

**DEAD MEAT? FEEDING AT THE ANATOMY TABLE
OF GUNTHER VON HAGENS' *BODY WORLDS***

By

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Abstract. According to the editors of the contemporary journal *meatpaper*, we are currently living in something of a ‘fleischgeist’ (Standen and Wizansky 2007); a ‘growing cultural trend of meat consciousness’ (Standen and Wizansky 2007). Perhaps surprisingly, nowhere is this emergent meat culture more evident than in academic and media discussions of Gunther von Hagens’ *Body Worlds* exhibition and its display of dissected cadavers across Europe, East Asia and North America. Struck by the frequent comparisons between these anatomical specimens and meat, my thesis explores the functioning of this most carnal of metaphors within the context of this highly controversial ‘blockbuster exhibition’ (Prior 2006: 154). In the light of work by feminist scholars such as Grosz (1993), Braidotti (1994) and Adams (2000: 2004), the association of *Body Worlds*’ corpses to ‘dead, inert’ meat (Carter 1978: 137) may appear a powerful indictment of the violent scopic drive seen to lie at the heart of modernity. Arguing, however, that this critique threatens to reinforce the very self/other relations it sets out to challenge through its own seeming ‘neo-Cartesian’ desire (Hacking 2007: 93) to ‘beat the meat’ (Sobchack 2004: 170), I instead install the meat-like cadaver within *Body Worlds* as a grotesque body under the broader rubric of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984). Consequently transforming meat from ‘an absolute zero point of being’ (Harty 2008) into a site of becoming with dynamic potential enfolded within its pleats of matter, encounters with these cadavers come to demand the necessary reconfiguration of self/other relations at every turn (MacCormack 2005/6). While the transience of carnivalesque insurgency ultimately ends in the removal of meat and the sealing of the lips, nonetheless the insistent presence of this visceral pulp of carnal physicality reveals meat less as the passive pole within a subject/object dichotomy perpetually grinding at the heart of modernity than as the excess that disturbs these very binaries. It is this that gnaws at the heart of contemporary epistemology; this ‘zone of the irreducible’ (Deleuze 2005: 15); this zone of the undecidable; *this meat.*

‘We’ve again disappeared into this act of eating each other. To let nothing pass between us but blood, milk, honey and meat (but no, no meat: I don’t want you dead inside me)...I never wanted your meat.’

(Irigaray and Werzel 1981: 60)

1.3

DEAD MEAT? FEEDING AT THE ANATOMY TABLE OF GUNTHER VON HAGENS' *BODY WORLDS* i

1.3 Introduction: Dead Meat? Feeding at the Anatomy Table of Gunther von Hagens' Body Worlds Exhibition 2

Methods 3
Mobilising the Meat 6

1.3 Chapter 1: Eviscerating through the Eye: Ocular Feasts in Gunther von Hagens' Body Worlds 10

Introduction 10
Abattoir/Museum 11
Meaty Matters: Feeding at the Anatomy Table 14
Snuff Anatomy 17
Beating the Meat 21
Conclusion: Fleshing It Out? 23

1.3 Chapter 2: Meat, Maps and Murder: Cartographies of the Cannibal 25

Introduction 25
Cartographies of the Cannibal 26
Gobbling Up Gunther 30
Constructing Difference, Consuming Difference 34
Conclusion 40

1.3 Chapter 3: Carnavalesque Consumption: Eating the Grotesque Body in the Body Worlds Exhibition 42

Introduction 42
A Carnival of Consumption 43
Grotesque Meat 46
Vagabond Materiality 51
Farewell to the Meat? 54

1.3 Conclusion: With Lips Pressed Together? 59

1.3 6.0 Bibliography 63

Introduction: Dead Meat? Feeding at the Anatomy Table of Gunther von Hagens' Body Worlds Exhibition

If the editors of the recently launched journal *meatpaper* are to be believed, we are currently living in something of a 'fleischgeist' (Standen and Wizansky 2007) marked by a 'growing cultural trend of meat consciousness' (Standen and Wizansky 2007). Perhaps surprisingly, this emergent meat culture appears to have penetrated the debates that continue to rage around Gunther von Hagens' *Body Worlds* exhibition. Undoubtedly one of the most successful and controversial of recent 'blockbuster exhibitions' (Prior 2006: 154), *Body Worlds* has generated inestimable profit by attracting over 25 million visitors since its launch in 1995 to its tour of dissected and skinned human cadavers across Europe, East Asia and, since 2005, North America (Connor 2007). While its mastermind, the somewhat infamous anatomist Gunther von Hagens, has increasingly sought to stress the pedagogical purpose of his project, the frequent comparisons made between his anatomical specimens and meat are striking (Moore 2002: Walter 2004: Ede 2005: Elliott 2006: Virilio 2006: Moore and Brown 2007: Manseau 2008). Struck by the potency of this most carnal of associations, my thesis consequently seeks to critically reflect upon the manner in which this meat metaphor functions within the context of the *Body Worlds* exhibition.

If, as Angela Carter (1978) suggested, meat is a signifier of 'dead, inert, animalised' matter (Carter 1978: 137) – what Harty (2008) deems 'the absolute zero point of being' (Harty 2008) – then the comparisons between the *Body Worlds* cadaver and filleted flesh can ostensibly be read as a powerful indictment not merely of the clinical gaze of anatomy, but more broadly a modern ocular economy whose scopic drive disassociates, distances and dehumanizes through

its 'radical rejection of the co-mingling of subject and object' (Bordo 1987: 100). Arguing however that this critique risks reinforcing the very self/other relations that it seeks to challenge through its own 'neo-Cartesian' desire (Hacking 2007: 93) to 'beat the meat' (Sobchack 2004: 170), I instead install meat as a grotesque body within a feast of Bakhtinian carnivalesque consumption (Bakhtin 1984). Positioned within webs of visceral alimentary exchange, I suggest that these meat-like corpses becomes something of a 'vagabond materiality' (Bennett 2007) whose pleats of matter enfold within them dynamic potential that demands the reconfiguration of self/other relations at every turn (MacCormack 2005/6). While the transience of carnivalesque insurgency ultimately ends in the inevitable removal of meat and the closing of the lips, nonetheless the very inability to fully contain this visceral pulp of carnal physicality reveals meat less as the passive pole within a subject/object dichotomy perpetually grinding at the heart of modernity than as the excess that disturbs this very binary. It is this that continues to gnaw at the heart of contemporary epistemology; this zone of the irreducible; this zone of the undecidable; *this meat*.

