculpture: Nathaniel Mellors describes the origins of his medieval-tinged mutant soap opera *Ourhouse*

***Jacob Fabricius**: When and how did you begin the films that make up Ourhouse (2010–)?*

Nathaniel Mellors: The initial idea was to come up with a scenario that could work for a mutant TV series – a kind of hybrid conceptual artwork and TV show. It came out of a long-standing preoccupation with TV that I had been exploring in various potentially inappropriate ways (in video installation and sculpture) since I was student. I grew up watching a lot of great British and American TV, and in my teens, before art school, I was involved with various local music scenes. So as I 'learnt' art – which is a peculiar process – I found myself pulling away, trying to collapse and expand the logic of certain artforms (some of which felt like they had become quite rule-bound) with ideas that I could run with almost unconsciously. And looking back, these more unconscious ideas tended to be steeped in the influence of TV and music, particularly the sensibility of British industrial music. Cinema comes in more consciously – I think – later on.

Coming out of my MA in sculpture I was working with a 'total installation' form with a lot of fragmented video projection and improvised sculpture and sound, filming strange video narratives with friends – mixing up actors and nonprofessional performers. The process developed and I found a kind of methodology in it. And then I made more of a commitment to writing, at first because I wanted the dynamics and potential I had found in the installations I had made – in works like *Profondo Viola* (2004) and *Hateball* (2005) – to occur in the films. At a certain point I thought I should try and approach the form not as a kind of deconstructive exercise but as a 'closed text'. I started to feel that deconstruction could, in some ways, be a default position for an artist – deconstructing the forms of the day – and that to make something that could hold its own relative to its inspirations I perhaps needed to more thoroughly generate something formally distinct, from the bottom up. Maybe I needed to go backwards to go forwards. I was looking at a lot of Pasolini as this was developing.

There was a specific opportunity, too – in 2009 Jonty Claypole, a producer at the BBC, invited me to make a short work for BBC1, to kick off the final episode of David Dimbleby's *The Seven Ages of Britain* series. The show is a potted history of British culture, and the final episode covers the entire twentieth century. So I made *The 7 Ages of Britain Teaser* (2010) an artwork about broadcasting and history, featuring David Dimbleby performing with a highly naturalistic silicon prosthesis of his own face. Gwendoline Christie ('The Operator') and Johnny Vivash ('Kadmus') play two crap deities who are battling for control of this Dimbleby-face – they think they can 'control the Modern age' through the icon. This was my first experience of working in TV. I'd been making work inspired by TV and then I was able to make a work that took TV as its subject and was also broadcast to several million people. The work has the production values of BBC TV but it's also resolutely an artwork – Dimbleby describes the status of the work itself within the work – which makes it even stranger: it's a hybrid. There's a seed there that I wanted to grow and grow. I was already working repeatedly with excellent actors – my friends Gwendoline, Johnny and David Birkin – and suddenly I wanted to do a lot more work with this BBC crew – the DOP, Ben Wheeler (who was shooting *Peep Show* for Channel 4 and *The Thick of It* for BBC2), the actors and I all felt a really good connection. So I went off and thought it would be great to have a scenario that could generate a potentially endless stream of episodes, like in a soap opera or long-running drama – something like *Twin Peaks*.

Then this very sculptural but literary image occurred to me – a person that eats books at the centre of a story. This person is not recognisable as human by the other characters. It is referred to as 'The Object'. It's a kind of device – the books 'The Object' eats, half-digests and regurgitates influence the story. It's a fleshy, human printer engaged in the grotesque egestion of a literal 'neverending story'. I came up with this core idea for the *Ourhouse* scenario and then I asked my friend Dan Fox to help me with the character and story development – because he's so good a writer and editor, very precise where I am very messy. We did that for six months and then I wrote the first set of scripts – about 70 pages or so – in a few weeks. The first three episodes of *Ourhouse* emerged, with two animatronic 'Ourhouse' sculptures for exhibition at De Hallen Haarlem in September 2010 – Xander Karskens commissioned the work for De Hallen with Tom Morton and Lisa Le Feuvre for British Art Show 7. That helped keep me on track during quite an intense period of work.

Could you describe what you were looking for in a few of the main characters?

NM: It's sort of soap-opera or sit-com cliché – it's a dysfunctional family unit. There were a couple of things that felt key – the 'Daddy' character 'Charles-Maddox Wilson' (played by Richard Bremmer) is a man of the late 1960s/early 70s – he sees himself as a hybrid playwright-poet-alchemist-artist. But really he's an eccentric of enormous hereditary wealth, and he has created 'Ourhouse', this giant, sprawling property of ambiguous geography – it sort of grows and shrinks like it's part of his mind. It's TARDIS-like. He has these two sons – Truson (played by Birkin) and Faxon (played by Benedict Hopper), one a biological son and the other adopted – and a young wife, Annalise 'Babydoll' Wilson (played by Christie). He does not appreciate his biological son, Truson, enough, although Truson has semimagical powers – he's a kind of savant, an innocent-savant. He fetishises his adopted son and fails to recognise the intelligence of his wife. He's a self-absorbed man, and we wanted him to represent the idea of failed radicalism, ideologies of individualistic liberation from the late 1960s failing through the reality of middle-class economic growth. There's another character that's very important too – 'Bobby Jobby', Robert Jobson (played by Vivash), who is the family's Irish gardener. He is at the bottom of the *Ourhouse* family structure, a relative outsider – which gives a lot of narrative possibilities. There's a point in the story where the family indentify Bobby as the source of their problems. But Bobby is a good man – a potential hero. So I wanted to use these familiar forms and structures and then excavate them and fill them with different content – for lots of reasons. Maybe it's an awkward thing, but I like that active quality of something not sitting too comfortably in its form. I'm happy that it works in its own way.

