Televisual Objects: Props, Relics and Prosthetics

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Published in *Afterall* 33, summer 2013: 66-77.

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: the commencement in the London region of the UK's 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 was designed and curated by Denny in collaboration with ICA curator Matt Williams. This section included a series of wall-mounted monitors, displaying video works produced since the late 1960s, which required viewers to sit close.[1] In contrast, 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

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[1] Simon Denny discusses his involvement in the exhibition in a short video posted on YouTube by the ICA on 5 April 2012, available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hji65gFPbds (last accessed on 15 February 2013).

[2] Examples include 'Broadcast Yourself' at Cornerhouse, Manchester (2008); 'Changing Channels: Art and Television 1963–87', Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (2010); 'Channel TV', a collaboration between Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof, Hamburg, centre d'art cneai, Chatou, Paris and Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg (2010–11); and 'Are You Ready for TV?', Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2010–11).

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. Clearly 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]

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

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[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: The MIT Press, 2000, pp.365–404.

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.

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[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.

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' exhibition at Matt's Gallery in London.[14] In each of these projects, the artist explores 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

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[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. Since 2010, versions of 'Any Ever' have been presented at numerous institutions, including the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art; Power Plant, Toronto; Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami; and MoMA PS1, New York. My discussion relates specifically to the version presented at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

within the gallery space.

Prosthetics, Relics and Props

In the three projects, sculptural objects and environments 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.

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[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.

While the phenomenon 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 (in which entities are already gathered) rather than engaging with 'the project of assembling new entities not yet gathered together'.[22] He proposes that these projects of assembling can occur in many contexts, including the 'artisan's workshop, the engineer's design department, the scientist's laboratory, the

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[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.

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 assembly 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 forms 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]

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[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] The term 'family of objects' was coined by Matthew Barney, and cited in *ibid.*, p.4.
[27] *Ibid.*, p.8.
[28] *Ibid.*, p.9.

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 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 in her videos revolve around a character called Cynthia, a woman of indeterminate age who lives in a

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[29] *Ibid*., p.11.

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.

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 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. 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). Additionally, quasi-figurative assemblages, made in collaboration with other artists, were 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'.[30] 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 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'.[31] In *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (1992), an influential

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[30] 'Ryan Trecartin/Lizzie Fitch: Any Ever' [press release], Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 12 July 2011. Emphasis in the original.
[31] L. Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p.99.

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'.[32] 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 a spokesperson for a commercial product.[33] 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

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[32] *Ibid.*, p.159.
[33] *Ibid.*, p.175.

without utilising headphones, and 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 aesthetics, then Nathaniel Mellors's multi-part video work *Ourhouse* (2010–ongoing) more closely resembles a relatively high cultural form – the serialised drama.[34] 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 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,

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[34] 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.

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).[35] 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 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.

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

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, all 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 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.