Methods

My exploration of *Body Worlds* as an exemplary site of a 'meat zeitgeist' (Stanley 2009) is primarily grounded in a discourse analysis that can be seen to loosely draw upon the work of Michel Foucault via the reflections of Stuart Hall (2001). Unlike the more traditional understanding of 'discourse analysis' as rooted in linguistic theory (Hall 2001), I draw upon the notion of discourse as that which 'constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about' (Hall 2001: 72). Within the context of my thesis, this means that I explore meat not as

an isolated signifier carrying one self-evident singular meaning, but rather as that which is produced through and produces relations, meaning and objects of knowledge (Mills 1997: Hall 2001). That Foucault accords particular attention to the body as a nexus of discursive inscription is furthermore of particular use to my thesis as I explore the link between ‘meat’ and the constitution of bodily relations within the context of the *Body Worlds* exhibition.

Although my discourse analysis is not rooted in a linguistic framework, nonetheless my thesis does involve a thorough engagement with a broad range of academic and media texts commenting upon the *Body Worlds* phenomenon. While the limited number of scholarly treatments of the exhibition provides me with a manageable field of data to analyse, an attempt to perform a concurrent analysis of media treatments of a ‘blockbuster exhibition’ (Prior 2006: 154) that has been circulating for nearly fifteen years to extensive global attention requires me to introduce certain parameters. Due to my own linguistic limitations, the media I examine originates from Europe and North America which unfortunately perpetuates the tendency to obscure the East Asian displays in treatments of *Body Worlds*. Although typically utilising written journalistic pieces, I do reference the UK documentary series, *The Anatomists* (Morse 2002), as well as a noted North American lecture series upon the *Body Worlds* exhibition (University of Minnesota Medical Center July 2006). I also choose to focus my analysis upon academic and media treatments produced since 2000, thus encompassing the introduction of the exhibition to North America in 2005. Since this expansion was notable not only for instigating a change in the aesthetics of the *Body Worlds* exhibition (Schulte-Sasse 2006: Moore and Brown 2007), but moreover for invigorating debates regarding the procurement of bodies for the display, this time frame allows me to address these concerns in Chapter Two of my thesis.

Although somewhat less prominent in my work, I also draw upon field research carried out during a visit to the recently premiered *Body Worlds 4: The Mirror of Time* at the London O2 arena. Due to the limited time I spent as a participant observer within this particular display, as well as the inevitable spatial differences between each particular location on the *Body Worlds* tour, my reflections upon this exhibition should not be read as though representative of a general experience that would obscure the specificities of this display and my own position as researcher. Nonetheless aware of the emerging emphasis in museum studies upon exhibitions as interactional engagements rooted in concrete spatial-temporal strategies (von Lehm 2006), I believe that to mobilise theory in dialogue with some form of ‘grounded context’ is useful for my exploration of the alternative means by which meat can be seen to function within the context of the *Body Worlds* display. Attentive moreover to feminist qualitative research methods that lay stress upon the situated nature of research, where I do draw upon my own experiences I provide ‘thick descriptions’ (Denzin 2001: 109-110) in which I aim to explicate the connection between my own interpretation and my situated context as a researcher drawing upon particular theoretical frameworks.

Undoubtedly an overarching concern in organising discourse analysis and field research around an emergent thematic – in this case the notion of the *Body Worlds* cadaver as meat – is the extent to which this comes to influence the interpretation and representations offered within my work. Within their overview of discourse analysis, Brown and Yule (1983) refer to Grimes’ notion of ‘staging’ whereby a text comes to be orientated around a particular motif or topic (Brown and Yule 1983: 134). This may permit an imaginative exploration of a theme beyond linear analysis by organising the work around ‘a particular point of departure’ (Brown

and Yule 1983: 134). However, as Brown and Yule (1983) suggest, it risks being seen as potentially misleading, if not outright manipulative, due to its tendency ‘to bring some items and events into greater prominence than others’ (Brown and Yule 1983: 134), impacting both on the choice of materials cited as well as the manner of their interpretation. My particular decision to ‘stage’ my exploration of *Body Worlds* around meat was a decision that emerged somewhat organically as my attention came to be drawn during my research to the striking number of eating metaphors that circulate around the *Body Worlds* display. While certainly my seizure of this theme provides a very particular framing for my choice of texts and theory, nonetheless I believe that this offers an interesting and moreover fruitful point of departure from which to explore a number of issues at stake in *Body Worlds* without perpetuating the somewhat stale ethical debates through which many considerations of the exhibition continue to be channelled.