The films draw on many genres, including horror, slapstick, sitcom, theatre (what did I forget?), and it's amazing how your narrative, language, setting and costumes seem both medieval and contemporary, even sci-fi…

NM: That started in an earlier work – *Giantbum* (2009) – which is a play in which some medieval explorers are lost in the bowels of a giant. The characters are wearing modern sportswear but with a medieval feel – the coprophagic 'Father' wears Puma. There are lots of childish puns in *Giantbum* – mostly in the verbose script – but I put some into the visuals: Puma = Pooma = Poo Ma = Poo More. *Ourhouse Episode 3: The Cure of Folly* (2011) is the 'medieval' episode, and the

Jacob Fabricius, 'Nathaniel Mellors Interview', Art Review, https://artreview.com/features/feature_nathaniel_mellors/

medieval characters in this episode are again wearing cheap contemporary sportswear mixed with some medieval elements – like Addison's knee-high leather boots, or 'The Hek's leafy crown. I pick the specific items of sportswear quite carefully, looking for items that I feel work within this hybrid-schema. Adidas & Yoshi Yamamoto's Y3 is a kind of high-end version – futuristic clothing with medieval cuts! It's not overtly retro at all, I love it. But I also think this mixture of cheap contemporary sportswear and historical costume detailing reflects certain class divisions. My central narrative device, the character called 'The Object', has this glistening new sportswear look – it is wearing a white tracksuit and big baseball boots. One starting point for this was the idea that he was some kind of avenging angel – like the underclass who wear a lot of cheap sportswear – rearing up against a bourgeois culture with a more knowing, historicised approach to clothing. The original version of 'The Object' was going to be this filthy tramp, all covered in shit and straw, that the family don't recognise as human. But that seemed too literal, so it became this more distinct-but-mysterious thing, less easy to decipher, with its own language of sportswear, baseball boots and watches. And then the 'medievalists' – they appear and their sportswear links them back to 'The Object'. I wanted that to give a sense of a pattern without confirmation or clarification.

Mysticism seems to be embedded in the films and how you write – a Kubrick-like mysticism… But they somehow also remind me of Molière's satirical plays. Do you recognise that?

NM: I think the idea of spending time putting something together from the bottom up, writing a script with its own interior logic and working through those ideas in different ways with collaborators who really know the work and get into the method… it's very consciously put together – it's a lot of effort – there's a big technical side – which for me enables an incorporation of chance and accident in a way that begins to feel organic. I think systematising these almost oppositional processes can be related to mysticism. It's a question of embedding things that keep on generating meaning, creating forms that resist total interpretation. Kubrick seems to be all about that. He exemplifies the discipline of mysticism. The work keeps giving. I think that many people would feel that by comparison my work looks cheap, confusing, pretentious…

I don't really compare my work to historical writers because I make this material for a different format. And I like that in making art I can decide what the rules are. I tend to naturally make links *across* things and make things up. I think you can write Theatre of the Absurd from a schooling in Saturday morning kids TV. Like *Tiswas* vs Beckett. "Have you seen *Happy Days*?" "No, but I've seen happy days." But I do really love what Terry Southern was doing in the 1960s – *Dr Strangelove* and *The Magic Christian*. I like a lot of absurdist writing – Spike Milligan's *Goon Show* scripts are amazing, and his play *The Bed Sitting Room*. I love Rabelais, Georges Bataille and Ed McBain. But none of these things are in mind when I'm writing. They might influence initial scenarios. The scenario of *Ourhouse* is influenced by Pasolini's *Teorema* and the scenario of *Giantbum* is loosely influenced by *Gargantua & Pantagruel*, but the things I go on to make are sufficiently different enough from any starting points that people have been able to criticise me for even citing them. Like if a games designer talks about Shakespeare it might seem strange to a few people but what should a form draw on to develop anyway? *Super Mario World* is a mock epic, and it requires no explanation. I'm often surprised by the extent to which people seem to want to unconsciously preserve artfoms.

What is the perfect Pasolini cinematic moment for you?

NM: The butterfly-eating scene at the beginning of *Porcile* (1968) left a permanent impression on me; that was the first Pasolini film I ever saw. It's a perfect ensemble of Marxist ideology intercut with the mythic/prehistoric via cannibalism and pig-fucking. But I think that with Pasolini, in my opinion, perfection is in the dynamic and visionary whole of it – the whole of Pasolini's achievements are a kind of apotheosis of completely integrated artistic, poetic and intellectual activity. He's the perfect model.

Language – or should I rather say that the British language? – and its tradition of satirical dark humour is important…

NM: I think that humour has a naturally dark tint to it. I think it can be natural for humour to become unfunny as an inherent manifestation of its function – it's there to deal with the weird shit; it is our irrational organ. I gave a talk last year at the Hayward Gallery for their Wide Open School called 'Notes on Brown Humour', talking about the idea of humour as an internal organ which helps us to process the potentially physically compromising effects of language. The basic idea was that language is a projection from the body outwards, while humour is an internal moderator of its effects. And laughter is a bodily emission – an emission of a waste product through the mouth. I'm very interested in the seriousness of humour and a specific form of not-very-funny funny that can have a destabilising effect on the viewer.

Would you rather be a polar bear or a phasmid (also known as a stick insect)?

NM: A polar bear. Have power – be at the top of food chain but end up estranged due to convulsions in other people's eco-cultural history. Drown.

