The Anatomy of Body Worlds

Critical Essays on the Plastinated Cadavers of Gunther von Hagens

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Affecting Bodies*

Natalie Loveless

(de)Monstrations

AUSCHWITZ. AUSCHWITZ. CHERNOBYL. ART MAUDIT. AUSCHWITZ. TITANIC. CHERNOBYL. HIROSHIMA. NAGASAKI. TERRORISM. SITUATIONISTS. LOS ALAMOS. NEUENGAMME. PIETA OF AVIGNON. GUERNICA. MASS MEDIA. REPRESENTATIVE. PRESENTATIVE. PITILESS. REPRESENTATION. NEW NEUROTIC REALISM. TABLOID. WALL OF THE FEDERATED COMMUNE OF SUICIDES. OVEREXPOSURE. RAVE PARTIES. BACKROOM. SELF-DESTRUCTION. PITY. PIETY. TITANIC. REPRESENTATION. PHOTO-FINISH. LIVE COVERAGE. CNN. INTERACTIVITY. MEPHISTOPHELES. AUTO-DA-FE. TERMINAL ART. AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU. PHOTO-FINISH. BLITZKRIEG. PORTRAITS OF THE FAYOUM. PHOTO-FINISHES. THE LOOK OF DEATH. PRESENTATION. ABSOLUTE PRESENT. REAL TIME. MONSTER. SUMMUM. BIOLOGY. GENETIC GENIUS. SCIENCE. BIOLOGY. DNA. HOMUNCULUS. AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU. PROCREATION. CREATION. HUMAN. TRANSHUMAN. INHUMAN. EXTREME ART. COUNTER CULTURE. COUNTER-NATURE. SNUFF LITERATURE. SNUFF MOVIES. SNUFF VIDEO. SNUFF DANCE. THANATOPHILIA. VIVA LA MUERTA. TERMINATOR. TERATOLOGICAL. NUREMBURG CODE. SCIENTIFIC. ARTISTIC.

The words above punctuate the pages of Paul Virilio's 2004 polemic *Art and Fear*. They appear in this order. They appear in capital letters. They typographically mark the field of the page, providing visual interventions in a sea of regulated text — text suggesting that artistic abstraction be read as representative of a sadistic impulse traceable directly to the violence of World War I, "when the first abstract canvases appeared and the human figure was literally

The following is based on site research and interviews in London (2002), Los Angeles (2004), and San Jose (2007) funded by the History of Consciousness department of the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the Institute for Humanities Research. I owe a debt of thanks, in particular, to Felicity Ruperti, Body Worlds press agent, for facilitating access, materials and stimulating conversation both in London and Los Angeles. For materials and aid in accessing the Bentham archives and Bentham's mummified head, as well as facilitating time with James Hales, Head of the Auto-Icon conservation team, I am grateful to Catherine Fuller of University College London's Bentham Project. Thanks also to Jacques Euphrasie, curatorial assistant at the Musée Fragonard, for access to and background information on Honoré Fragonard's anatomical specimens.

and figuratively blasted to bits."[1] Asserting that the destruction of the human form in representational abstraction exists in an intertwined and causal relation with the destruction of the human body, *Art and Fear* stages a face-off between what Virilio calls *demonstration* and its sadistic other, *monstration*, a practice that works "to outdo mere REPRESENTATION by offering *the very presence of the event.*"[2] One of the examples Virilio offers as a foil in this polemic is Gunther von Hagens' controversial anatomical exhibition Body Worlds.

Rather than engage in a general debate about representational practice (what it might mean for *monstration* to take over the mediating function of *representation*), Virilio's claims will be illustrated in this essay specifically through Body Worlds. The exhibition offers a particularly charged location from which to think through the stakes of Virilio's text, one that profits from reading the shifting exhibition codes that have accompanied Body Worlds in its move from Europe and Asia to North America. An examination of these shifting exhibition codes will also be used to ground us in a historical lineage of controversial post-mortem practice that finds a particular affinity in Jeremy Bentham's 1832 Auto-Icon. Ultimately, this essay considers Body Worlds as a project that, rather than simply contributing to debates surrounding techno-scientific excursions that cross a putative art/science divide (excursions that Virilio's text is explicitly positioned against), offers a particularly charged location from which to think through the stakes of affect and identification as pedagogical tools.