Mobilising the Meat

In Chapter One I introduce the *Body Worlds* exhibition by situating it amidst recent changes to its spatial mechanics following the expansion of its tour to encompass North America; a fundamental aesthetic upheaval that aimed to bolster its claims of upholding an educational ‘museum ethos’ (Jones 2002: 436). However, drawing upon Georges Bataille’s (1947) binary between the abattoir and the museum in which he suggests that the ‘unseemliness’ (Bataille 1947) of the former has come to be increasingly displaced from public view by the ostensible purity of the latter, I suggest that the comparison of the *Body Worlds* specimens to ‘meat’ indicates the continued spectre of the slaughterhouse that lurks behind the exhibit. If ‘meat’ is here invoked as a means of positioning the cadavers as ‘dead, inert’ matter (Carter 1978: 137), I bring this interpretation into interplay with a number of feminist critics such as Bordo

(1987), Grosz (1993) and Braidotti (1994) who critically examine the scopic drive of modernity that is particularly associated with the clinical gaze of anatomy. This cross-textual analysis allows me to suggest that the association of the dissected specimens of *Body Worlds* to filleted flesh offers stern critical comment not only upon the violence of medical epistemic practices, but more broadly the ocular economy of modernity whose desire for visual mastery disassociates, distances and dehumanizes objects from subjects in the pursuit of a fixed body of knowledge. However I nonetheless suggest that this reading of meat as a static signifier for de-individuated and dehumanized matter risks reinforcing what Hacking (2007) has deemed a ‘neo-Cartesian desire’ (Hacking 2007: 93) to ‘beat the meat’ (Sobchack 2004: 170). The continued tendency to turn away from our own meatiness as though this can be eviscerated from living flesh consequently can be seen to reinforce the very subject/object dichotomy that these critiques claim to condemn.

Having rendered problematic this singular understanding of meat, in Chapter Two I attempt to demonstrate how the reinforcement of the violence of this subject/object binary plays out within the context of current concerns regarding the potential procurement of bodies from China. As an entry-point into a consideration of these fears, I begin by reflecting upon the accusations of anthropophagy that are levelled by a number of commentators at the exhibition (O’Rorke 2001: Cummings 2002: Marshall 2006: Hibbs 2007: Schulte-Sasse 2007). As the logical extension of the body-as-meat metaphor discussed in Chapter One, I suggest that this charge of cannibalism could similarly appear as cogent cultural critique by concurrently ‘nailing’ both the anatomist and the *Body Worlds* visitor as complicit in the simultaneous violence perpetrated by Western epistemic practices and consumer capitalism. However, by bringing these accusations of anthropophagic appetite into interplay with academic scholarship on the figure of the cannibal, I suggest that this seemingly critical discourse in

fact serves to displace the spectre of meat onto a monolithically constructed ‘Eastern body’ (Manseau 2008) as a symbol of pitiful passive victimhood; the implicit antithesis of a Western body on display that even in death is seen to signify freedom and intentionality (Marshall 2006: Valapour 2006).

What should be underscored is the extent to which neither the notion of the ‘Western self’ nor the ‘Eastern body’ discussed within this chapter should be taken as self-evident or pre-discursive entities. Rather, I utilise these monolithic and undeniably reductive constructs in order to demonstrate how they emerge both implicitly and explicitly within the discourses surrounding the *Body Worlds* exhibition, in particular the debates regarding the origins of bodies in light of a growing underground organ trade. Undeniably there is a danger that in seizing upon these terms, even as a means of undertaking critical practice, one risks perpetuating the very assumptions that permit their constitution. This is particularly pertinent considering that the scope of my texts is limited to within the boundaries of Europe and North America. However these concerns should be tempered through an analysis that intends to offer critical reflection upon the means by which these terms are constructed and circulated by self-proclaimed critics of exploitative bodily relations.

Having reflected upon the troubling consequences of approaching ‘meat’ as a static signifier within the *Body Worlds* exhibition, in Chapter Three I come to install the meat-like cadaver as a grotesque body under the broader rubric of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984). This most corporeal of categories is espoused in the work of Bakhtin (1984) who positions the grotesque body in stark opposition to the individual body of modernity, sheathed in the firm frontiers of skin. In contrast to this canonised body, the grotesque can be seen to launch ribald

social critique against this ‘closed, smooth and impenetrable surface of the body’ (Bakhtin 1984: 318) by pushing ‘beyond the body’s limited space or into the body’s depths’ (Bakhtin 1984: 318). While admittedly the triad of social transformation, pleasure and the grotesque body that characterises the spirit of the carnivalesque was primarily utilised by Bakhtin (1984) as a somewhat nostalgic literary category (Stallybrass and White 1997), nonetheless the work of those such as Russo (1994), Stallybrass and White (1997) and Cohen Shabot (2005: 2007) has sought to expand its oppositional potential to offer a site of inversion and transgression (Stallybrass and White 1997). Although admittedly the grotesque is not the only theory that associates ontological slippage with insurgency, nonetheless the degree to which the grotesque launches its processes of boundary deformation and defilement through the intensified grid of the body and the politicised pleasures of eating makes it particularly useful for my affective re-conceptualisation of meat within the context of the *Body Worlds* exhibition. As the dynamism offered by the grotesque body transforms meat from ‘an absolute zero point of being’ (Harty 2008) into a site of becoming with potential enfolded within its pleats of matter, I draw upon Patricia MacCormack (2005/6) to suggest that encounters with these cadavers within *Body Worlds* come to demand the necessarily reconfiguration of self/other relations at every turn. While the transience of carnival insurgency may ultimately demand the eventual ‘removal of meat’ and the closing of the lips, nonetheless the inability to fully contain this visceral pulp of carnal physicality implicates meat less as the passive pole of the subject/object dichotomy perpetually grinding at the heart of modernity than as the excess that disturbs this very binary; the doubt that gnaws; meat that roars.

Chapter 1: Eviscerating through the Eye: Ocular Feasts in Gunther von Hagens’ Body Worlds

‘If there’s one thing *Body Worlds* has in plenty, it’s meat.’