Most of your films are made in Britain and with British actors and collaborators. Recently you have been spending time in LA – home of Hollywood and 'Por n Valley'. Will that change your approach and production? Will you embrace America or stick to your own British tradition?

NM: I'd like to hybridise it. I'd like to bring my actors here and insert new American actors. Maybe the British actors will be very confused by the American ones – that could be part of a script.

How do the animatronics fit into your filmworks?

NM: It's more like they come out of the filmworks. They come out of the scripts – I see them as one strand of different forms of studio practice in which I have been working out ideas in the scripts. So the first animatronics I made in 2008 were part of *Giantbum* and cast from the face of Vivash's character 'The Father', the coprophagic priest. This character had a mechanical trajectory in the story – that of aspiring suicide-cult-leader using fear to control a frightened and isolated group of people – so we cast his face and made him into this uncanny, three-headed animatronic that talks and sings about 'freedom'. The idea of a kind of mechanical trinity made sense for that work and so it became the third stage of that script. The talking-singing sculpture was sited at the end of the installation, but it sang about freedom and chanted the word 'exit' – I saw it as a kind of life-after-death for the story, character and script.

I also had the idea that kinetic art was so unpopular, so ugly and unstylish, that there might be room to do something interesting, particularly having the original script at the heart of the work as a counterpoint to the visual spectacle. I like the idea of a script providing a base for a visual rationale. I hoped that using my own scripts and films as a starting point for strange forms of studio-based art production could be a way to buck the slurry of visual art history. I wanted to write myself somewhere else and then use the writing as a kind of secret formula for visual development. Obviously solipsism is a risk with this approach. Writing is in itself quite a hermetic process. Since making the animatronics I've also made photograms and paintings with my collaborator Chris Bloor. Both approaches evolved with their own particular formal logic, which we have evolved out of ideas in the scripts. It's hermetic franchising.

You are right, kinetic sculptures are not on everybody's lips these days. Do you think it is the crafty element that makes them less desirable to make, collect and maintain?

NM: The craft thing is interesting to me – it was ghettoised for a long time. But now, because we have this endemic consumer culture of reconsumption, things that are less known and unfashionable become unfashionably desirable and then they become unfashionably fashionable and then they become just fashionable. All the subcultural marrow gets sucked out. The recent Ken Price show at LACMA in LA was good. It's LA-cool, but it retains an awkwardness and humour. This is really appealing to me, this sense of awkwardness and humour. Sometimes it verges on ugliness, but I wouldn't summarise it as that – it's a resistant quality that can't be reduced to visual tropes. It resists stylisation. I find this quality in a lot of the Chicago Imagists's work – wonderful work. It's interesting to see who this cultural recycling does and doesn't work for – certain figures and movements seem intrinsically resistant. Look at an awkward figure like George E. Ohr, for example – he is a founding father of American Modernism and is broadly unappreciated, probably because he has been placed in this craft ghetto that you mention. He's a seminal figure, but historically he's an oxbow lake. And now ceramics are fashionable but he's still unknown. It strikes me that the artworld periodically fixates on a particular look – in the last decade we've had the look of music; the look of narrative; the look of craft (including ceramics); the look of the digital. It's interesting to me how the environment, like the fashion world, needs a new theme to fixate on – but how primarily visual the environment remains. If you put in something more awkward, it's processed to this visual level. I've seen a lot of artists staging the appearance of literature in their work. It's fascinating and weird. I can't separate myself from this cultural pandemic, but I do try to address it in the work.

Corridor8

28.04.2016 — Review

Nathaniel Mellors, Ourhouse Episode -1: Time

Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston
by Holly Grange

On your next trip to Preston, I urge you to visit the imposing Brutalist bus station on Tithebarn Street. Recently saved from demolition by some tenacious locals and the vital voice of *The Twentieth Century Society*, it serves as a backdrop for Nathaniel Mellors' newest film in the 'Ourhouse' series, titled *Ep. -1: Time*, made especially for the Harris' collection after they won the £40,000 Contemporary Art Society Annual Award in 2014. The work is currently on show at the Harris Museum and Art Gallery (a Grade I listed neoclassical behemoth also worthy of a visit) as part of *Nothing Happens, Twice: Artists Explore Absurdity.* Mellor's work is shown alongside new commissions and existing works by artists Pavel Büchler, Broomberg and Chanarin, Sally O'Reilly and Bedwyr Williams, among others, which share a dark sense of humour and a keen sense of the absurd.

The title of the exhibition, taken from a famous description of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, as 'a play in which nothing happens, twice', offers a clue to the curatorial logic. Parallels can be drawn between the selected works and the style of fiction writing and theatre that emerged in 1950s Europe known as the Theatre of the Absurd, of which Beckett was a major proponent. Experiencing Nathaniel Mellors' *Ourhouse Ep. -1: Time* certainly feels analogous to watching an absurdist play, as bizarre situations and nonsensical scenarios are played out in settings that often bear no obvious relationship to what is happening. Variously described as a 'mutant soap opera', Mellors' *Ourhouse* series combines elements of TV melodrama and situation comedy to create something entirely unique, deeply disturbing and utterly compelling. Characters act regardless of the usual motivations and cause-and-effect reactions and the worlds created often feel incoherent, frightening and strange.

I was still recovering from my experience of the previous *Ourhouse* films at the British Art Show in 2010 and the ICA in 2011, and I felt equally bewildered as I watched the escapades of *Ep. -1*'s highly dysfunctional family unit. At the head of the family is Charles Maddox-Wilson, a loquacious and somewhat dominating father figure played to perfection by Richard Bremmer. Charles is an artist with the transformative powers of an alchemist and a hair-brained scheme to travel back in time using prehistoric faeces as fuel. With me so far? Good, because its about to get a lot stranger and much more scatological. His companions on this adventure are his sons Truson (aka 'True son'- his biological offspring) and Faxon (his Fake or adopted son). Word-play abounds in Mellors' writing, who takes obvious pleasure in slippages of meaning.