Before turning to my discussion of the exhibition proper, then, it is necessary to pause on these two terms, affect and identification. Though both of these terms have a place in common and philosophical discourse, my use of them in this essay stems from their use in psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalytic theories of affect play a central role in understanding the role of trauma and memory in Freud, transference and the subject-Other relation in Lacan, and the promise of the analytic scene in both. For the purposes of this essay, I am primarily interested in Lacan's use of affect to assert that the commonplace of a binary split between emotion and intellect is not valid within the psychoanalytic field. This understanding, within which the affective cannot be understood as a separate realm opposed to the intellectual, provides a counterpoint to Virilian understandings of representational practice — a counterpoint through which affect emerges *within* identification. Identification, while generally understood as either a classificatory act (a relation of difference: *to identify*) or a constitutive act (a relation of similitude: *to identify oneself with*), in Freud's work, through his development of the Oedipus complex, comes to denote "the operation itself whereby the human subject is constituted."[3] To this operation, Lacan, in turn, adds a special emphasis on the role of the *image* — a role embroiled in complex negotiations of ambivalence and aggression.

Having laid out a gross terrain for affect and identification, let me move forward with the hope that, even without a full engagement with the psychoanalytic stakes of the terms, something of the enmeshed and constitutive aspects

of these functions within a psychoanalytic theory of the subject will nonetheless point towards a conception of representational practice at odds with the Virilian model. Without attempting to fully account for the varied and complex histories of these terms, even within psychoanalysis itself, I would like to highlight the way that each of these terms, held separately and together, offers an interpretive framework for a reading of the particular pedagogy that I see at work — as a proposition, if not always a practice — in Body Worlds.

An anatomical exhibition that has amassed twenty-five million visitors in eleven countries since its unveiling in Japan in 1995 (at the 100th anniversary of the Japanese Association of Anatomists), Body Worlds uses a preservation technique called plastination, a process allowing preservation of the dead body in incredibly durable, life-like, and dramatically upright poses for a projected 1,000 years, to sculpturally mold dead bodies into statuary. The particular technology and labor invested in these specimens provide an image of upright integrity and life-force, and, rather than the disorder of decomposition, offer us an anatomical structure as accessible, clearly displayed, and stable. The plastinates, on the one hand, recall images from Renaissance anatomical and early twentieth-century art historical texts: from Andreas Vesalius, the La Specola waxes, and Frederik Ruysch's anatomical tableaux — one of which famously featured a fetus crying into a handkerchief made of placenta, surrounded by vascular systems as foliage — to early twentieth-century artworks of Naum Gabo, Umberto Boccioni, and Salvador Dalí. On the other, the plastinates mimic cultural caricatures through function and form (the baseball player hitting a home run; the chess player leaning over a chessboard, frozen mid-move).

Divided in its formal approaches, the exhibition offers, at one extreme, bodily parts displayed according to conventional codes of modern anatomical display (the juxtaposition of healthy lungs and tar-stained ones; cross sections producing two and three dimensional configurations; fetuses from between 17–33 weeks, including some with birth defects). At the other, it offers a series of what von Hagens calls "gestalt plastinates" — whole bodies articulated in whimsical, active, and sometimes fantastical poses. *The Runner* (a figure whose muscles fly backwards off of his bones, revealing different layers of muscle, both the outer and the lower muscles simultaneously) mimics Umberto Boccioni's 1913 Futurist sculpture *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space. The Drawer Man* (a plastinate cut into drawers that shows how neatly packed the various body structures really are) recalls Salvador Dali's 1936 Surrealist sculpture *Venus de Milo With Drawers. The Rearing Horse with Rider* — the *Rider* flayed and split twice longitudinally to reveal underlying musculature while coaxing a plastinated horse over a jump — pays homage to the eighteenth-century professor of anatomy Honoré Fragonard's *Horseman of the Apocalypse* (a preservation of a horse and rider that can be seen, along with Fragonard's other metal alloy preservations, in the Musée Fragonard at the Ecole Nationale Vétérinaire D'Alfort, Paris). Like von Hagens, Fragonard's aim was to trans*form* the body into a statue without trans*lation* into marble, plaster, or bronze. To produce the *Horseman* he injected a metal alloy into the specimen's arteries, and, after the remaining tissue dried out, the entire preparation was treated with lacquer. The resulting anatomical preparation offered a permanent display of individual anatomy that aimed to rectify the lack of cadavers available for live dissection. The technology available to Fragonard, however, left him with models that, while impressive in their own right, offered limited insight into the finer details of bodily systems.[4]

Von Hagens came up with the idea for exhibiting the plastinates in this way while using models and sections in lectures with students of anatomy at the University of Heidelberg. In his words, "people always went towards the intact bodies. They saw themselves in the specimens, and gave them names. That gave me the idea for my first exhibition ... I developed a kind of exploded view, moving body parts so that lay-people can put them back together in their minds."[5] This statement, in my reading, highlights the interrelatedness of the functions of affect and identification for von Hagens: the spectator is asked to identify with the exploded body, see in it the partition of her own animate body, and, through an identification with the similitude of the plastinate, to also engage in an affective relation with its former life as if invoked by the plastinate's formal articulation.