(O’Keefe 2008)

Introduction

Although Georges Bataille (1947) notably opposed the museum and the abattoir as sites of respective sobriety and slaughter (Bataille 1947), it is arguable that the controversial *Body Worlds* exhibition – grounded in the display of dissected and skinned cadavers to a paying public – fundamentally challenges this polarity. Reflecting the argument that the exhibit trades off the spectacularisation of bodily horror, the comparison between these anatomical displays and meat indicates the spectre of the slaughterhouse that haunts the ostensible pedagogical purpose of *Body Worlds*. Drawing upon the work of a number of feminist scholars such as Bordo (1987), Grosz (1993), Braidotti (1994) and Adams (2000: 2004), the analogy between the ‘dead, inert’ passivity of meat (Carter 1978: 137) and the body-corpse central to modern medical epistemology appears to not only reveal the brutality of the clinical gaze of anatomy, but more broadly the visual regime of modernity whose scopic drive preaches a masculinised vision that disassociates, distances and dehumanizes in its ‘radical rejection of the co-mingling of subject and object’ (Bordo 1987: 100). Yet, while the invocation of meat with regards to *Body Worlds* would seem to offer critical comment on this ocular economy, I argue that the reading of meat solely as a synonym for all that is passive and objectified itself serves to reinforce what Hacking has deemed a ‘neo-Cartesian’ desire (Hacking 2007: 93) to ‘beat the meat’ (Sobchack 2004: 170). Rendering problematic this singular understanding of meat will enable me to demonstrate in Chapter Two how this

association of carnality and dehumanization functions within the context of current concerns regarding the procurement of bodies for the display. This refusal of meatiness as a symbol of deadened inertia comes to participate in the discursive construction of an 'Eastern body' (Manseau 2008) as paradigmatic 'meat' of *Body Worlds*; the implicit antithesis of a Western body that even in death is seen to retain the markers of a fleshed intentionality.

Abattoir/Museum

In a notable edition of Surrealist journal *Documents* (1947), Georges Bataille (1947) offered contrasting definitions of the abattoir and the museum for his alternative dictionary, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica* (1947). Setting the two sites in stark opposition, while for Bataille (1947) the abattoir signals the space of repetitive carnal sacrifice, the museum offers a purified space of 'bloodless representation' (Hollier 1989: xii); of cleansing contemplation. Arguing that the 'unseemliness' (Bataille 1947) of the slaughterhouse has come to be increasingly ushered out of public view, its displacement by the museum assures that 'a nice clean expenditure takes the place of a dirty one' (Hollier 1989: xv) where 'one can spend and be spent without getting dirty...nothing repugnant about it' (Hollier 1989: xv). The museum and the abattoir certainly gain the most significance precisely through their opposition; nonetheless, it is clear that for Bataille (1947), 'while one does not exist without the other...it does not exist *with* the other either' (Hollier 1989: xiii).

Although Bataille (1947) may have formed this implicit polarity between the abattoir and the museum in the 1940s, his memorable comparison is certainly troubled by the *Body Worlds* project; arguably the most successful example of the contemporary 'blockbuster exhibition' (Prior 2006: 154) that, although premiered in 1995, continues to reap inestimable profit

through its displays of the skinned and dissected body to a paying public across Europe, East Asia and North America. Ostensibly *Body Worlds* seems firmly welded to a ‘museum ethos’ (Jones 2002: 436). *Body Worlds*’ mastermind, Gunther von Hagens, has always positioned his ‘specimens’¹ as offering a reinvigoration of the Renaissance theatre of dissection, grounded in the emergent Enlightenment belief that ‘Truth and progress lay not in texts, but in the openly and properly displayed body’ (Laqueur 1992: 70). If this newly fostered desire of science to ‘confront, master and represent the truths of the body in a self-consciously theatrical and public fashion’ (Laqueur 1992: 72) installed dissection at the centre of modern medical epistemology, it would appear somewhat apt that von Hagens has co-opted the iconography of Renaissance anatomy into his displays. As plastinates pull open their chests with their own hands, or, in the case of notable exhibit piece *The Skin Man*, raise their flayed skin in triumphant gesture, one finds direct appeal to the imagery of early modern anatomical textbooks (Laqueur 1992).² Yet, this is no mere aesthetic conceit. Rather, enclosed within walls inscribed with quotes from Goethe and Kant, it serves to authorise *Body Worlds* as an educational project committed to revealing the anatomical wonder of the human body, as seen to be laid bare in the dissected corpse.

Although von Hagens (2001) has always defended his work as upholding the long-standing didactic value of the cadaver by vehemently proclaiming its democratic pedagogical aim of

¹ This term is typically used by von Hagens and his *Body Worlds* team, generally in reference to the whole-body exhibits. Another common alternative is the label ‘plastinate’, which alludes specifically to the process by which these bodies are preserved; namely the replacement of around seventy percent of all bodily fluids with plastic in order to ensure against their deterioration for an estimated 4000 years (Walter 2004). Although aware of the discomfort some have with the use of these terms as symbolic of the body’s objectification by the project, I will nonetheless by using them interchangeably throughout my thesis to give the reader a sense of the highly evocative discourses that circulate around the exhibition.

² To see examples of this iconography, see Laqueur 1992. A number of essays within Egmond, F. and Zwijnenberg, R. (2003), *Bodily Extremities: Preoccupations with the Human Body in Early Modern European Culture* may also be of use.

‘bringing anatomy again to the people’³ (von Hagens in: O’Rourke 2001), undeniably the phenomenal success of the project stems in part from controversy surrounding the ‘real flesh and blood’ nature of its display⁴ (Schwartz 1999: 48). Although many of the bodies within the exhibit feign vitality – frozen mid-kick with football in the air, or chess-piece gripped tantalising in hand – these scenes of ostensibly wholesome activity are unable to distract from the overarching sense of displayed death, installed and elevated on a museum plinth. It is this unapologetic parade of mortality that is seen to underscore the gruesomeness of the project that for some threatens to annul its didactic aims (Henning 2003: Elliott 2006: Allen 2007: Hibbs 2007), rendering it less of a ‘blockbuster exhibition’ (Prior 2006: 154) than an ‘atrocious exhibition’ (Selzter 1997: 3) fuelled by the image of the torn body. So deep are these objections, so often levelled at the exhibition, that it has been banned from numerous cities across Europe, such as Edinburgh, while sparking notable protest even where it appears to have been accepted.⁵ Seen to proffer plastinated specimens as though sideshow curiosities in a twenty-first century travelling show of ‘freakish’ death, for a vast number of critics *Body Worlds* can be seen to trade off a spectacularised body horror whose proclaimed ‘museum ethos’ (Jones 2002: 436) fails to obscure the spectre of the slaughterhouse lurking behind the exhibition (O’Rourke 2001: Stern 2003: Nunn 2005: Elliott 2006: Burns 2007: Hibbs 2007: Schulte-Sasse 2007).