Charles' vivacious girlfriend Babydoll is the apple of his eye until she gets kidnapped by a group of marauding cavemen and replaced by a lavatory. Charles and his sons ostensibly go on a rescue mission to save Babydoll, a mission that is sometimes aided, sometimes hindered, by a miscellany of characters including the deeply terrifying Sergeant Jobbins, who acts as a kind of gatekeeper. Sporting syphilitic sores on his face and wearing an army uniform adorned with scout badges, he has a rather distracting habit of thumping the desk with a dildo to hammer a point home.

Their home is the Preston Bus Station, which gradually reveals its Tardis-like innards, spitting them out into ever-weirder locations. They eventually come across a maniacal genius whose stolen Charles' idea for time travel. However, in Mellors' universe the Delorean Time Machine has been substituted for a porcelain toilet fuelled by human excrement. Brian Catling (English sculptor, poet, novelist, film maker and performance artist), makes a few short but memorable appearances in the film as 'The Object', a creature that gorges on the torn pages of books and then regurgitates them in pulpy globs. Mellors has hinted that 'The Object' ingestions may be altering the reality that the other characters are experiencing. Either way, it's an iconoclastic gesture that seems to mirror Mellors' approach to art-making.

In this latest episode of *Ourhouse*, Mellors takes a running jump and lands outside of the confines of good taste. The film relishes in body functions and the obscene, which is not to say that it is merely puerile but should be viewed in the Rabelaisian tradition of grotesque and scatological realism. Excrement being something both comic and sobering – a reminder of the indignities of our shared bodily condition, as well as symbolising the link between our bodies and the earth into which this inert material will eventually return. Mellors' commission for the Harris is a visceral viewing experience, a successful attempt at plumbing what he calls 'a deeper weirdness.'

Nothing Happens, Twice: Artists Explore Absurdity is on at the Harris until 4 June 2016. Nathaniel Mellors and guests will discuss *Ourhouse, Ep-1: Time* on 7 May, more details here.

Image: Nathaniel Mellors, *Ourhouse, Ep -1: Time, 2016* (film still). Courtesy of Harris Museum and Art Gallery.

Holly Grange is a curator and writer based in Sheffield and gallery manager at S1 Artspace.

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Warring Neanderthal and cannibal factions to battle in cinema drama at brutalist Preston Bus Station

By Ben Miller | 25 November 2014
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Neanderthals and cannibals to meet in dilapidated cinema at brutalist bus station after gallery wins contemporary art award

Clarissa Corfe, of the Harris Museum (second from left) and artist Nathaniel Mellors (second from right) receive the Contemporary Art Society's 2014 award at the Barbican

© Sophie Mutevilian

Nathaniel Mellors, a British artist known for his satirical and absurd works, is not exaggerating when he speaks of "pulling out some deeper weirdness" in his "unique" new commission for Preston's imposing Harris Museum and Art Gallery.

Effectively won through the Contemporary Art Society Annual Award and the £40,000 in funding that prize brings, Mellors – whose current Ourhouse series has featured the likes of Harry Potter actor Richard Bremner and Gwendoline Christie, of Game of Thrones and Star Wars – will reimagine the **notorious, brutalist bus station** in the Lancashire city as a knackered cinema where cannibals and Neanderthals battle.

"The exterior will be Preston Bus Station, this piece of 60s modernism and a kind of archetypal brutalist exterior which also looks a bit like a tardis," says Mellors.

"Its interior is a rotten, rundown cinema populated by a Neanderthal tribe and also a group of cannibals. I think the Neanderthals should be constructing some kind of icon; some kind of head which is an exteriorisation of themselves which will be peculiar."

Filmed on a grey and rainy day, Preston might be perceived in an unflattering light. But Mellors, who will create the work for the Harris having been chosen for the award from a shortlist of bright artists fleetingly represented in British galleries, believes some of its architecture is "extraordinary". As unbeautiful as it might appear, the bus station itself has recently become Grade II listed.

"The city is relatively compact, yet architecturally it's really diverse," says Clarissa Corfe, the Exhibitions Officer at the Harris, admitting that the depot is "infamous".

"So it makes for an ideal film set. Nathaniel's interested in a range of buildings around Preston.

"One of them is the bus station. It's brutalist in style and monumental in scale.

"I've been wanting to work with Nathaniel for a few years and the award seemed like the perfect opportunity to do something really substantial.

"I invited him to use the social history collection or something of the fabric of the city of Preston as a starting point."

Defining the possible feel of the finished film is tricky. Corfe says Mellors reflects ubiquitous forms of high and lowbrow culture. The artist himself says he deals in film and video, as well as sculpture and multimedia informed by his scripts.

"I was always interested in some sort of hybrid approach which needed to incorporate my interest in TV and film and weird music – a more psychedelic culture and script-writing and fantasy and fiction," he says.

"I want to take a form and sort of switch all its insides around so that it works different and you become aware, partly, of the strangeness and subjectivity of the form.

"The support and faith in my work that this award represents is impossible to put a price on."