Exhibition Codes

The first Body Worlds exhibition that I attended was in 2002, at the Atlantis Gallery in the Old Truman Brewery, Brick Lane, London. Over the course of two afternoons I meandered, encountering bodies live and dead: the gestures of viewers moving in to follow the gestures of plastinates, frozen in the act of displaying their bodily systems like Vesalian engravings — although with more heroicism and less abject *vanitas*. While the organs were in cases, the gestalt plastinates were not. Unprotected by ropes or glass, they remained accessible, available. One could scrutinize as closely as one might wish, and even the occasional touch was often noticeable, if not encouraged (except, of course, in the case of the "touch-tours" led for the blind).* Whereas the conditions of display in North America have progressively made such interaction impossible — the 2007–2008 San Jose exhibition, for example, has the majority of its gestalt plastinates under plexiglass — the London exhibition offered the viewer-participant a complex and heterogeneous space. The strict linearity of the viewing narrative I found in the Los Angeles and San Jose exhibitions — where one is guided through the exhibition space by placards, lighting, and dividers — was

*See Goodbye Body Worlds, *a pamphlet produced and distributed at the end of the UK run of Body Worlds, for a brief discussion of one of these tours.*

absent. While there *were* placards and lighting, the choreography of the space in London was looser, primarily delineated through installations of natural foliage. It even made use of the gallery's food court, set halfway through the exhibition space, where one could contemplate the bodies while sipping on tea from slightly above, but still very much within, the exhibition itself. This loose organization suggested, in its experimental ingenuity, that we each find our own way through the space. Due to its size, organization, and lack of dividing curtains, it seemed that we were constantly bumping into each other, as uncertain of how to navigate the space as how to read the objects.

I was regularly witness to fingers that, in pointing something out, moved in to touch — just to see — and I saw in this gesture two central aspects of the Body Worlds encounter: the entwining of the plastinates' formal spectacle with their didactic function. Bereft of biographical history — von Hagens insists on donor anonymity — the exhibition highlighted the individuality of these bodies at the level of structure. As the official plastination donation brochure put it, "as a rule we do not plastinate human specimens for private persons. We are discussing making an exemption for contemporary historical figures who wish to and should be plastinated in order to be kept in a mausoleum or crypt."[6] Divorced from the biographies that once articulated their flesh, and molded into caricatures that ostensibly took bodily function as their point of origin, the plastinates were both powerful to behold and difficult to read, and it was this difficulty that kept me transfixed. I was attracted to the way that Body Worlds worked to challenge the framing of disciplinary and institutional specialization, and saw it as a uniquely interdisciplinary project, one that asked its viewers to inhabit a de-familiarizing space both at the level of exhibition practice and pedagogical practice.

That said, from its first wave in Europe to its arrival, in 2004, on North American shores, there has been a noticeable shift in exhibition framing and language. While the exhibition originally suggested an uneasy collapse between conventional aesthetic and scientific codes, with Body Worlds' arrival in the United States, von Hagens has gone to great pains to represent the project as a primarily scientific endeavor, arguing that the exhibition should be read only as democratized medical knowledge production rather than as a form of transgressive aesthetics, a challenge to taboos surrounding the treatment of the dead, or a revolution in funerary practice. In keeping with this, Body Worlds in the United States has been framed squarely within a conventional "natural history" or "science museum" lens — a turn at odds with the exhibition's early history, one that insisted not only on raising questions of morality and taboo (ideological narratives articulating the post-life body as alternately utilitarian and sacred) but also on situating the exhibit in alternative, non-scientifically-coded venues (e.g., the Atlantis Gallery at the Old Truman Brewery in London, the old Mail Railway Station in East Berlin, an old abattoir in Brussels and the *Erotic Art Museum* in Hamburg).

These early exhibitions had, as their central strategy, a proposition regarding humor explicated during the 2002–2003 London exhibit. This Body Worlds featured a series of what von Hagens called his Mystical Composite Plastinates along with an article for the press entitled "Or Why it is ok to laugh at dead bodies." The article argued that the Mystical Composite Plastinates demonstrated anatomical features in a way that surpassed what was possible from naturalistic, or serious, poses, opening "a world of fantasy which allows us to accept our mortality easily."[7] One of these, a witch hanging from the ceiling on puppet strings, rode its own internal organs like a broom, its facial muscles flipped back from its skull to form a magician's cap. The *Winged Man*, for its part — sporting one of von Hagens' own signature black hats — offered back muscles fanned out like wings and a peace sign carved on its abdomen. The audio tour commented that this black hat functioned to "further close the gap between life and death [and] help break another taboo which blocks our mind [that] dead bodies should not be played with or laughed at. To play with them helps to deal with fear of the unknown."[8] Through an encounter facilitated by what von Hagens calls "non-serious" poses, plastination was thus proposed as a forum forcing "unavoidable discussions as to whether it is ethically defensible to turn a human body into a work of art."[9] In another interview he states: "What I do is not art, nor is it science. It reaches into artistry but the effect goes beyond education because emotions are involved."[10] Such discussions are precisely what emerged around Body Worlds in Europe.