³ This notion of the re-democratisation of anatomy links directly to the return of the Renaissance public theatre of dissection. Yet while this is valued through its ostensible challenge to the limited access that the contemporary ‘lay person’ is afforded to the dead body in comparison to ‘medical experts’ (Body Worlds website), this justification of *Body Worlds* tends to omit the fact that these public dissections were usually inflicted as a form of posthumous punishment, typically upon executed prisoners (Bennett 1995: Egmond 2003: 92).

⁴ For discussions of the tension between ‘the real’ and the artificial within the *Body Worlds* exhibition, see Wegenstein 2006, van Dijck 2007, Stephens 2007.

⁵ The desire of von Hagens to show *Body Worlds* during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival was thwarted by the city council’s refusal to house the exhibition. Although claimed to be due to questions of public decency (Brown 2003), Khan (2003) and Connor (2007) suggest that this may have been fuelled by historical links between Edinburgh and the infamous Victorian bodysnatchers Burke and Hare (Khan 2003: Connor 2007). The most recent example of this often vehement antipathy to the exhibition can however be shown in the reactions to *Body Worlds* in Haifa, Israel upon the premiere of *Body Worlds 4: The Mirror of Time* in April 2009. This display marked the first unveiling of the exhibit within the Middle East and is particularly attacked due to its perceived affront to Jewish burial rites (see Brinn 2009: Zarchin and Eyadat 2009).

Meaty Matters: Feeding at the Anatomy Table

If critical debate surrounding *Body Worlds* appears to have oscillated dramatically between these two conceptions of the exhibition – the educational versus the exploitative, the didactic versus the disturbing, the pedagogical versus the pathological – it nonetheless appears that recent changes in the nature of the display, in particular its spatial locations, have attempted to cleanse the image of *Body Worlds* by securing a trajectory reminiscent of the transition of abattoir to museum posited by Bataille (1947). The venues for the exhibition have been undoubtedly varied since its world premiere in Tokyo in 1995, but nonetheless Schulte-Sasse (2006) has underscored the additional layer of macabre enfolded most particularly within its European displays; housed frequently not only in basement spaces such as the Belgian Curgem Cellars, but also, somewhat notoriously, in a converted slaughterhouse itself (Schulte-Sasse 2006). These choices can arguably be seen to encourage the overarching impression of ‘corporeal transgression and seediness’ (Sandberg 2003: 34) due to what Sandberg (2003) has deemed the more ‘downstairs’, or low, display of bodies (Sandberg 2003: 34) associated with other such historic sites as the Paris Morgue and its ‘plat du jour’ of anonymous dead (Schwartz 1999: 48), or Madame Tussaud’s Chamber of Horrors (Sandberg 2003: 20). Although undoubtedly these locations heightened the sense of ghoulish occasion attached to the exhibit, reminiscent of the visiting sideshow, its spatial mechanics have undergone radical transformation following the expansion of the *Body Worlds* tour from Europe and East Asia to North America in 2005 (Schulte-Sasse 2006: Connors 2007: Moore and Brown 2007). This Atlantic border crossing pre-empted an ethical review by the California Science Center in 2004/5 prior to its introduction to the USA, whose evaluation placed avowed emphasis upon pedagogical purpose (California Science Center 2004/5). Its forceful advice regarding the display of the exhibits has led to it being shown almost exclusively in science and national history museums across North America. Sharing the belief

of a number of critics of *Body Worlds* that the only rationale for the display is an educational one (Jones 2002: Valapour 2006: Burns 2007: Hibbs 2007), it is perhaps unsurprising that this move has been paralleled by a subsequent increased commitment to didactic display being adopted in exhibits currently touring in Europe.⁶

While this attempt to counteract the ‘unseemliness’ (Bataille 1947) of the *Body Worlds* display through the re-orientation of the exhibition ‘out of dark basement anatomy laboratories...out of formaldehyde jars and curiosity cabinets’ (Muser 2007: 34) into state and educational institutions may appear to mirror the metamorphosis from the ‘low’ slaughterhouse to the higher ethos of the museum suggested in the work of Bataille (1947), it could be argued that some memory of the abattoir nonetheless remains in *Body Worlds*. This is most potently demonstrated through the myriad of associations that continue to be drawn between these anatomical specimens and meat (Moore 2002: Walter 2004: Ede 2005: Elliott 2006: Virilio 2006: Moore and Brown 2007: Manseau 2008); ‘the same meat which you eat at your table’ (Comporesi 1994: 133). While admittedly the somewhat synthetic appearance of the plastinates may render them more akin to packaged ham than fresh entrails (Hannah 2004: Ede 2005: Elliott 2006), nonetheless this link is frequently evoked in reference to *Body Worlds*, being rendered particularly visible in the UK Channel Four documentary *The Anatomists* (2002), in which exhibition pieces are hung on meat hooks (Morse 2002). Concurring with the observations made by Moore and Brown (2007) in their analysis of visitor comments from shows in London, Toronto, Singapore, Cleveland, Houston and Denver, my own perusal of the guestbook at the *Body Worlds 4* exhibition, currently showing

⁶ As acknowledged in my introduction, if the lack of reference to exhibits in East Asia – namely Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan – appears striking, it in part reflects the difficulty in accessing considerations of exhibits shown in this region. Although admittedly limited by my own linguistic capacities as a researcher, nonetheless this is a gap that is present within nearly all considerations of *Body Worlds* that I examine (a notable exception being Moore and Brown 2007). While this glaring omission may in part also be attributable to the fact that *Body Worlds* has not displayed its exhibition in East Asia since 2004, I will offer more reflection upon this issue in Chapter Two.

at the London-O2 arena, also indicated the prevalence of meaty metaphors circulating around the display as visitors write of ‘going for a steak’ after their visit, or of ‘still loving meat.’⁷ Countering the assertion that the banishment of the slaughterhouse from public view has rendered us ‘reduced to eating cheese’ (Bataille 1947), this link between *Body Worlds* and meat poses a fundamental question to Bataille’s (1947) binary of abattoir/museum by enfolding a certain carnality into even the most respectable of museal locations.