- **The Contemporary Art Society Annual Award is supported by the Sfumato Foundation.**

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Ben Miller, 'Warring Neanderthal and cannibal factions to battle in cinema drama at brutalist Preston Bus Station', Culture 24, November 2014, https://www.culture24.org.uk/art/photography-and-film/art507560-warring-neanderthal-and-cannibal-factions-to-battle-in-cinema-drama-at-brutalist-preston-bus-station

Nathaniel Mellors Wins the £40,000 Contemporary Art Society Annual Award 2014

25 NOVEMBER 2014 BY TEAMCAS (HTTP://WWW.CONTEMPORARYARTSOCIETY.ORG/AUTHOR/TEAMCAS/)

Contemporary Art Society Annual Award 2014

03:09

Contemporary Art Society Annual Award 2014 (http://vimeo.com/111772881) from Contemporary Art Society (http://vimeo.com/user5347716) on Vimeo (https://vimeo.com).

Nathaniel Mellors, in partnership with the **Harris Museum & Art Gallery**, has won the Contemporary Art Society Award 2014. Mellors will create a film that will form the centrepiece of a 15 month exhibition on the themes of Samuel Beckett and The Theatre of the Absurd.

The £40,000 prize, generously supported by the Sfumato Foundation, is one of the country's highest value contemporary art awards and this year was presented by Turner Prize-winning artist **Martin Creed**.

Mellors will be making a hybrid work of fiction, sculpture, performance and film, using the architecturally monumental, brutalist Preston Bus Station as its focus. The Bus Station has recently been Grade II listed and this, as well as the compact and architecturally diverse city centre of Preston, makes for an ideal film set.

His current practice and this film commission are part of Mellor's ongoing Ourhouse body of works, produced by NOMAD, which has featured a panoply of British acting talent including **Richard Bremmer** (*Control*, *Harry Potter & The Philosopher's Stone*), **Gwendoline Christie** (*Game of Thrones*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*),**Patrick Kennedy** (*Atonement*, *Boardwalk Empire*), **David Birkin** (*Sylvia*, *Les Miserables*) & **Johnny Vivash** (*Perdition County*, *Vigilante*) as well as local performers in supporting roles.

Nathaniel Mellors said:
The support and faith in my work that this award represents is impossible to put a price on, particularly from such a strong shortlist. It is a unique opportunity to consolidate recent developments in my practice and pull out some deeper weirdness, both with my amazing collaborators and through the extraordinary locations in and around Preston.

Caroline Douglas, Director, Contemporary Art Society, said:
In a year with exceptionally strong applications for the Award, the Harris Museum proposal with Nathaniel Mellors was outstanding. Nathaniel Mellors' work connects with a tradition of absurdist and satirical film making in Britain that includes such figures as Lindsay Anderson and Derek Jarman. I am delighted that the Award will enable the production of a substantial new work within Mellors' oeuvre, and one that links so directly to the city it will be made in.

Cllr Veronica Afrin, Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure Services; Preston City Council, said:
Nathaniel Mellors is a prestigious and fascinating artist, and we are immensely proud to be working with him on this major commission. His unique imagination and approach to film making will enable him to draw on and re-imagine the museum's collections and the fabric of the city, cementing Preston's growing reputation as a centre for high quality cultural activity.

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Notes to Editors:

1. ABOUT CONTEMPORARY ART SOCIETY

The Contemporary Art Society is a national charity that encourages an appreciation and understanding of contemporary art in the UK. With the help of our members and supporters we raise funds to purchase works by new artists which we give to museums and public galleries where they are enjoyed by a national audience; we broker significant and rare works of art by important artists of the twentieth century for public collections through our networks of patrons and private collectors; we establish relationships to commission artworks and promote contemporary art in public spaces; and we devise programmes of displays, artist talks and educational events. Since 1910 we have donated over 8,000 works to museums and public galleries – from Bacon, Freud, Hepworth and Moore in their day through to the influential artists of our own times – championing new talent, supporting curators, and encouraging philanthropy and collecting in the UK.

2. ABOUT CONTEMPORARY ART SOCIETY ANNUAL AWARD FOR MUSEUMS

One of the highest value contemporary art prizes in the country, the £40,000 Contemporary Art Society Annual Award for Museums supports a UK-based museum or public gallery to work with an artist of their choice to commission a new work that, once completed, will remain within the museum's permanent collection.
For the winning museum, the award allows the acquisition of an ambitious work of contemporary art of national importance, and for the winning artist (who may be showing widely nationally and internationally but whose work is not represented in collections in this country), the award is a stepping stone to greater visibility and provides access to national and international audiences. The award is open to all museums in the Contemporary Art Society's Museum Membership network and artists anywhere in the world.

The Contemporary Art Society Annual Award is generously supported by the **Sfumato Foundation**, which exists to promote, encourage and support the education of the public in the arts, humanities and sciences. The Sfumato Foundation developed the award in collaboration with the Contemporary Art Society in 2009 and has been a partner since its inception.

Previous recipients of the award include: **The Graves Art Gallery, Museums Sheffield** (with artist **Katerina Šedá**) in 2009; the **Hepworth Wakefield** and **Wolverhampton Art Gallery** (with Turner Prize nominated artist **Luke Fowler**) in 2010; **Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery** (with artist **Christina Mackie**) in 2011; **The Collection & Usher Gallery, Lincoln** (with artist **Oliver Laric**) 2012; and last year's winners: **Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology** in partnership with the **Pitt Rivers Museum and the Ruskin School of Drawing & Fine Art** (with artist **Elizabeth Price**).