From Cologne, Vienna, Basel, and Berlin to Hiroshima, Seoul, and Busan, claims against Body Worlds included that it denied the body's eternal rest, sensationalized rather than educated, and deliberately transgressed boundaries between morality, art, science, and commerce by treating the human body, as one journalist put it, "as something tantamount to a sculptor's clay."[11] During the run of the Berlin exhibition, a requiem mass was held to pray for the souls of the dead; promotion for the exhibition included placing plastinates in a local snack bar and sending a pregnant odalisque around the city, behind glass on the back of a bus, her belly open in the middle revealing an eight-month-old fetus. In Mannheim, Roman Catholic and Protestant Church leaders denounced the exhibit as a breach of human dignity and attempted to close the show, arguing that "the human body shouldn't be used for amusement."[12] Prime Minister Teufel himself went on television to officially denounce the exhibit, and local district prosecutors began the process of pressing criminal charges against museum officials (stating that it violated the sanctity of the human body for the purposes of commercial art, they almost succeeded in preventing the exhibit from opening). In Brussels, where Body Worlds was shown in an old abattoir with vaulted ceilings, Belgian physicians called for a boycott of the exhibition. And lest we think reception was one sided, while representatives of the Catholic Church in Cologne officially asked people to boycott the exhibit, in Oberhausen the head of the Catholic college himself invited Body Worlds into town, having

learned that young women viewing the embryos were saying that they would never again consider abortion.[13]

The London exhibition — where von Hagens had *The Rearing Horse and Rider* installed at the *Hard Rock Café,* costumed for Halloween — had no less controversy than elsewhere in Europe. Only one year after the Hayward Gallery's sensational *Spectacular Bodies: The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now* (an exhibition that brought together more than 300 works of art, anatomy, and science from fifteen countries, making explicit connections between Renaissance and contemporary work), and with the likes of Damien Hirst, Rick Gibson, and Mark Quinn still in the limelight (all contemporary artists who made their names producing work, intended strictly for a contemporary art audience, out of biological and decaying materials), von Hagens was well positioned to encourage a challenging set of questions around the exhibition through press conferences, publicity stunts, and other attempts to upset divides between scientifically, commercially, and culturally-coded space.

On March 26, 2002, Geoffrey Lee, 51, entered the London exhibit and smashed the plastinate called *The Organ Man* (a man parted down the middle, holding his liver extended in one hand) with a claw hammer. "I never believed in such a thing as evil until I saw human bodies had been turned into commercial objects," he told the press.[14] Two days earlier, Martin Wyness had thrown a blanket over the *Reclining Pregnant Woman* plastinate and spilled paint on the floor as an act of protest (Wyness later went on to protest outside the exhibition, an action von Hagens acknowledged by joining him for a public debate).[15] Repeating the drama of Berlin, in London several members of parliament tried to stop the show from opening, claiming not only that it undermined human dignity but also that it went against Britain's 1832 Anatomy Act. Her Majesty's Inspector of Anatomy, Jeremy Metters, however, was forced to announce, only days before its scheduled opening, that there were no laws in place that could ban Body Worlds.

These protests in England were, in part, a result of tensions running high in the wake of the Alder Hey hospital organ retention scandal, in which it came to light that between 1988 and 1995 organs were removed, retained, and disposed of without family consent (that the organs removed included those of children became the heart of the debate), and in this wake, many called on the Anatomy Act for vengeance. Passed in 1832 to regulate traffic in body parts and protect against the practice of body snatching (as exemplified most famously in the Burke/Hare grave robbing trials), the Anatomy Act could not be held to apply to Body Worlds because it specifically covers dissection and medical traffic, not display — leading to the plastinates, in this case, being categorized alongside the Egyptian mummies and bog people displayed in the British Museum. Though nothing could be legally done to prevent its opening, controversy surrounding the exhibition led to the production of legislature working

to ban the return of Body Worlds to England. In protest against this new code — the United Kingdom Department of Health's 2002 "Draft Code Of Practice On The Import And Export Of Human Body Parts" — von Hagens extended the stay of the exhibition (with posters stamped "Assigned for Deportation") and staged a televised anatomical theater, the first public dissection in the United Kingdom in just under 200 years (1830), modeled on Vesalius' sixteenth-century theatre of anatomy in Brussels.

