

3 Materializing the Body of the Actor

Labour, Memory, and Storage

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Abstract

Actors, extras and models, engaged in scripted or staged performances, have featured prominently in artists' film and video since the 1990s. But some artists have also used more specifically sculptural means to materialise acting bodies within the physical space of the gallery. Focusing on works by Cécile B. Evans, Nathaniel Mellors and Clemens von Wedemeyer, this chapter explores how artists have articulated changes in the imagination of the human body, within the realm of acting and the performance of emotional labour. Their works suggest an emerging tension between the body conceived as an organic store of experience, following the logic of Method acting, and the body conceived as a surface for the display of signals, to be scanned and recognised by non-human things.

Keywords: Method acting; emotional labour; data storage; materiality; memory technologies; non-human bodies

Introduction: Bad Copies of Actor's Bodies

'I'm just a bad copy [...]. My voice is wrong and it's not even connected to my face.' This confession emanates from 'PHIL' a computer-animated character in Cécile B. Evans's video *Hyperlinks or It Didn't Happen* (2014), which revolves around questions of authenticity. PHIL bears a very strong resemblance to Philip Seymour Hoffman, a celebrated exponent of Method acting techniques, who died before completing his contribution to the *Hunger Games* film series, prompting rumours of possible CGI use.¹ PHIL

¹ Brody.

is evidently anxious about his own digital status in common with other non-human entities (spambots, CGI objects, robots) that exhibit ostensibly human attributes in numerous works by Evans. However, I am specifically interested in the figure of the actor in her practice, and in specific works by two other artists—Clemens von Wedemeyer and Nathaniel Mellors—that share a concern with the corporeality and materiality of acting bodies. These works articulate changes in the imagination of the human body as source and store of emotion, both within the realm of acting and the wider context of performance. In particular, they articulate a dissonance between the body conceived as an organic storehouse of experience (following the logic of ‘sense memory’ within Method acting) and the body conceived as exterior, which functions as a surface (even a screen) for the display of signals that can be recognized and mediated by non-human things.

In this chapter I focus on projects by Evans, Mellors, and von Wedemeyer using choreographed robots, animatronic installations, and sculptural objects to explore the materiality of acting and performing bodies, both human and non-human. While Evans directly invokes the figure of the Method actor through the character of PHIL, it is important to note that she, Mellors, and von Wedemeyer are all interested in a much broader realm of performance, extending well beyond the domain of professional acting into multiple contexts of labour. These artists are attuned to the fact that while Method acting occupies a distinctive place within the popular cultural imagination of memory work, sense memory techniques are also deployed well beyond the context of professional dramatic performance, in the training of service workers. All three artists engage with cinema, with von Wedemeyer in particular drawing from the industrial and social history of film production in addition to filmic narrative conventions and acting techniques. But although these artists clearly acknowledge cinema’s cultural significance, in terms of the imagination of memory and shared public experience of emotion, their work engages with a much broader economy of screen media consumption and production.

The performing body, whether belonging to a trained actor, celebrity, or amateur, is a well-established object of artistic investigation. Key figures within the history of artists’ moving image, including Yvonne Rainer, Sally Potter, and Stuart Marshall, were drawn to explore aspects of the culture, craft, and institutional apparatus of screen acting in the 1970s and early 1980s.² The celebrity performer returned to prominence in the subsequent decade, most notably in Matthew Barney’s *Cremaster Cycle* (1994–2002) and