3. ABOUT NATHANIEL MELLORS

British artist Nathaniel Mellors (born 1974) makes irreverent, absurd and hilarious videos, sculptures, performances and writings that challenge our notions of taste, morality, and intelligence. Based in Amsterdam and Los Angeles, recent solo exhibitions include Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; De Hallen, Haarlem; and the Stedelijk Museum Bureau in Amsterdam. Recent group shows include *British Art Show 7 – In The Days of the Comet* (2010-11); *Altermodern* at Tate Britain (2009); and the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. In 2009, Mellors was commissioned by the BBC to make a short work of art to introduce the final episode of the cultural history series *The Seven Ages of Britain* and in 2013 made a short for Channel 4 through the Jarman Award. He is the 2011 recipient of the Cobra Art Prize. Mellors studied at the Ruskin School, Oxford University (1996-99), the Royal College of Art, London (1999-2001), and the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam (2007-09).

4. ABOUT THE HARRIS MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

The Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston is one of the leading museums in the North West and features contemporary art, fine art, decorative art and historic collections of national significance. Located in the heart of Preston in a stunning Grade 1 listed building, it hosts a wide range of exhibitions and events and is fast gaining a reputation for its innovative and ambitious contemporary arts programme. The Harris is a major tourist attraction, welcoming 220,000 visitors per year. www.harrismuseum.org.uk (http://www.harrismuseum.org.uk)

5. ABOUT THE 2014 JUDGING PANEL

Paul Bonaventura (Senior Research Fellow in Fine Art Studies, University of Oxford)
Paul Bonaventura is the Senior Research Fellow in Fine Art Studies, University of Oxford. After studying history of art at Reading University and the Courtauld Institute of Art, Paul went on to organise exhibitions of work by modern and contemporary artists, firstly at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford and subsequently at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London. Since 1994 he has overseen research activities at the Ruskin School of Art where he has developed a particular interest in encouraging cross-disciplinary collaborations between artists and experts from other disciplines. Paul was an artistic advisor on the UK Pavilion at Aichi Expo in 2005 and guest-curator of the One *Giant Leap* season at BFI Southbank to coincide with the 40th anniversary of Apollo 11 in 2009. Paul devised a major commission for the London 2012 Festival and is at present working on large-scale projects to mark the centenary of the First World War and the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta. Paul is a trustee of Camden Arts Centre in London and Situations in Bristol and a special advisor to the Design and Artists Copyright Society.

Helen Legg (Director, Spike Island)
Helen Legg has been the director of Spike Island, Bristol, since September 2010. Since joining, Helen has curated exhibitions with contemporary artists such as Haroon Mirza, Becky Beasley, Laure Prouvost, Dewar and Gicquel, Clara Phillips and Corita Kent, Ivan Seal, Jessica Warboys and Cevdet Erek. Prior to this role, Helen was Curator at Ikon, Birmingham, working on exhibitions and offsite projects. Additionally, Helen worked on the development of Ikon Eastside, a second gallery based in a former factory building in Digbeth, an industrial area of Birmingham. Helen is chair of Visual Arts South West, on the advisory board of the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership and serves on the acquisition committee for Frac Midi-Pyrénées 2012-15. In 2013, Helen was chosen as a selector for the Paul Hamlyn Artist's Awards and this year will act on the judging panel for the 2014 Turner Prize.

Tom Morton (Curator, Writer and Contributing Editor, Frieze)
Tom Morton is a writer, independent curator, and contributing editor of Frieze Magazine. Tom has worked as a curator at Cubitt Gallery London, the Hayward Gallery London, and was co-curator with Lisa Le Feuvre on the major quinquennial travelling survey exhibition *British Art Show 7: In the Days of the Comet* (2010-11). Tom's recent exhibitions include *British British Polish Polish: Art*

Contemporary Art Society, 'Nathaniel Mellors Wins the £40,000 Contemporary Art Society Annual Award 2014', http://www.contemporaryartsociety.org/news/nathaniel-mellors-wins-the-40000-contemporary-art-society-annual-award-2014/

from Europe's Edges in the Long '90s, The CSW Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (2013), Today, The CSW Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (2013), *It Means It Means! – A Drawn Exhibition* by Charles Avery & Tom Morton, Galerie Perrotin, Paris and Pilar Corrias, London (2013). Tom has contributed critical writing to magazines including Frieze, Parkett, Metropolis M, and Bidoun, as well as numerous exhibition catalogues and edited volumes. Tom is currently working on his first novel.

Eva Rothschild (Artist)
Eva Rothschild is an Irish artist living and working in London. Eva creates sculpture working in a range of materials, which primarily consider the transformative power of looking. Eva's recent solo exhibitions and public commissions have included the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, (2014), *Why Don't You?*, The Nasher Sculpture Centre, Dallas, Texas (2012), *Boys and Sculpture*, The Whitechapel Gallery Children's Commission (2012), *Hot Touch*, The Hepworth Wakefield and Kunstverein Hannover, Hannover, Germany (2011), *Empire*, Public Art Fund Commission sited in Central Park, New York (2011), *Cold Corners*, Tate Britain's Duveen gallery commission (2009). Group exhibitions have included You *Imagine What You Desire*, Sydney Biennial, Sydney, Australia, (2014), *We are living on a star*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo, Norway (2014), *Changing States*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, (2013), *Making is Thinking*, Witte de With, Rotterdam, Netherlands (2011),The Dark Monarch, Tate St Ives, St. Ives (2009), *Un-monumental: Falling to Pieces in the 21st Century*, the New Museum, New York (2007). Eva's work is included in public and private collections including Tate Britain, MoMA, New York and the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

Prequel Dump

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nathaniel Mellors
Prequel Dump
February 27 - **April 16, 2016 (EXTENDED)**

Opening Reception: Saturday, February 27, 6-9PM
Ourhouse Episode -1: 'Time' screens on the hour

******Notes from the Perma-Present******

Prequel Dump is Nathaniel Mellors' first solo exhibition at The Box. The installation combines the video works *Ourhouse (2010-16), Neanderthal Container (2014)* and *Giantbum (2008)* with the vomiting animatronic sculpture *The Object* (2010), new sculptures, photograms & paintings.