In the move from Europe to North America, most elements of transgressive laughter, protest agitation, and moralistic discomfort have been suppressed in favor of a normative didacticism that suggests not only how to live a healthy life — as evidenced in the central place of the smoker's lung in exhibition practice and literature — but also, at the San Jose exhibition, in how to live a gendered life: one of the wall placards states that "on average, women are more empathetic, expressive, articulate, and diplomatic, and better able to sense what others feel ... [while] men may be better at focusing on a specific task, orienting themselves spatially, or solving complex math or physics problems."[16] Not to suggest that this normative didacticism was absent from earlier incarnations of Body Worlds (Indeed, this question of gendered representation has dogged the exhibition at least since London, where Amanda Wilson stripped down to her underwear and jumped on *The Rearing Horse* to protest that female plastinates were, for the most part, relegated to the display of the reproductive system. Von Hagens has responded to these initial criticisms by including more visibly female plastinates, though there are as yet no female musclemen, baseball, or chess players on display, instead taking the form of plastinates like *The Angel* and *The Yoga Lady*). Rather, I would like to suggest that, despite the normative gender and anthropocentric basis of the exhibition, the alternative venues and controversial practices that marked Body Worlds in Europe displaced the act of plastinate viewing from the suturing lens of *data* to a foregrounding of the *scene* of encounter. This is not to say that the scene of encounter (and the reality effect that is attached to this) has been completely effaced from current incarnations of Body Worlds or the exhibition literature surrounding it. Rather, it is to assert the important role that alternatively coded venues had, in pre–United States incarnations of the exhibition, in displacing assumed codes of legibility and function. Since its arrival in the United States, site, context, and framing narratives emerging from the von Hagens team have insistently policed references to art, transgressive aesthetics, or the creative expansions we could call sculptural post-life practice. (Felicity Ruperti, in the "Genetics & Plastination" section of *Goodbye Body Worlds,* also discusses von Hagens' search for a terminally ill donor "willing to discuss with scientists how his body will be dissected and restructured as a 'super-human' after his death" — a project aiming to "visualize what a genetically restructured human might look like" and that would be televised and thus end anonymity as a hard and fast rule of plastination.[17]) And, in all of this, instead of the issue simply lying in the turning

of a "someone" into an "object," what has been at stake is the *kind* of object. An object dedicated to popular anatomical knowledge production redeems itself (or its maker); one that adds to this a disruption of conventional taboos and rituals surrounding the material we call a dead body incites riot.

Social Utility

It is not only anatomy that von Hagens brings back to life by fleshing out Vesalian imagery and Renaissance waxworks, but also a dream long gone proposed by the Enlightenment philosopher Jeremy Bentham in his last, and unpublished, 1831–32 essay, "Auto-Icon or Farther Uses of the Dead for the Living." In correlation with Bentham's last will and testament — in which he requests that his body be publicly dissected before being made into an Auto-Icon — this essay suggests a utilitarian program for the materiality of the body after death: one in which, "with the consent of parties concerned, the mass of matter which death has created, be disposed with a view to the felicity of mankind."[18] In his essay, Bentham defines Auto-Icon as the preparation, preservation, and display of the dead body for social use: "*Auto-Icon* will be soon understood for a man who is his own image."[19] While there are significant differences between Bentham's and von Hagens' visions, they profit by being read together as both controversial and conservative propositions with regards to sculptural post-life practice.

It is said that for the ten years leading up to his death, Jeremy Bentham carried a set of glass eyes with him everywhere he went.[20] These eyes were to be *his* eyes, inserted into his preserved head to figure his post-mortem sight for eternity. Taking seriously the question of post-mortem utility, and eerily pre-figuring Body Worlds, Bentham set the stage for this post-humous self in "Auto-Icon or Farther Uses of the Dead for the Living," describing a future in which "entire museums of Auto-Icons would be formed."[21] This vision is what constitutes the "Farther" in Bentham's title (the "nearer" being the promotion of anatomical dissection, the naturalization and decriminalization of which Bentham was active in promoting). Bentham's title refers to Southwood Smith's article in the *Westminster Review* in 1824, "Use of the Dead to the Living." The article promotes the "immeasurable utility" of anatomical dissection in the training of surgeons, and suggests that the bodies of the unclaimed dead be made available for dissectional practice in order to prevent that practice being done on the bodies of the living (with the understanding that, in either case, it is the poor who will suffer, the choice here being between the living and the dead poor). This is, in fact, what, in 1832, the Anatomy Act legislated, leading to the collapse of the body snatching trade. The oration over Bentham's corpse and public dissection, performed by Southwood Smith eight years later while the Anatomy Act was in parliament, became a public call to add to his initial formulation a strong plea for individual bequests. As such, Bentham's body, during the oration, became exemplar.[22]

