Henrik Olesen

How do I make myself a body?, 2008
Mixed media installation
Collages, prints, various objects (screws, screwdriver,
shoe, spoon, wooden laths) and spatial interventions
Installation views
Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Berlin, 2008

At any rate, you have one (or several)
I am talking about bodies, such as my own body or the bodies
of others, or the combination of my own body with the body of
another body (nearly homologous to my own). Specific to this
project, I have thought about bodies and systems of producing
and reproducing bodies. Honestly, I do find it difficult to accept
the birth of human culture in the knowledge that heterosexual
intercourse produces babies. More remarkable, however, is how
this is secured by a system specifying who may be allowed to
produce or reproduce what and how. Boundaries are constructed
around bodies, and such practices of regulating bodies and body
practices are enforced through a corpus or body of law. The politic
of bodies also begets issues and raises questions of property.

How do I make myself a body?
Seemingly symptomatic of the twentieth century, the life of British
scientist and mathematician Alan Turing (1912–1954) is an indeci-
pherable puzzle of diverse but deeply intertwined themes and
events, both historical and personal. But nevertheless the story did
offer me a departure from the normative notion of 'fixed bodies'
and a way to expand toward fantasies of 'possible bodies'. In this
project, the disassembled and reassembled biography of Alan
Turing serves as a framework for associative concepts of a reified,
postmodern body — whether male/female or otherwise.

Computers, servants, sex
In 1936 Turing published a theoretical model of a machine,
which was to constitute the base of all post-war computing.
His diagram reduced the working of anything and everything
to a set of symbolic configurations based on the absolute yes/no
logic of binary code. All subsequent computers are implemen-
tations of this most general of general-purpose machines.
The Turing Machine is universal, pure function: both 'the works'
and the 'that it works' of any computation. It is a virtual system,
capable of simulating the behaviour of any other machine,
even, and including itself.... It only actually exists when it has a
specific task to perform, and then it is no longer itself, but simply
whatever it is doing.

THE BODY
UNDERNEATH
THE SKIN
IS AN OVERHEATED
FACTORY

X LIVED FOR A LONG
TIME WITHOUT
STOMACH,
WITHOUT INTESTINES,
ALMOST WITHOUT
LUNGS, WITH A TORN
OESOPHAGUS,
WITHOUT A BLADDER,
AND WITH SHATTERED
RIBS.

BUT DIVINE MIRACLES
ALWAYS
RESTORED WHAT
HAS BEEN DESTROYED.

X CLAIMS THAT HE NO
LONGER HAS
A BRAIN OR NERVES
OR CHEST OR
STOMACK OR GUTS.

ALL HE HAS LEFT IS
THE SKIN AND BONES
OF A
DISORGANIZED BODY.

THESE ARE HIS OWN
WORDS.

I PREFER YOUR
NOSE TO ALL YOUR
ORGANS
O MY LOVE
IT IS THE THRONE OF
FUTURE KNOWLEDGE

4 posters, 2008
Digital prints

For years I had wanted to do something on Alan Turing. His biography interested me for the way in which a masochistic subject could control his suffering, setting the simultaneity of submission and self-empowerment in relation to queer and fragile constructions of identity. The central aspect is the disappearance of Turing's body parallel to the invention of the computer body. The invention of the binary code is naturally a reference to queer theory. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for example, has examined how our culture is marked by the duality of 'homo' and 'hetero'. ▷

Turing worked as a servant of society for the Allied authorities during the Second World War, decoding German military communications. After the war, in 1952, he was arrested and subjected to female hormone therapy as treatment for his homosexuality. Turing became impotent and grew breasts. The treatment also caused waves of depression and despair. On 8 June 1954, Turing was found dead; he had apparently committed suicide, with a cyanide-laced apple left half-eaten beside his bed. Some have suggested that Turing was re-enacting a scene from *Snow White*, his favourite fairytale, but because Turing's homosexuality would have been perceived as a security risk, others suggest the possibility of assassination.