2 See Carroll (on Yvonne Rainer); Potter; and Elwes (on Stuart Marshall).

in the work of various ‘young British artists’.³ This was however followed by a shift in focus toward the body of the amateur performer, theorized by Claire Bishop as an ‘outsourcing of authenticity’, in which artists delegated the task of performance to non-professionals, sometimes cast as the representatives of specific, marginalized socio-economic groups.⁴ Yet it is also possible to trace an ongoing interest in the craft of acting, as practiced by professionals rather than amateurs. This focus is apparent in Sam Taylor-Wood’s *Method in Madness* (1995), in which a distressed man is revealed to be an actor. It is equally evident in subsequent moving-image works by artists such as Gerard Byrne, Christian Jankowski, Jesse Jones, and Joachim Koester, many of which explore acting traditions that specifically counter the Method.⁵ Other artists such as Pierre Huyghe have addressed the rights of professional performers, most notably in *Blanche-Neige Lucie* (1997), which centres upon a lawsuit pursued by the actress who voiced the French-language version of Disney’s *Snow White* (1937). Huyghe’s *One Million Kingdoms* (2001) features the manga character Annlee (purchased by Huyghe and Philippe Parreno as part of the collaborative project *No Ghost Just a Shell*) walking through a landscape that is generated through the processing of a recording of Neil Armstrong’s voice, speaking from beyond Earth.⁶ Legal rights are also at stake in Huyghe’s *The Third Memory* (2000), in which John Wojtowicz oversees a dramatic reconstruction of the robbery he helped to commit, as a corrective to the event’s portrayal in *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975).

In many of these works, the acting body becomes a means not just to explore changing economies and practices of media production, but also to investigate how bodies, data, and memories are mobilized as technologies of storage, to be used in the performance of required behaviours. Harun Farocki’s exploration of ‘operational images’ is also clearly relevant here, since he directly addresses the pervasive modelling, simulation, and scripting of behaviours, on- and off-screen. Christa Blümlinger and Thomas Elsaesser have examined how Farocki’s analysis was developed through the use of images drawn from archives and collections associated with bureaucracy,

3 Fowler, p. 243.

4 Bishop, p. 111.

5 Specific works include Gerard Byrne, *Untitled Acting Exercise (In the Third Person)* (2010); Christian Jankowski, *Crying for the March of Humanity* (2012); Jesse Jones, *The Struggle Against Ourselves* (2011); and Joachim Koester, *Maybe One Must Begin with Some Particular Places* (2012). In contrast, Gillian Wearing’s documentary *SelfMade* (2010) centres upon a Method acting class taught by Sam Rumbelow and attended by a group of amateurs recruited by Wearing with the promise that they can star in a film focused upon their own experiences.

6 See McDonough.

the military, education, and public relations, sources that were deliberately made accessible and visible in the circulation of his work. As Elsaesser points out, Farocki's interest in the transformation of 'lived experience into scripted situations, and scripted situations into live-action training exercises' led him to film in a wide range of institutional contexts, including 'schools, offices, maternity clinics, in strip clubs, shelters for the homeless, management training centres, police stations, and while observing child therapists and army field exercises'.⁷

The operational image offers an important vantage point from which to revisit Arlie Russell Hochschild's seminal 1983 study of emotional labour in the service industries, which revealed how workers are encouraged to draw upon their memories in order to manage their own appearance, for the benefit of customers, and their employers. Significantly, Hochschild demonstrates how the training of service workers involves the repurposing of emotion memory techniques associated with Method acting, to elicit more 'authentic' performances. I am especially interested in the Method's construction of memory as a resource that, although it is often imagined to be located 'within', must also be conceptualized and visualized in an externalized form (the house, the filing cabinet, the warehouse) so that it can be effectively accessed, managed, and put to work. This process of externalization is, I argue, made manifest in the work of Evans, Mellors, and von Wedemeyer, in which actor's bodies acquire material forms that are often compromised or unstable. While these artists focus on supposedly 'professional' performers, they are engaging with forces and processes – of distribution and exteriorization – that impact upon a much wider range of workers. In contrast to an earlier generation of (typically projected) moving-image works that seemed independent of material supports, these artists rely upon the material supports of the physical exhibition space. Their work derives added weight from the history of the public gallery and museum as a privileged site for the modelling of approved behaviours.⁸

Acting Methods, Memory, and the Exteriorized Body

[We] cannot hinder ourselves from asking *where* memories are stored up.
We understand that physiochemical phenomena take place *in* the brain,