"Auto-Icon or Farther Uses of the Dead for the Living" suggests, in addition to the use-value of a corpse for anatomical dissection, a secondary use — "a permanent, — say a conservative, or statuary."[23] Cross-temporally echoing both Fragonard and von Hagens, Bentham champions the wide-scale use of this as a practice of *auto-thanatography*, telling his reader: "If a country gentleman had rows of trees leading to his dwelling, the Auto-Icons of his family might alternate with the trees."[24] Further, in suggesting that statuary and coats of arms be replaced by the very bodies of those meant to be represented, Bentham submits that, with his Auto-Icon, "a spick and span new subject-matter of property (would be) brought for the first time into existence," one that, in its authenticity, enshrines a post-mortem future, diminishing the horror and increasing the utility of death. While von Hagens insists, in the production of a plastinate, on erasing personality and preserving only structure, Bentham's proposal is grounded in the utility of the Auto-Icon as indexically linked to the person who preceded it: "As regards anatomical purposes, one body serves for instructing nearly as well as another; but the head of each individual is peculiar to him, and, when properly preserved, is better than a statue."[25]

Though Bentham's remarkable essay addresses a wide range of detailed, sometimes humorous, and highly imaginative uses for the permanently preserved dead body (including economic, anatomical, phrenological, moral, genealogical, commemorative, and architectural), it is firmly committed to moral instruction and offers itself as a limit-case exercise in utilitarian philosophy. Most interesting of Bentham's uses in this regard are those "Theatrical or Dramatic" that he describes under the title "Dialogues of the Dead":

> By means of strings or wires, by persons under the stage, or if the Auto-Icon were clothed in a robe, by a boy stationed within, and hidden by the robe, the eyes being already made in imitation of his, the eyelids might be made to move; and in so far as needful or conducive to keeping up the illusion, the hands and feet, one, more, or all. As to voice, by well-known contrivances, it may, without difficulty, be made to appear to proceed from the vocal organs of the figure; the body, if necessary, might by obvious contrivances, be made to appear to breathe.[26]

Founded on affective identification, this fantasy offers an alternative in which a king would be "literally imperishable," in which a philosopher could be forever visited, with his "unfinished manuscripts, lodged in an appropriate case of shelves."[27] As with the plastinates, such Auto-Icons would not only shed light on the archaic nature of taboos surrounding the treatment of the dead, bringing attention to the inefficiency of funerary practice, but would also function as exemplars for social behavior: how one acted in life would determine the treatment of one's Auto-Icon. Suggesting a temple of honor and temple of fame, into which the Auto-Icons of the elite would be placed according to their practices during life, Bentham tells us: "If injury had been done to the reputation

of an Auto-Icon placed in the temple of dishonour, public opinion might redress the wrong — might correct its own mistakes — might transfer the sufferer to the temple of honour."[28] The sufferer, here, *is the Auto-Icon itself*, and, as in the Theatrical Uses above, Bentham's proposal depends on a slippage between the affective identification of the viewer with the Auto-Icon as both *same* and *different* — different from the viewer at the level of personality and identical at the level of a possible immortal and corporeal social utility.

That is, encounters with Auto-Icons of the virtuous function, for Bentham, as moral exemplars: by gazing on the faces of the virtuous or the fallen, in their permanent status as Auto-Icon, a kind of secular punitive hereafter is born in which one "must anticipate the judgment of his fellow men. If the judgment is unfavourable, he may be exposed with his head reversed."[29] Central to this form of moral instruction is an aesthetically preserved post-life body that is put to use in service of those left behind — a service that relies on a visual encounter that, through the relay of affective identification, moves the viewer to reflect on her choices in life. This moral imperative is one that is equally operative in Body Worlds.

Body Worlds, like Bentham's world of the Auto-Icons, offers a promise of socially useful immortality. And though, in Body Worlds, one's immortality is, at present, anonymous, one is, nonetheless, encouraged to *figure* one's personal physical existence beyond death. This is achieved through active solicitation for the Institute for Plastination's body donation program, including large scale Xeroxes presenting the handwritten testimony of chosen body donors, advertisements for yearly body-donor meetings including an expense paid trip to "Plastination City" in Dalian, China, as well as a prominent memorial, usually placed at the exit of the exhibition, to the body donors. The donation form, as well, ends with a list of reasons you can check off, should you be unsure, for choosing to donate your body for plastination. In order they are:

> I would like to donate my body to a good cause. / I am fascinated by the thought of being preserved forever for posterity. / I find the thought of conventional funerals, i.e. being cremated or buried, unpleasant. As there is no need for a burial service with plastination, my relatives will not have to worry about tending my grave. / I have no relatives to tend my grave once I am gone. / I wish to save on the costs of a funeral. / I am excited about the potential of plastination. / I am fascinated by the public exhibitions.