If this link between the body-corpse of medical epistemology and the meat of the butcher seems surprising, for Comporesi (1994) the association of the anatomy table and the kitchen table is anything but novel. Rather, as he suggests, ‘both the anatomist and the cook work with dead flesh, corpses that have to be cut up, greased, severed, diced and gutted’ (Comporesi 1994: 119). In her discussion of autopsies in contemporary culture, Klaver (2005) similarly compares her experiences of attending a post-mortem to ‘watching a cooking demonstration’ (Klaver 2005: 27). Morse (2002) productively mines this analogous relationship with direct regard to *Body Worlds* in his afore-mentioned televisual exploration of anatomy in which he sets butchers to work upon animal carcasses in order to demonstrate the dissection methods utilised by von Hagens’ forefathers, Galen and Vesalius (Morse 2002). While in part reflecting the historical development of anatomy in which animal bodies were used in place of human bodies due to legal and religious restrictions (Morse 2002), it is apparent nonetheless that this slippage between human flesh and dead meat is seen to lie at the very heart of *Body Worlds* with von Hagens revealing himself to have been inspired to develop his own plastination techniques upon seeing meat being sliced for sandwiches in his local grocery (Morse 2002: Whalley 2005: Manseau 2008).

⁷ Indeed, although too numerous to recount here, a short period on internet blogs and forums narrating visits to *Body Worlds* will uncover a sizeable array of meat references, one notably vivid example being the comparison of these bodies to ‘half eaten chicken wing bones’ (see The Cranky Yankee 2006).

Snuff Anatomy

Not only does this story of inspiration in a grocery shop serve as an interesting anecdote narrating the roots of the *Body Worlds* phenomenon; it also arguably reveals something of the attitude of modern medical epistemology towards the body as a source of knowledge. Since, as Angela Carter (1978) notes, meat is all that which is ‘dead, inert’ (Carter 1978: 137), this reflects the ideal body desired by anatomy; namely the body-corpse, passive and arrested, ‘devoid of subjectivity and intention’ (Leder 1998: 119). Yet, for a number of feminist scholars such as Bordo (1987), Grosz (1993), Braidotti (1994) and Wegenstein (2006), this epistemic practice more broadly reflects a visual regime of modernity that resides at the centre of Western philosophical traditions stemming from the Enlightenment. Grounded in the project of Cartesian dualism (Bordo 1987: Grosz 1993: Braidotti 1994), this tradition is seen to preach a fundamental separation of mind from body; viewer from viewed; the knower from the known. With its ‘radical rejection of any co-mingling between subject and object’ (Bordo 1987: 100), Korsmeyer (2004) argues that ‘this structural relationship can take on what we might call the form of gender in the relationship between subject and object, a structure that possesses traits parallel to those obtaining between masculine and feminine positions’ (Korsmeyer 2004: 57). While ‘masculine and feminine positions’ of knowledge have undoubtedly been characterised in a number of ways within feminist critical practice, with regards to the anatomical gaze, femininity here comes to denote the passivity of the objectified site of knowledge. Accordingly, the ocular economy of modernity is seen to be rooted in the masculine position; masculine being infused with the power derived from the ‘autonomy, separation and distance’ (Bordo 1987: 100) that endows the viewer with an overarching sense of mastery. The notion of the body on display as a hunk of meat can consequently be read as reflection upon the scopic seizure at the centre of Western epistemic practices that renders the object of knowledge fundamentally inert.

Yet, to look upon the body as meat not only can be seen to enact a symbolically violent social power; it also wields a *sexualised* power (Korsmeyer 2004). This eroticization of the mastery enacted through a visually driven epistemic practice such as anatomy with its ‘constant state of overexposure’ (Braidotti 1994: 49) permeates the relationship between viewer and plastinated specimen as the exhibits come frequently to be described as shedding their skin as though shedding clothes; ‘undressed of skin’ by ‘feverish eyes’ (Comporesi 1994: 133). The feigned co-operation of the body in this process – ‘yielding its secrets and laying open to us’ the interior of the body (Bloom 1999: 2) – suggests an agency on the behalf of the plastinated body that obscures the conquering eye demanding the unravelling of these bodies to their core, endowing the scene with a sexuality that entwines a posthumous striptease into the act of epistemic revelation (Klaver 2005: Linke 2005). This is furthermore supported by the description of Gunther von Hagens ‘sizing...up’ (O’Rorke 2001) living individuals and mentally stripping them from their skin (O’Rorke 2001: Rathget 2006); a process that commentator Tony Walter himself (2004) repeats following his own visit to *Body Worlds*. Talking of ‘unskinning people’ (Walter 2004: 13) around him - ‘even nice girls’ (Walter 2004: 17) - whilst in the exhibition café, Walter (2004) fails to reflect upon the sexual overtones implicit in this curiosity. This apparent desire to revel in the ‘anatomical nudity’ (Linke 2005: 16) of these bodies has led to accusations that the exhibit encourages us to feast upon a ‘pornography of the dead human body’ (Hibbs 2007) that threatens to stretch beyond voyeurism into outright necrophilia (O’Rorke 2001: Stern 2003: Klaver 2005: Linke 2005: Guyer 2006); what could be deemed, drawing upon the critique of Paul Virilio (2006), a form of snuff anatomy.⁸

⁸ Having already been displayed in a German Erotic Art Museum (Schulte-Sasse 2006), the organisers of the exhibition have seemingly done little to counteract this charge, as evidenced by the recent unveiling of a new exhibit piece for the current display in Berlin that shows a male and a female body having sex, fused together in a coital position (Connolly 2009: Nothnagle 2009).