7 Elsaesser, p. 223.

8 On the importance of public museum or gallery as site of embodied learning, structured around the collection and narrativization of objects, see Bennett; and Preziosi.

that the brain is *in* the body, the body is *in* the air which surrounds it, etc.; but the past once achieved, if it is retained, where is it? To locate it in the cerebral substance, in the state of molecular modification, seems clear and simple enough because then we have a receptacle, actually given, which we have only to open in order to let the latent images flow into consciousness. But if the brain cannot serve such a purpose, in what warehouse shall we store the accumulated images?⁹

In *Matter and Memory*, originally published in 1896, Henri Bergson identifies an impulse to locate the storage site of memories, modelled after an existing physical entity such as, for example, the warehouse. Actors, and others who are trained in the accessing and storage of memory, may use different metaphors but they are often equally mundane. In a *Guardian* interview from 2014, Patrick Stewart explains that actors ‘have this thing called a “sense memory” which we draw on for particularly emotional moments. We have these things stored away in a vault and we can draw them out when we need to’. The interviewer suggest that this ‘vault’ might operate ‘[l]ike a filing cabinet of emotions’ and Stewart concurs, reasserting the importance of efficient management: ‘[t]hat’s right. [...] We were taught how to store emotions. It means no experience is ever wasted’. An imaginary vault of sense memory is just one of many storage mechanisms that an actor might use to construct and realize a successful performance. The term ‘repertory’, which describes a specific economy of theatre production, actually means ‘list, catalogue, or index’, thus implying an infrastructure of storage. But the ‘sense memory’ described by Stewart refers specifically to individualized bodily techniques, originally devised to assist actors who were struggling to perform a required emotion.

Popularized (among screen actors) by Lee Strasberg at the Actor’s Studio in New York, the Method was adapted from the ideas of Constantin Stanislavski. It requires the actor to identify a specific circumstance in his or her past experience, which is the basis for the mental recreation of an atmosphere or scene, and the associated bodily senses, thereby creating more favourable conditions for the production of the necessary emotion. Stanislavski used various metaphors to describe how such memories might be accessed, encouraging his students to ‘imagine a number of houses, with many rooms in each house, in each room innumerable cupboards, shelves, boxes, and somewhere, in one of them, a tiny bead. [...] That is what it is like in the archives of your memory. It has all those divisions and sub-divisions. Some

9 Bergson, p. 148 (emphasis in the original).

are more accessible than others'.¹⁰ According to Philip Auslander, Stanislavski often tends to treat the subconscious as 'a repository of retrievable data', but, at the same time, he accepts that 'memory distorts [and] the information we retrieve is not the same as the data we store, adding that distorted memories are of greater use to the actor than accurate ones because they are purified, universalized, and, therefore, aesthetic in nature'.¹¹ Auslander's research forms part of an extensive critical literature on memory in acting, which extends much further than techniques associated with the Method, and includes the use of acting 'scores', and exercises that function 'like amulets, which the actor carries around' as sources of energy.¹² I am especially interested, however, in the application and popular perception of emotion memory techniques well beyond the realm of professional acting.

Informed partly by Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach to the analysis of everyday behaviour, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild's 1983 study *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* analyzed a growing requirement for service workers to perform emotional labour in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Such labour occurs when workers need to either 'induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others'.¹³ Hochschild demonstrates that airline attendants were trained not simply to appear caring, welcoming, hospitable, etc., but also to experience (and exhibit) 'authentic' feelings. *The Managed Heart* differentiates between 'surface acting', involving the use of the body to merely exhibit gestures, and 'deep acting', which draws more specifically on emotion memory techniques, observing that both can be demanded of workers in the service industries. Borrowing and repurposing metaphors of mining from Stanislavski, she emphasizes the difference between the imagination of memory and personal experience as a 'precious resource' in the training of professional actors, and its relatively casual exploitation as a raw material for the performance of service-oriented emotional labour.¹⁴