The form also includes a blank space for donors to articulate in their own words their reasons for becoming plastinates, examples of which are then published and distributed in the body donor packet. Take the following as examples: "I think about the idea that my human body will continue to teach. This is a kind of consolation";[30] "I just like the idea of cross-sections of my body traveling around. It's got to be more fun than being buried. And it's cheaper!" Articulating a fantasmatic attachment to the materiality of the body after death, these statements replace an image of bodily decay and invisibility with that of visibility and

social use, on the one hand and a visibility *of* social use, on the other, that is grounded in affective identification. I would like to suggest that it is precisely on this point that von Hagens' pedagogical program, at its most interesting, turns. Calling the exhibition alternatively "event anatomy," "emotional anatomy," and "anatomy art," von Hagens insists that "We are changing the way we look into the future, I will survive in my body with a special purpose: the purpose of education ... I offer a death lived by anticipation, a death that crosses over into the sphere of life." [31]

Rejecting any attention to the *narrative* of individual lives, with its possible attendant sentimentality, von Hagens directs attention to the structural particularities of a body that, while it might be sensationally crafted, is nonetheless being framed primarily as an educational tool: "In a democratized anatomy, it is my task to lure the audience with the unfamiliar pose and to tame their sensationalism; to transfer it into a real interest in the body."[32] In service of this, in one article, von Hagens suggests that "the specimen acts as an optical bridge to his own body — he realizes who he is and what he's made of. This way he's emotionally touched."[33] In another article, the specimens function to "build bridges back to your own body."[34]

As a viewer I know that the plastinated body is real, and I engage in a fantasy of equivalence: *this is me, I am it*, or: *this could be me, I could be it*. Where anatomical models glide over differences between bodies in service of a world of anatomical averages, the imagined authenticity of a plastinate permits learning beyond what a mere model can provide. Linking the plastinates to Renaissance masterworks, von Hagens insists: "we have the need to see the real specimens. When people go into museums, they like to see the great masters, not reproductions. A layman has a thirst for authenticity, especially in a media oriented society where everything is a representation, not original."[35] For von Hagens, that learning can be located in the affective charge of an encounter with the plastinated body of one's posited material counterpart. It is this charge that articulates an uncanny pedagogical scene, grounding the value of his pedagogical program in affect and offering a focus in which the *scene* of encounter outweighs the *data* transmitted. That is, the exhibition has (whether foregrounded, as in London, or not, as in Los Angeles) a pedagogical commitment underpinning it, one attuned to the productive possibility of *affective* engagement — a commitment that is supported by both formal choices within the exhibition as well as in the rhetoric surrounding it: from strategic choices regarding where skin remains on otherwise flayed bodies — eyebrows, noses, nipples, navels, and genitalia — to exhibition literature, placards, and audio tours.

(re)Presentation

It might be interesting to read the Body Worlds narrative I have just offered as depicting a movement from the framework of radical democracy — a radical

democracy that, to echo Chantal Mouffe "would be suspicious of any attempt to impose a univocal model of democratic discussion" — to that of a liberal democracy.[36] As a project in radical democracy, in its early incarnations Body Worlds presented us with the volatility of laughter, the championing of dissent, and the courting of protest action as central exhibition practices — ones that made sense of von Hagens' claim to encourage individuals in questioning their relationship to their bodies, to mortality, and to the received conventions of funerary practice. "They tell me that I market the human by, that I commercialize it. My answer is, there's nothing wrong with getting money from people who want to see the exhibition because, of course, there is a lot of money involved in putting it up. And when people buy specimens from me, they are paying for the plastination process, not for the specimen, because the specimen is donated. And I see no difference for an undertaker, who, for putting the body in the earth, gets money from the relatives at the worst point of their lives, when they've lost a loved one. I get money from the people who want to see the show, and I get money from the universities who want the specimens for medical teachings. I have no problem with that."[37] As a project in liberal democracy, Body Worlds has now turned to the fantasy of the citizen subject, to the effective civics lesson — a value located in the firmness, rigidity, coherence, and strength of the objects. It is the materiality of the plastinates, rather than simply their formal composition or context, that remains the heart of complaints like that of Virilio, with which we began.

In Virilio's reading, Body Worlds, by leaning into a history of pre-modern anatomical codes and conventions of visual display rather than the naturalized neutrality of modern medical display, imposes "its own terrorist voyeurism: that of death, live."[38] Echoing statements by von Hagens himself ("I want to bring the life back to anatomy. I am making the dead lifeful again. This exhibition is a place where the dead and the living mix"[39]) but towards a different end, for Virilio, the plastinate, as flayed and displayed corpse, paves "the way for actual torturing of the viewer."[40] Failing to permit heterogeneous affective responses, this statement dictates the terms of the viewing encounter, effectively closing down semiotic-affective possibility with the war cry of visual pollution. Recalling Medieval threats of visual contamination, and their attendant representational logics, for Virilio, plastinates *impose* themselves upon the viewer, bypassing the modifier of interpretation to torture us with the reality-effect of dissected and displayed human bodies. In this, Virilio enforces what he calls the *presentative* (*monstrative*) and *representative* (*demonstrative*) as distinct and oppositional structures, and it is on this opposition that his argument rests. Representation, in *Art and Fear*, functions as a liberatory process that is held in opposition to the collapse that ensues when, within Virilio's terms, we are offered something said to function as the thing-itself.