Imitation/Enigma, 2008
Box, adhesive tape, rope, padding material, blanket

Apple (Ghost), 2008
Computer, plastic sheeting

How many BODIES are there? How many are you?
The body of Alan Turing became the site of oppressive scientific interventions and his story exposes heterosexuality as an incessant and panicked imitation of its own naturalised idealisation. But while this example provides us with a disturbing document of sexuality and gender-based objectifications, it also demonstrates more emancipated models of the (post-)human subject and models of human relations that displace the binary constructions of modernist epistemologies: thinking machines and artificial intelligence. From the (injured) Turing body springs forth the computer body and concepts of other possible bodies and intelligences. That is a re-constitution and re-sexualisation not only of the Turing body but of all kinds of bodies!
    'When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom.' (Antonin Artaud)
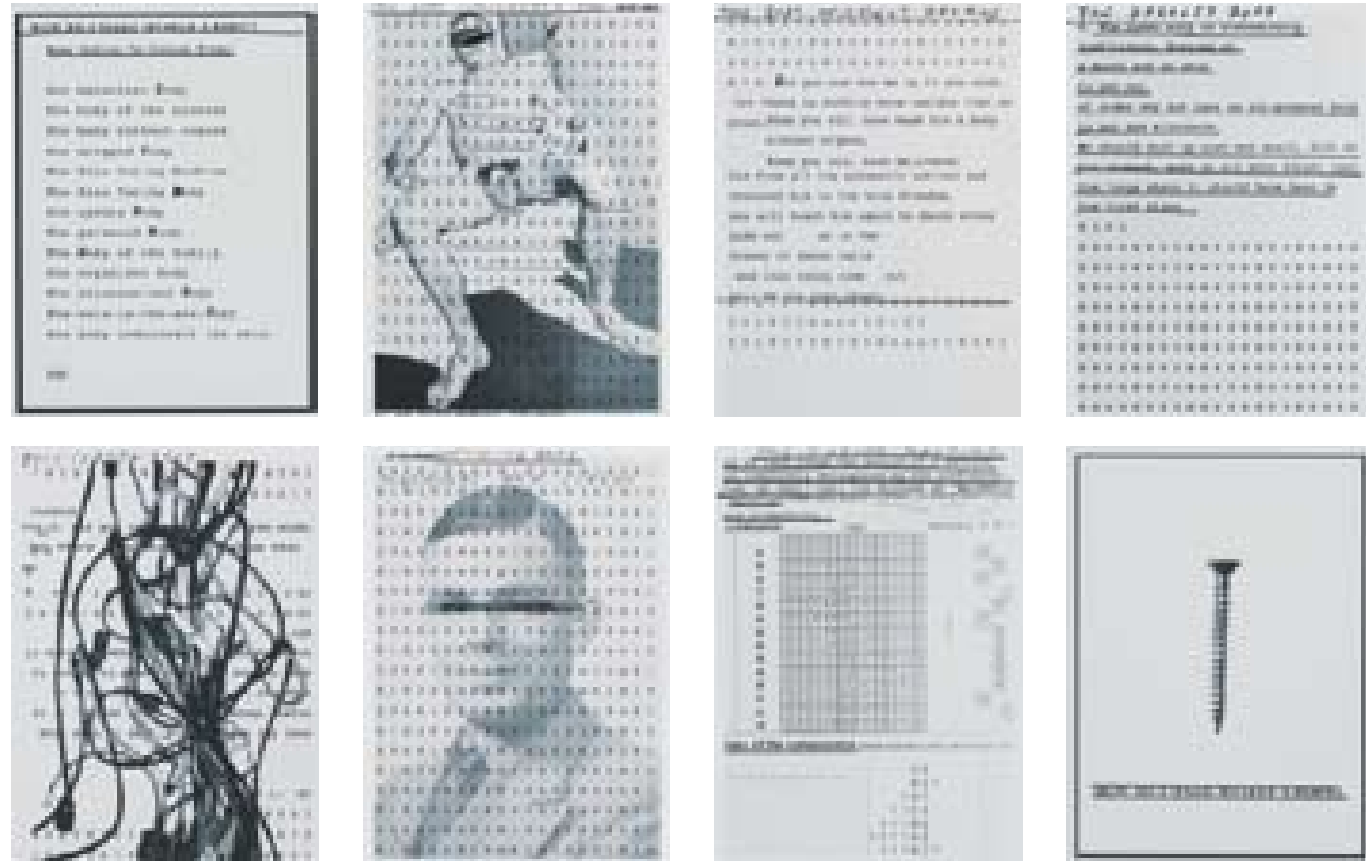   Henrik Olesen