Although this notion of snuff anatomy associates *Body Worlds* with an aesthetic that is symbolically infused with structured power relations of gender, a number of commentators have argued that it is the sexualised display of female bodies that is of particular note. In her work *The Pornography of Meat* (2004), Carol Adams (2004) scathingly links the representation of female bodies with meat as evidence of a sexual violence that reduces female bodies to passive objects of consumption within popular culture. This would appear to concord with the arguments of Linke (2005) and Lizama (2008) for whom the notion of these bodies as meat appears to be particularly evident in the hyper-sexualisation of female bodies in what Lizama (2008) has powerfully called ‘a gendered anatomical apartheid’ (Lizama 2008: 43). While this can in part be seen in the decision to reattach breast tissue and erect nipples only onto the female bodies (Stephens 2007), it is *The Pregnant Woman* that has attracted the most critical attention as the piece that ‘seriously pushes the bounds of taste’ (O’Rourke 2001: Ellis 2002, see also: Andrews 1998: Cummings 2002: Jones 2002: Hanlon 2003: Henning 2003: Moore and Brown 2007: Goeller 2007: Guyer 2007).⁹ Undeniably one of the most notorious of the plastinates circulating in the *Body Worlds* tour¹⁰ in displaying a pregnant woman in her fifth month of pregnancy, undissected foetus in her womb, her leisurely positioning – what Cummings (2002) has deemed ‘the carefree pose of a reclining dolly-bird’ (Cummings 2002) – is difficult to detach from a certain eroticization. Andrews (1998) goes

⁹ As somewhat of a historical precursor to *The Pregnant Woman*, comparison could be made with the figure of Sara Baartman, otherwise known as ‘The Hottentot Venus’. Displayed as a curiosity through England and France during the Victorian era, she was subsequently shown as a dissected specimen in the Musée de l’Homme in Paris until the 1970s. For more information, see Qureshi, S. (2004), ‘Displaying Sara Baartman: The Hottentot Venus in: *History of Science*, Vol. 42, Issue 2, pp. 233-257.

¹⁰ In an interesting adjunct to this argument, although there now exist multiple bodies that circulate under the moniker *The Pregnant Woman*, the original exhibit piece is also notable for being the only plastinate whose origins have been revealed to the public. Although staunch firewalls protect the identities of the whole-body plastinates from being publicised, the controversy surrounding this piece led to her life story being issued by von Hagens (California Science Center Ethical Review 2004/5: Nunn 2005). As Nunn (2005) suggests, the subsequent revelation that the body was that of a drug addict who donated her body upon discovering she was pregnant insinuates something of a criminality that reflects past historical justifications for performing dissections (Bennett 1995: Nunn 2005: 198).

further in his insinuations of brutal violation by describing the body as having been ‘slashed open’ as part of its reveal (Andrews 1998). While it is interesting that none of the commentators cited appear to reflect upon whether their own discomfort is at all instigated by the interweaving of female sexuality and pregnancy in the same scene, nonetheless the notion of these bodies as meat can be seen to reflect the manner in which it is the female bodies that seem to most clearly exemplify the broader tendency to eroticize the mute and passive body-corpse.¹¹

It is, however, the link that Adams (2004) makes between meat and animality that demonstrates how the link between the body-corpse and meat goes further than stressing the static and eroticized state of the plastinated specimen within *Body Worlds*. The gaze that carves an unyielding divide between the subject and object of knowledge to render the latter ‘meat’ is seen moreover to be complicit in stripping the very humanity away from these bodies. Since, as Boyne (2001) argues, ‘all meat takes the form of a head without a face’ (Boyne 2001: 114) – the traditional marker of unique identity – this comparison with meat indeed suggests that *Body Worlds* erases all trace of the individual subject in its display. However the potency of meat as a metaphor for these plastinated bodies lies in more than de-individuation; rather, it indicates a process of ultimate dehumanization. As Deleuze (2005) argues in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2005), meat marks ‘the zone of indiscernability or undecidability between man and animal’ (Deleuze and Smith 2005: 15); as such, it forms ‘the absolute zero point of being’ (Hatry 2008). As a result, the epistemological seizure of the eye becomes interwoven with the most fundamental violence as

¹¹ For more detailed discussion upon the politics of displaying female bodies in the state of pregnancy, see also Jespersen, C. and Rodriguez, A. ‘Forced Impregnation and Masculinist Utopia’, and Ducomb, C. ‘The Politics of Fetal Display’ (both in: eds. Jespersen, C. Rodriguez, A. and Starr, J. (2009), *The Anatomy of Body Worlds: Critical Essays on the Plastinated Cadavers of Gunther von Hagens*). For broader reflections upon the association of femininity and the corpse within the field of literature, Elizabeth Bronfen’s work, *Over Her Dead Body* (1992) may be of particular interest.

human flesh becomes brutally gutted into ‘pure carnal orifice and organ’ (Harty 2008) as an act of scopic consumption (Stafford 1993: Leder 1998: Braidotti 1994: Kuppers 2007). If the mobilisation of meat metaphors critically balances anatomy at the edge of a butchery that strips and severs the body, divorcing it from its human dignity into carnal anonymity, this provides credence to Hollier’s claim (1989) that ‘museums have a strange way of following in the footsteps of slaughterhouses’ (Hollier 1989: xiv) as the epistemological endeavours of *Body Worlds* can be seen to engage in a violence that permits the most base of ontological devolutions into passive, mute and massacred meat.