In recent decades, Method acting has 'fallen from grace' in both academic performance studies and in actor training because of 'the rise of post-modern theories; mistrust of Freudian views of psychology and humanist-modernist views of identity' as Rhonda Blair, cited by Lisa Bode, observes.¹⁵ Crucially,

10 Stanislavski, pp. 188–189.

11 Auslander, p. 31.

12 Barba, p. 128.

13 Hochschild, p. 7.

14 See Elsaesser's discussion of the pro-filmic world reduced to 'raw material', p. 218.

15 Bode, p. 59.

however, Bode notes that the Method remains prominent in popular understandings of acting because it confers a 'sense of authenticity and intentionality upon the figures we see on the screen', which is increasingly important when digital technologies can supplement actor's bodily capacities and even enable posthumous 'performance'.¹⁶ This view is bolstered by Mihaela Mihailova's analysis of the erasure of the labour of animators and visual-effects artists in promotional discourses around screen performances that use motion capture. Andy Serkis, she notes, is frequently described as a Method actor, in ways that tend to downplay the labour of others contributing to the performance.¹⁷ This disparity in accreditation is partly due to the fact that actors have better union representation than visual-effects artists, but Mihailova also reads the focus on Method technique as an attempt to assuage widespread anxieties about the 'replication and obsolescence of humans', which are especially acute for actors yet clearly relevant to much larger masses of workers facing the threat of automation.¹⁸

Method acting techniques have come to serve, in popular discourse, as a guarantee of authentic human emotion, manifesting the presence of interior reserves that can be accessed through the mining of personal experience and memory. Screen actors and their representatives seek to promote the integrity of acting as a (distinctly human) craft process. Yet actors also have the capacity to adapt their practices to new processes and technologies of storage and visualization and can even assert their own agency by engaging with these processes. In an interview cited by Deborah Levitt, Serkis describes an exteriorized relationship to his own body, in which the monitor acts both as a memory aid and as a tool of prosthetic extension. Addressing his comments towards aspiring motion-capture actors, Serkis explains that '[f]or digital roles, the actor is manipulating their character like a puppet. It's really useful to have time on a monitor to work with the CG model. It's like having a third eye on yourself. Actors have to learn to demand that time'.¹⁹ Actors working with motion-capture technology constitute a very specific, and relatively privileged, category of workers. Yet for Levitt the motion-capture actor is of interest because they are acutely exposed to a condition that is experienced much more widely generally. She observes that 'our very selves are turned inside-out, becoming increasingly distributed' through the use of pharmaceuticals, psychotropic

16 Bode, p. 60.

17 Mihailova, p. 44.

18 Mihailova, p. 45.

19 Serkis, quoted in Levitt, p. 190.

drugs, biomedical manipulations and imaging technologies, such as MRI scans, involving ‘multiple and differing kinds of exteriorization’.²⁰

How are these forces of distribution and exteriorization to be reconciled with the long-standing desire (evoked by Bergson) to envisage the brain as a physically bounded form of storage, imagined as a receptacle or as a more complex entity, potentially accessed and managed like a warehouse? In an analysis of works by artists that include Ed Atkins, Mark Leckey, Ryan Trecartin, and Lizzie Fitch, Melissa Gronlund identifies the recurrence of an anxiety that was once articulated in Gothic literature, whereby the boundaries of the home (and, by extension, the human body) are transgressed by new technologies. In theorizing this ‘return of the Gothic’, Gronlund focuses on the use of CGI in moving-image works by Ed Atkins, such as *A Primer for Cadavers* (2011) and *Us Dead Talk Love* (2012). Atkins often devises monologues that are delivered by ‘animate-inanimate’ characters, digitally modelled upon the surfaces of the artist’s own body. In these works, ‘the digitally rendered dead look back on what the world was like when bodies had materiality and all that comes with it: hair, nails, and abject bodily functions’.²¹