*****BROWN REASONS TO LIVE*****

Mellors' epic scatological fantasies are full of wry-humour and big themes: language, technology, art, ownership, cavemen, cannibalism & excrement.

****Object eats Subject****

Ourhouse (2010 -) Conceptual sculpture meets British TV drama. 5 episodes.
The eccentric Maddox-Wilson family's lives are destabilized when their house ('Ourhouse') is occupied by The Object (Brian Catling), whom the family fail to recognise as a human-being, each perceiving a different form in its place. The Object yields strange power over words and begins to eat the family's books; processing their story inside its guts. Each episode of the series is determined by the texts The Object consumes, half-digests and sicks-back-up.

"All my toilets are made with Aztec porcelain and will have a brutalist trim."

Ourhouse Episode -1: Time (2015-16)
The family have inhabited the northern wing of Ourhouse with holidays in mind but lose one of their group to a pair of passing Neanderthals after Charles 'Daddy' Maddox-Wilson (Richard Bremmer) announces his imminent celebrity. The Object is consuming The Eternal Present - a book covering 35,000 years of European cave-art. Meanwhile Ourhouse has become inundated with surveillance technology through the expansion and rise to power of a gentleman-criminal called Davis (Patrick Kennedy), a plumber hired by the family in 1999 to "do the pipes" who has evolved into…something else. Charles has invented a revolutionary new theory of time - but Davis, one step ahead, has invented a time-travelling toilet - the 'T.T.T.'. Charles' subsequent attempts at time-travel go awry as the family find themselves duped, cannibalised and trapped inside a permanent-present…

Bird-headed man with a stiffy

In *Neanderthal Container (2014)* a Neanderthalised stunt-dummy falls from a plane over the San Joaquin Valley, crashing to earth over and over again. Mellors conceived of the falling figure as depicting an 'absolute exterior' and these falling sequences are punctuated by more fragmentary and improvised sequences representing the Neanderthal's interior - a film-set populated by four different versions of the Neanderthal character (all played by Patrick Kennedy) who reflect on their condition and position "inside the Neanderthal stunt-dummy…which is actually a spaceship."

"If you eat yourself, eat yourself… do you shit yourself?"

Giantbum - Stages 1 & 2 (2008)
It's 1213 AD. Sir Boss (Gwendoline Christie), The Truthcurator (David Birkin) & their crypto-medieval phalanx have been accidentally eaten by a Giant and need to avoid starvation and digestion and find THE EXIT. But "there is no outside!" The group are (mis)led by their religious leader The Father (Johnny Vivash) - a kind of poo-crazed medieval spin doctor, who has achieved an idiosyncratic form of immortality through cannibalism and coprophagia. From scatology to eschatology, Giantbum is a pious critique of cultural reenactment, recycling, re-staging & re-ligion.

Chris Bloor & Nathaniel Mellors: *The Dinosaur Moderne (2015 - ∞)*
New collaborative paintings by Bloor & Mellors -
Prehistory as a lens for the present.
Transitional epochs.
Jurassic Parquet.

Nathaniel Mellors (b. Doncaster, UK, 1974) recent exhibitions include The Great Acceleration – Taipei Biennial (2014), The Sophisticated Neanderthal, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin (2014),

Current Exhibition | Past Exhibitions | Upcoming Exhibitions | Artists | News | Shop | Contact | Ma
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Cobra Museum, Amstelveen (2011), British Art Show 7 - In The Days of the Comet (2010-11), Hayward Gallery, London (touring).

Awards: 2014 Contemporary Art Society Prize, 2011 Cobra Art Prize.

Ourhouse -1, 'Time' presented by the Contemporary Art Society, 2015, through the Annual Award funded by the Sfumato Foundation with the support of the National Gallery of Victoria - Melbourne, the Mondriaan Fund and Arts Council England. Commissioned by the Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston. Produced by Nathaniel Mellors & Nomad Projects.

The Box Gallery, 'Prequel Dump', http://www.theboxla.com/artist.php?id=6080

- Home
- What's On
- Exhibitions
- Collections
- Your Visit
- Learning

- About Us
- Café
- Shop
- Support Us
- Get Involved
- Our Work
- News
- Sponsorship & Hire

Exhibitions 2016

Nothing Happens, Twice: Artists Explore Absurdity

Exhibition
6 February - 4 June 2016

Imagine Neanderthals living in Preston Bus Station and around the city ... what Jackson Pollock's wife really thought ... and how a talking shoe might gossip over the garden fence.

Preston Bus Station is part of the inspiration for Nathaniel Mellors' new film, winner of the Contemporary Art Society Annual Award, and showing here for the first time as part of the exhibition.

A range of entertaining and thought-provoking work also includes Mel Brimfield's Alan Bennett-style take on what it

What our visitors are saying about this exhibition:

"Love Nathaniel Mellors' film and intend to come back and watch it all. Thank you!"

"Just seen #NothingHappensTwice at the imposing @HarrisPreston brilliantly curated by @ClarissaCorfe Animated? ... I'm absolutely fizzing."

"Innovative, top quality new commission that drew us to the exhibition."

"Good fun to spot the Preston locations used in the film."

"Glad the Harris is keeping on its toes and staying fresh."

"Really love the decision to show long video works; makes me want to come back again and again."

"It is remarkable that in these straightened times, the Harris manages to show challenging yet engaging contemporary art."