How do I make myself a body?, 2008
16 of 19 computer collages
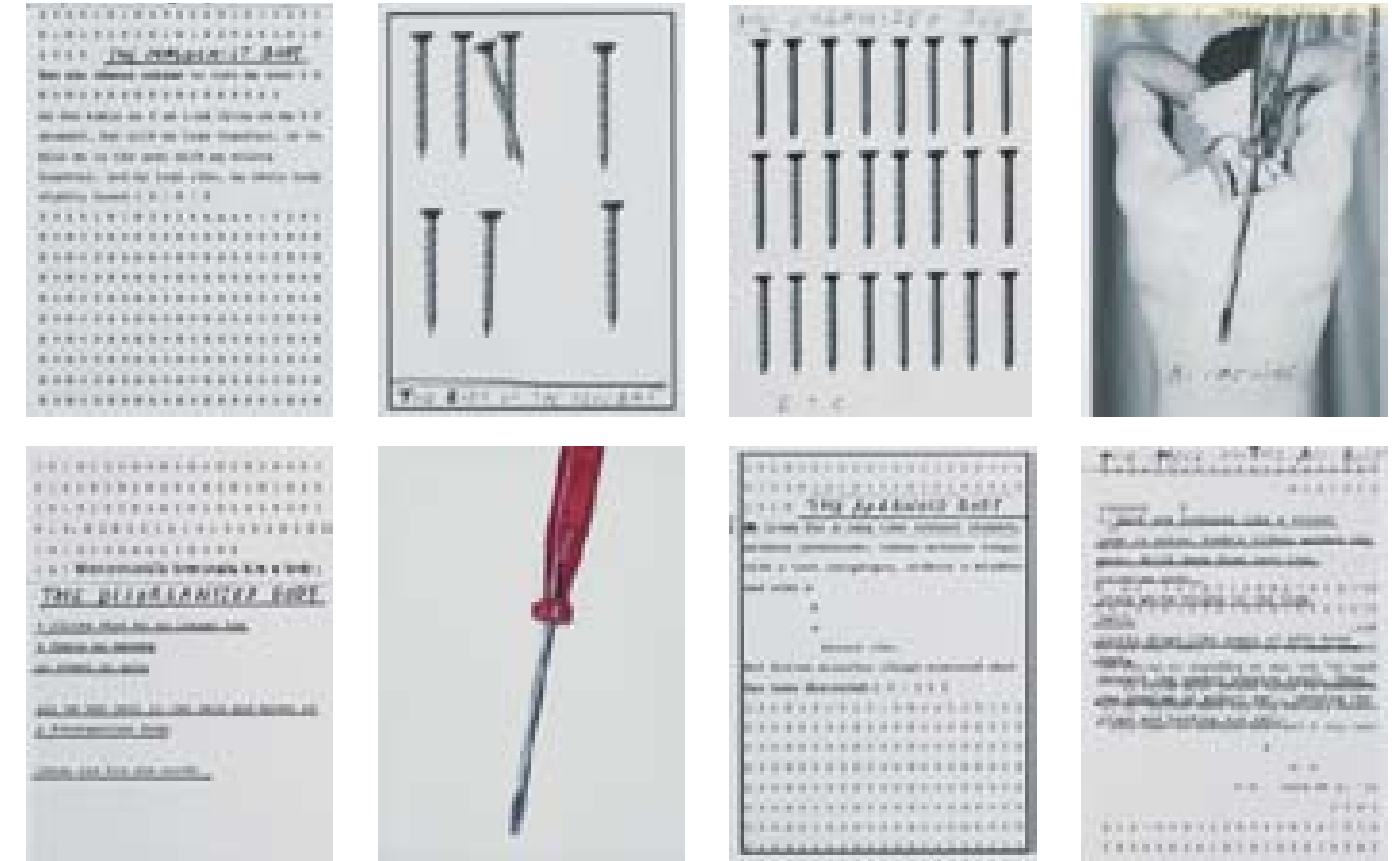
My aim is to approach and present the body, along with its production and reproduction, in terms of social images: *the body of the servant*, *the body without organs*, *the drugged body*, *the paranoid body*, *the body of the family*, *the disorganized body*, *the hole-in-the-ass body*, *the body underneath the skin*. The result should be a view of the body as multiplied and sexualised. It's all about constructing a postmodern body! ▷
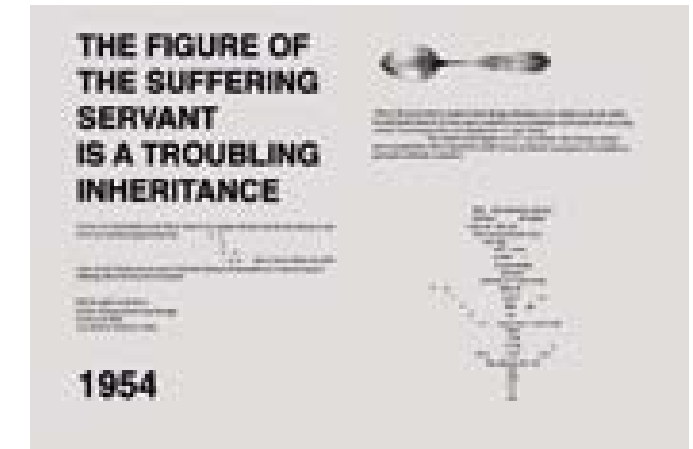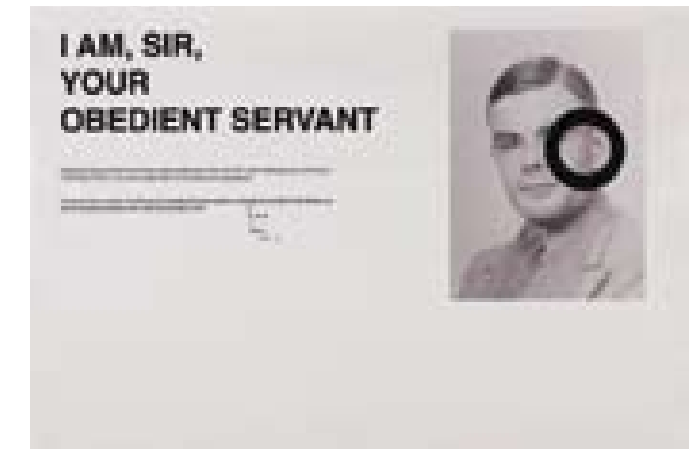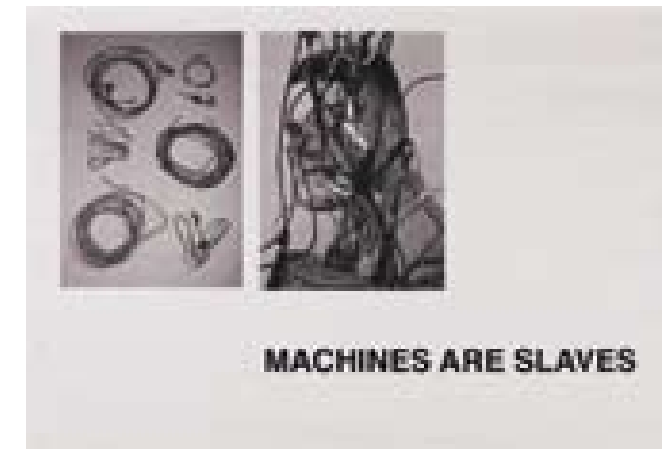
Some illustrations to the life of Alan Turing, 2008
8 of 16 digital prints

My concern in regard to Turing is how bodies dissolve.
That is why I have incorporated references to modernist
fictive bodies, as invoked by the Futurists, Guillaume
Apollinaire, Antonin Artaud and in Freud's files. I was
looking for people and statements of crucial importance
to modern research into the production of identity.
Picabia's machines put in an appearance in this connec-
tion, as do Philippe Soupault's *Portrait d'un imbécile* and
Man Ray's *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* — a reference,
of course, to Turing's breaking of the Enigma code. I had
the feeling of moving around Turing's ghostlike body
and wanted to weave around it a number of traces, lines,
narratives and codes evocative of modernity. □