The ‘digitally rendered dead’ that populate Atkins’s CGI narratives covet a physical interiority that they can never possess. They exist only as surfaces. But the human body and the domestic dwelling are not the only fragile, porous, and unstable containers to be evoked in Gronlund’s analysis of ‘digital anxiety’. She cites an interview with Atkins, who frames his exploration of the body very specifically as a meditation upon cinema:

Cadavers became the best way to look at representation and, in particular, recent technologies of representation. There is the push in industrial cinema towards high definition and 3D, and at the same time the body of cinema is falling away: there is no celluloid, no tape, no DVD. All you are left with are these reams of code, which, to a certain extent, simply haunt different media.²²

In Atkins’s work, there is no attempt to materialize the actor’s body within the physical space of the gallery. Digital anxiety has, in fact, given way to an acceptance of loss because the acting body has been replaced by a set of data points, merged into the ‘reams of code’ that now constitute

²⁰ Levitt, p. 178; pp. 191–192.

²¹ Gronlund.

²² Atkins, quoted in Gronlund.

cinema. Artists such as Evans, Mellors, and von Wedemeyer are similarly attuned to technological transformations in film and media production. But, to a much greater extent than Atkins, they use the figure of the actor to explore how the body, and memory, of cinema is being disarticulated, reassembled, and reconfigured within a wider economy of distribution and exteriorization.

Activist, Animatronic, and Automated Acting Bodies

Like Nathaniel Mellors and Cécile B. Evans, Clemens von Wedemeyer tends to realize multifaceted installation projects, which are often created (or substantially reconfigured) for a specific context of exhibition. Von Wedemeyer's 2013 solo show *The Cast* was devised for one of the upper floors of the MAXXI in Rome, designed by Zaha Hadid. The exhibition utilizes the distinctive architecture of this building (including a floor that is raked, not unlike a cinema) to structure a complex spatio-temporal narrative that draws from the history of epic film production at Cinecittà, the iconography of classical myth, local traditions of religious procession, and dialogues with activist theatre practitioners. *The Cast* is structured as four interconnected 'chapters', interweaving distinct yet interdependent timelines. The first work to be encountered is *Afterimage*, a six-minute animation generated from a laser scan of a physical space, projected onto a huge free-standing curved screen. *Afterimage* depicts the interior of the artisan sculptural workshop of Cinears, the oldest company located in the Cinecittà complex, in which four generations of the De Angelis family produced sculptures and props for the Italian film industry, ranging from the epics of the early twentieth century to objects created for Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, 1975). The workshop gradually mutated into a storehouse, preserving not only the objects made by Cinears but also material from other sculpture workshops.

In a discussion with von Wedemeyer, which appears in the book accompanying *The Cast*, theorist Avery Gordon describes the spectral vantage point offered by *Afterimage*, in which the surfaces of objects are rendered as semi-transparent 'point clouds'. She imagines a 'ghostly figure that moves through the workshop rooms [which are] filled with body part moulds and resting statues [...] as if he or she were in a computer game. The ghost in this machine, however, has a will to create something out of the surplus of hands and heads and arms and legs resting or waiting in the workshop', and von Wedemeyer concurs that this ghost 'would like to have a body of

its own, not just an eye'.²³ So, while *The Cast* is filled with 'bodies', they tend to lack agency and coherency, existing only as a dispersal of parts. Yet the exhibition refuses to project an imagined wholeness onto Italian cinema's past, and instead focuses attention upon the fissures and instabilities that have persisted throughout its history.

The next chapter consists of *The Beginning: Living Figures Dying*, a work literally embedded into the floor of the gallery. Devised for a series of glass-covered screens that extend from one wall to the other, resembling an enormous filmstrip, this moving-image installation is composed of sequences from the history of cinema, depicting objects (many of them human-like in form) being brought to life.²⁴ Stepping over the screens, the visitor approaches another free-standing structure, this time with seating, onto which is projected the film *Procession* (2013), which collides two distinct histories and modes of labour activism. Members of Teatro Valle Occupato, an activist group that claimed collective ownership of an Italian theatre to prevent its privatization in 2011, reflect upon (and loosely re-enact) fragments of an ad-hoc 1958 protest by thousands of aspiring *Ben-Hur* extras, who were lured to Cinecittà by the promise of paid work. The soundtrack features Mino Argentieri, an influential critical commentator on the Italian film economy, reading from his own contemporary report on these events, condemning the exploitation of the workers by underworld organizations posing as labour unions.