Virilio's text has remained useful to me as a particularly potent articulation of the need to decry not only Body Worlds, but all practices that pollute

the boundaries of naturalist representation — whether Modernist abstraction, performance and action art, or bio-art experimentation. It reminds me of the degree to which I am invested in articulating a field surrounding Body Worlds, one that engages Body Worlds' assertion that affect is necessarily embedded within the putatively intellectual encounter, as well as one that engages the uncanny collapse this effects between conventional aesthetic, scientific, and pedagogical codes. Body Worlds, in its attempt to insert itself as a legitimate post-life practice, asks us to question our relationship to our own materiality, to the ecology in which we live, and to the cultural structures that legislate our actions. Ultimately it is the reading of all of these narratives together, a reading for a *conflicting plurality* of Body Worlds (from the radical to the liberal, the conservative to the avant-garde, the Benthamian to the Virilian), that offers the most potent terrain from which to think through the stakes of affect and identification as pedagogical tools — tools that not only benefit from the championing of dissent, but that are structurally organized around dissenting bodies, bodies that dissent and bodies in dissent.[41]

Notes

1. Virilio, *Art and Fear*, 29.
2. Ibid., 40.
3. Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 205.
4. Simon, "The Theater of Anatomy," 69–76.
5. MacKenzie, "A Body of Knowledge," 22.
6. Institute for Plastination, *Body Donation Consent Form*, 20.
7. Rathgeb, "Or why it is ok," 2.
8. Ruperti, *Body Worlds Digital Audio Tour.*
9. Rathgeb, 2.
10. O'Rorke, "Skinless Wonders...," 22.
11. Andrews, "German Show Uses Corpses," 45.
12. Leth, "Museum's Body of Work," 11.
13. MacKenzie, 24.
14. Holmes, "Remains of the Day," 78.
15. Jones, "I Disagree Publicly," 6.
16. Ibid.
17. Ruperti, "Body Worlds and Organ Retention," 12.
18. Bentham, "Auto-Icon," 2.
19. Ibid.
20. Marmoy, "The 'Auto-Icon,'" 80–1.
21. Bentham, 6.
22. Richardson and Hurwitz, "Jeremy Bentham's Self Image," 195–198.
23. Bentham, 2.
24. Ibid., 3.
25. Ibid., 2.
26. Ibid., 10.
27. Ibid., 8.
28. Ibid., 6.
29. Ibid., 7.
30. Jeffries, "The Naked and the Dead," 33.
31. Institute for Plastination, 22.

32. Jenkins, "The Exhibitionists," 33.
33. Knipfel, "Body Art," 33.
34. Andrews, 33.
35. Knipfel, 33.
36. Mouffe, "Which Ethics," 94.
37. Knipfel, 22.
38. Virilio, 43.
39. Jeffries, 22.
40. Virilio, 37.

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Worrying About Democratic Values: Body Worlds in German Context, 1996–2004*

Peter M. McIsaac

Since Body Worlds' debut, one of the main justifications for the value of the show's controversial exhibition strategies has turned on the claim that Body Worlds democratizes medical knowledge. Though situated on one level as a critique of the way that medical science has developed and legitimated itself as a discipline since the early nineteenth century, the relationship of democracy and knowledge production has figured in other crucial ways with respect to the exhibition, both as an enabling condition and decisive factor in its reception during its first eight years. At this formative time, the German origins of the exhibition intersected with the fact that from 1996–2004, it showed primarily in Germany, where it attracted some 5.9 million paying visitors. Together, the various resonances and dissonances of these years have worked to mark the show, leading to its particular form and the peculiar success it has enjoyed precisely as a function of its highly controversial nature.

In this essay, I will be arguing that a distinguishing feature of the German engagement with the exhibition resides in the way it inflects German debates on the promotion of democratic values. My perspective is one that will regard democracy from a number of vantage points. Though affirmative notions of democracy, as they are shaped by the constitution and shaped by institutions, the media, and citizens, demand consideration, democracy in the post–1945 German tradition is also charged in obvious and not-so-obvious ways with maintaining distinctions vis-à-vis Germany's Nazi and GDR pasts. As I will show, consideration of these periods reveals democratic discourses to be an implicit, and implicitly disavowed, "other" of today's Germany. Thus, while the

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