Immerse yourself in film, sculpture and painting, exploring ideas of farce, tragi-comedy and repetition with the Theatre of the Absurd as the starting point. Mellors' work is complemented by national and international artists and six newly commissioned pieces. A resource area and family activities are also available in the gallery.

Doncaster born, international artist Nathaniel Mellors, has created his most ambitious film to date for the exhibition, the latest in his *Ourhouse* series. The absurdist drama, which was shot in various locations around Preston, features an eccentric family who inhabit Preston's iconic, brutalist bus station.

The exhibition includes four other new commissions by Pavel Buchler, Common Culture, Hardeep Pandhal and Sally O'Reilly, as well as film, sculpture and painting by eleven other leading contemporary artists. The exhibition title is taken from academic Vivien Mercier's description of Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot, as 'a play in which nothing happens, twice'.

Beckett, as with many of the artists in this exhibition, deconstructs notions of time, using it as a malleable medium to orchestrate absurdist scenarios. The works highlight the absurdity of the human condition in our relationship to each other, the natural world and the metaphysical, confronting us with situations that might, in some ways, be analogous to our own.

Nathaniel Mellors new film commission, Ourhouse, Ep.-1: Time, has enabled him to create his most ambitious work to date. This absurdist drama, which is shot in various locations around Preston features an eccentric family who inhabit Preston's iconic, brutalist bus station. It has a TARDIS-like interior, subjecting them to a series of fantastical events while finding themselves inundated by Neanderthals. The main character Charles 'Daddy' Maddox-Wilson played by

Nothing Happens, Twice is part of *Dance First, Think Later*, a 15 month contemporary art programme exploring notions of performativity and the human condition; tragicomedy and absurdity curated by Clarissa Corfe.

Notions of time and the fallibility of memory are explored in Pavel Buchler's new sculpture *Once Again* that references the film *Last Year at Marienbad* as well as his new sculpture *Acrobats*.

Time and labour are referenced in Mladen Stilinovic's *Artist at Work* exploring the differences between communist and capitalist influences on artists' approaches to production.

Pierrick Sorin's repetitious waking film is a groundhog experience whilst Pat Flynn's film sculpture explores the fecundic power relationship between a melon and lemon.

Steph Fletcher's work addresses the notions of a work/health life balance through the use of house plants and John Bock's film features two elderly men whose existence is confined to a surreal office environment.

Broomberg & Chanarin bring a group of army cadets and a 'bouffon' into filmic dialogue whilst Bedwyr Williams collapses time in a type of self-portrait that explores the antics of contemporary Cambridge society through the objects in the Fitzwilliam Museum.

Common Culture's new work employs comedians to perform their stand-up routine in an empty auditorium whilst Sally O'Reilly has written a new monologue performed by a professional actor using a shoe as an orifice. Performed in 'over the fence' tones it addresses its neighbouring artworks.

Meanwhile, Samuel Beckett's *Play* shows three actors; a man, his wife and his mistress trapped in urns performing a chorus of three isolated and almost unintelligible monologues.

Hardeep Pandhal's new drawings explore an absurdist and surreal physical and metaphysical world, whilst Hilde Krohn Huse and Willum Geerts explore the power of religious and neo liberal symbolism.

Artists include: Samuel Beckett, John Bock, Mel Brimfield, Broomberg & Chanarin, Pavel Buchler, Common Culture (Ian Brown, David Campbell and Mark Durden), Steph Fletcher, Pat Flynn, Willum Geerts, Hilde Krohn Huse, Nathaniel Mellors, Sally O'Reilly, Hardeep Pandhal, Pierrick Sorin, Mladen Stilinovic, Bedwyr Williams.

Essays

Samuel Beckett, the Long Sixties and Contemporary Art by Dr. Conor Carville

The Cant of the Conni-Sewer: Repetition and Affirmation in Nothing Happens, Twice by Chris Fite-Wassilak

The Harris Museum, 'Nothing Happens, Twice: Artists Explore Absurdity' http://www.harrismuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/1018-nothing-happens-twice

Keywords:
Installation
Animatronics
Video
Absurdist Satire

Key Dates:
2014 Boiler Room Lecture: Nathaniel Mellors, The Wheeler Centre, State Library of Victoria in collaboration with Monash University, Australia. https://vimeo.com/131502779

2016 Ourhouse Episode -1: Time wins Contemporary Art Society Annual Award; shown in Nothing Happens, Twice, Harris Museum, Preston, 6 February - 4 June, which is reviewed in Art Monthly.

2016 Ourhouse Episode -1: Time shown in Prequel Dump, the Box, Los Angeles, Feb 27 – April 16.

2016 Dance First, Think Later: Nathaniel Mellors and Guests: Focus On Panel Discussion, The Harris Museum, Preston 7 May.

2017 Ourhouse Episode -1: Time shown at NGV Triennial, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, December 15, 2017 - April 15, 2018. Included interview with artist in the Triennial catalogue, and another with Tala Madani in the National Gallery of Victoria magazine.

2018 Ourhouse Episode -1: Time shown in Mellors' solo exhibition Progressive Rocks, The New Museum, New York, Feb 6 – April 15, curated by Margot Norton and reviewed in The Village Voice

Funding Credits:
Awarded the Contemporary Art Society Annual Award 2014 in partnership with the Harris Museum, Preston, winning £40,000 to create Ourhouse Episode -1: Time

Other supporters of the project include Stigter van Doesburg, Amsterdam; MONITOR, Rome; The Box, Los Angeles; and Matt's Gallery, London.

Links:
www.mattsgallery.org/artists/mellors/home.php

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