In moving through the various chapters of *The Cast*, the visitor is progressing closer and closer to a sculpture of a headless naked male figure. This entity stands, holding a rock above the place where a human head might be, looking out through a wall of glass onto the city below. Around this figure lie fragments of bodies, and the moulds used in their construction, transposed from the workshop of Cinears. The headless figure is an allusion to the myth of Deucalion (son of Prometheus) and Pyrrha. Fleeing from Zeus, Deucalion and Pyrrha were told by an oracle to cast behind them 'the bones of the mother', which they interpreted to mean rocks from the earth's surface; these rocks grew to be men and women. Von Wedemeyer's Deucalion is, however, caught mid-gesture and seems to materialize the exhibition's central question, also articulated in the movements of the disembodied eye of *Afterimage*. This is the question of how to make a new body that might

²³ Gordon and von Wedemeyer, p. 90.

²⁴ The films excerpted include *Viaggio in Italia* (*Journey to Italy*, Roberto Rossellini, 1954), *La Belle et la Bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*, Jean Cocteau, 1946), *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*, Jean-Luc Godard, 1963), and *Jason and the Argonauts* (Don Chaffey, 1963).



Figure 10 Clemens von Wedemeyer, *Remains, Deucalion and Pyrrha* (2013). Installation view *The Cast*. Photo: Matteo Monti (MAXXI). Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris; KOW, Berlin.

both incorporate and give new life to the remains of cinema, engaging with radical transformations in the organization of memory, labour, and storage. Crucially, *The Cast* figures the cinematic ‘acting body’ as a composite, rather than an organic entity. It presents a body that is assembled from multiple components, including stop-motion special effects sequences, choreographed re-enactments, the scanned surface of a prop house interior, as well as oral and written histories of Cinecittà,²⁵ and it is manifest materially and socially through the complex architecture of the exhibition.

Italian cinema – specifically Pasolini’s *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968) – is also referenced in Nathaniel Mellors’s multi-episode work *Ourhouse* (2010–), which dramatizes the transgression of social and bodily boundaries following the arrival of a mysterious stranger into a middle-class home. Played by the accomplished, but not particularly svelte, performance artist Brian Catling clad in white casual sportswear, Mellors’s stranger bears little resemblance to the elegant character Terence Stamp plays in Pasolini’s film. The entity embodied by Catling is not even recognized by his hosts as human. Designated as ‘The Object’ or ‘Thingy’, he does not speak but rather ingests words, taking up residency in the family library and devouring pages from books such as E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). His motivations are never explained but the texts and images that he draws into his body seem to dictate the course of the narrative, structuring

²⁵ Gordon and von Wedemeyer allude to Cinecittà’s use as a post-war refugee camp, pp. 94-96.

interactions between family members, their employees, the inhabitants of the local village, and, in later episodes, a group of mysterious ‘medievalists’ who encroach upon the family’s territory, seeking ancient artefacts endowed with unspecified powers.

Episodes from *Ourhouse* have often been installed alongside prop-like objects, sculptural assemblages, or tactile modifications to the viewing environment, suggesting a kind of prosthetic extension from the screen into the space of the gallery.²⁶ These installations sometimes include animatronic busts modelled upon (and voiced by) actors who appear in the series. The sculpture *Hippy Dialectics* (2010), for example, consists of two heads that have been cast from the body of the same actor, Richard Bremmer, who plays the part of Charles ‘Daddy’ Maddox-Wilson in *Ourhouse*. Within the narrative world of *Ourhouse*, Daddy is a disgruntled and opinionated patriarch – an amplified version of a stock character commonly encountered in British and US television sitcoms. In *Hippy Dialectics*, however, Bremmer/Daddy is disarticulated from this narrative and his head is doubled. The two busts (one of them painted blue) are displayed upon separate plinths, with their electrical and mechanical supports clearly visible. But they are also physically bound to each other, by a length of dark artificial hair that hangs from their cheeks. Offering a direct contrast to the acts of ingestion performed by The Object in *Ourhouse*, these entities spurt words into the space of the gallery, jerking and juddering, engaged in an absurd dialogue that is obliquely yet inescapably reminiscent of Samuel Beckett. As (partial) acting bodies, the heads in Mellors’s *Hippy Dialectics* can be read as primitively automated performers, forming part of a test to see if human-made things are adequate to the task of ‘surface acting’ as described by Hochschild. These ‘actors’ have no interiority beyond the cables and code that entirely determine their movements and words.

The automation of feeling, while only a peripheral concern for Mellors, is integral to the work of Cécile B. Evans, including online projects such as *AGNES* (2013), the first digital commission by Serpentine Galleries. Hosted on the gallery website, *AGNES* is a ‘bot’, modelled after the automated computer programmes that gather personal data online, inviting visitors to interact by selecting from a menu of images, answering questions about their feelings and memories, and by completing various CAPTCHA (Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart), to prove and perform their own humanity. *AGNES* also meditates upon the history of human–computer interactions in popular culture, drawing from *Wikipedia* entries and video-sharing sites to harvest key moments, such as

²⁶ This aspect of Mellors’s work is explored in Connolly, pp. 66–77.

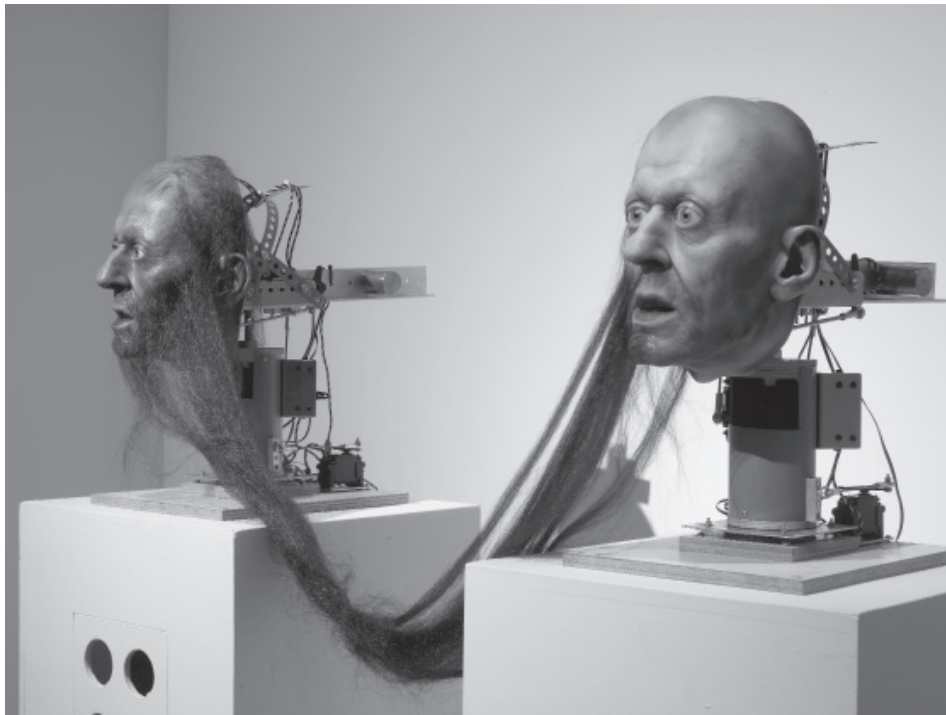


Figure 11 Nathaniel Mellors, *Hippy Dialectics* (2010). Photo: Steve White. Courtesy of the artist, Matt's Gallery, London, and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.

the 2011 *Jeopardy* quiz show contest featuring a computer called Watson. Evans has continued to develop scenarios that involve interactions between human and non-human participants, but her work has taken an increasingly material form, often incorporating architectural or sculptural elements.²⁷

Evans trained as an actor and she voices many of the characters in her work, including the entire cast of *Sprung a Leak* (2016). This work, which was devised for Tate Liverpool, is a play in three acts performed by two humanoid robots and a robot dog that move around the gallery interacting with three screens, each displaying a video of a pole-dancer. As the narrative unfolds, these characters join forces in a struggle against another non-human entity – the multichannel screen system that forms part of the exhibition's infrastructure. The robots are all designed to function socially, as evidenced by physical gestures they display in their scripted interactions with the pole-dancers. But all of these 'actors' speak with Evans's own voice, underscoring their total containment within a world that she has designed and choreographed. Increasingly, Evans has sought to materially manifest her own labour by exhibiting interim stages in the production of specific works (in performances

²⁷ See Daoust.



Figure 12 Cécile B. Evans, *Sprung a leak* (2016). Multi-channel video, raspberry pis, cables, humanoid robots, robot dog, custom fountain, privacy shades, lamps, dog pen, bookshelf, assorted books, prints, miscellaneous items, Solar vitamin bottles. 16:45 (looped). Installation view, Cécile B. Evans, Tate Liverpool, 21 October 2016–19 March 2017.

and installations) and by incorporating project management aesthetics into the design of her website. So while she asserts her former identity as an actor, her memory architecture is clearly dislocated from the individual human body, and much more closely aligned to the cloud than the filing cabinet or vault.

In an interview with Chris Fite-Wassilak for *Art Monthly*, Evans answers questions via personas drawn from her video *Amos' World* (2018), a multichannel work structured as a series of monologues, all delivered by entities connected to a single building. They include Gloria (an actress-turned-secretary), Amos the architect, a trio of dancing CGI daffodils, and several figures that remain off-screen, including Time Traveller, Building Manager, and Weather. Gloria, the former actress, is absent from the interview scenario but she is framed as an object of fascination and speculation for the other characters, and also a possible model for learning. According to the entity known as Weather, Gloria's 'voice is still rooted in her body', unlike the other tenants, who continually project themselves onto others. Time Traveller observes that Gloria sees projections of others as 'a part of herself. She does not deny their authenticity or the meaning they have for others'.²⁸ Expanding upon the issue of embodied knowledge, interviewer Fite-Wassilak observes that

²⁸ Fite-Wassilak, pp. 4–5.

Evans explores many different categories of container or vessel, from 'meat bodies that hold brains and maybe souls' to 'ships, buildings with tenants, computer servers that hold bots and AI'. His observation underscores the fact that although the actress may occupy a privileged position, she must deploy the insights derived from her 'meat body' within an environment shared with multiple non-human sensing and storing entities.

Conclusions

Acting bodies take many different forms in the works of Clemens von Wedemeyer, Nathaniel Mellors, and Cécile B. Evans. They exist as inanimate objects, either whole or fragmented, as social beings that are capable of self-organization and activism, as animatronic assemblages of mechanical gesture and recorded speech, as automated virtual entities seeking interaction, as computer-generated models of dead people, and as scripted characters that are imagined as sources of embodied knowledge. While some of these acting entities are bound to the screen, other bodies take an explicitly material form and extend partially or wholly into the physical space of the museum, temporarily inhabiting these spaces in choreographed and scripted configurations. Von Wedemeyer, Mellors, and Evans do not use the museum to preserve cinema, or to restore its lost materiality. Instead, they engage in a more open-ended mining of its forms and histories, presenting unfamiliar manifestations of acting bodies. Attending to the matter of acting seems especially urgent at a time when scripted and simulated behaviours proliferate beyond the screen, yet the actual labour of performance is very often erased or obscured. These works also suggest that analysis of the actor's body, in all of its contradictory manifestations, might illuminate how the body of cinema is itself being reconfigured.

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