Beating the Meat

Drawing together the work of those such as Adams (2000: 2004), Bordo (1987), Grosz (1993) and Braidotti (1994), it would appear that the use of ‘meat’ in connection to *Body Worlds* reflects what Kuppers (2004) has deemed ‘the violence of the vision machine of anatomy’ (Kuppers 1994: 40) that collapses the ‘high’ intent of its educational project into the ‘low’ spirit of the abattoir. As a consequence, as Schulte-Sasse (2007) ominously asserts, to compare these bodies to meat ‘puts *Body Worlds* in its proper genre: horror. It understands that *Body Worlds* is about voyeurism. And, most importantly, it remembers a world where somebody can all too easily be utilised as some body’ (Schulte-Sasse 2007). To insert this horror narrative at the heart of *Body Worlds* thus appears to act as a powerful critique of the epistemological endeavours pursued not merely within modern medical practice, but more broadly in a visual regime of modernity driven by an insatiable desire for mastery through a gaze that interweaves erotic pleasure with ultimate scopic violence. Within this imaginary, meat functions as a provocative means of reflecting not merely the de-individuation but,

moreover, the *dehumanization* of the human body through structures pertaining to gendered power relations.

Yet, in applying to *Body Worlds* a narrative of dissected bodies rendered mere ‘fragments of food’ (Hurley 1996: 62) to be ‘partially devoured’ under a prying preying gaze of modernity, one offers a somewhat singular reading of meat. To see meat as all that which is, in the words of Carter (1978), ‘dead, inert’ (Carter 1978: 137) and consequently dehumanized may inadvertently reinforce the brutally carved boundaries of epistemic practice that feminist scholars have typically sought to challenge. Rather than probe into precisely why the critique of *Body Worlds* generates its terror through the notion of the body on display as meat, here taken as a synonym for ‘a simple chunk of brainless flesh’ (Aliaga 2003: 223), this argument mobilises a ‘neo-Cartesian’ (Hacking 2007: 93) logic that continues to devalue the body as ‘just stuff’ (Hacking 2007: 93). This comes to perpetuate the objectification of the body as mere passive matter; evacuated of any potential for dynamic transformation. Since it is arguable that ‘meat includes every bit of something we should cherish and remember; bodies, flesh, skin, muscles, organs, blood, veins’ (Harty 2008), to defend humanity as lived flesh from the category of carnality threatens to retain the boundaries that prevent the co-mingling of subject and object in order to ‘beat the meat’ (Vobschack 2004: 170, see also Kalaga and Rachwal 2005).

Conclusion: Fleshing It Out?

Examining the function of meat within the discourses surrounding *Body Worlds*, it may seem that this metaphor can be read as critical comment upon an ocular economy installed at the very heart of modernity and Western epistemological traditions (Braidotti 1994). Yet one may ask as to what extent this terse rejection of these bodies as ‘meat’ exemplifies a shared desire to demarcate oneself from flesh that appears more carnal organ than coherent organism. In both the scopic drive of modernity and the ostensibly ‘exposing’ critique of these very processes of epistemological endeavour, I suggest that it is the body-as-meat that nonetheless remains ‘a lurid secret, a pushed-aside thought, equal to the resigned and shameful recognition of the failure of life (and all its flesh-born pleasures) in the face of death’ (Zajac 2005: 73). From this perspective, the association of meat with nothing more than dead, inert, dehumanized matter exposes a need to turn away from our own potential meatiness into something of an eroticized void whose imperative remains that of ‘leaving the meat behind’ (Bell 2005: 555).¹²

In Chapter Two I will further explore this problematic reading of meat in order to expose how the association of the *Body Worlds* cadaver with meat as de-individuated, de-humanized matter functions within the context of the current concerns regarding the procurement of bodies for display in ‘body museums’ (Linke 2005). If, as Heide Harty (2008) suggests, ‘having people interact with meat...is a way of addressing the typical deformation of people through any number of social and political processes’ (Harty 2008), the reversal of cannibal discourse by commentators onto both the anatomist and the audience of *Body Worlds* can be read as a logical extension of the body-as-meat discourse in seeming to visibly map *Body*

¹² This notion of beating the meat or ‘leaving the meat behind’ (Bell 2005: 555) has been accorded particular attention within the field of cybercultural theory, in response to the representation of the body as meat found in the cyberpunk canon, in particular the noted work *Neuromancer* (Gibson 1984) and its ‘meat-puppets’ (see Gibson 1984; Springer 1996; Bell 2000)

Worlds as an exemplar of Western epistemic practices driven concurrently by the insatiable appetites of consumer capitalism. However I will ultimately argue that this charge of ‘Occidental anthropophagy’ (King 2000: 122) becomes a strategy through which the visitor comes to ‘beat the meat’ (Sobchack 2004: 170) in the manner discussed in this chapter. These processes of distancing comes to construct an ‘Eastern body’ (Manseau 2008) as the paradigm of the *Body Worlds* plastinate, trapped in passive meat-ridden victimhood, thus securing living flesh within the borders of an implicitly Western world.

Chapter 2: Meat, Maps and Murder: Cartographies of the Cannibal

Introduction

In her critical appraisal of *Body Worlds*, journalist Lisa Cummings (2002) speaks of an old shop sign in which a pig, playing butcher, smilingly holds up a chopped piece of pork. For Cummings (2002), this sign shares with *Body Worlds* the same 'killing joke, if you find it funny: the victim as perpetrator, serving up his species as a dish for dinner (Cummings 2002). With this cannibalistic appetite installed at the centre of the exhibition leaving more of a bitter taste than hearty laugh in her throat, nonetheless Cummings' (2002) insinuation of anthropophagy at work in *Body Worlds* has also been levelled by a number of other commentators against the display (O'Rourke 2001: Marshall 2006: Hibbs 2007: Schulte-Sasse 2007). If, as Heide Harty (2008) suggests, 'having people interact with meat...is a way of addressing the typical deformation of people through any number of social and political processes' (Harty 2008), the reversal of cannibal discourse by commentators onto both the anatomist and the audience of *Body Worlds* can be read as a logical extension of the body-as-meat discourse in seeming to visibly map *Body Worlds* as an exemplar of violent Western epistemic practices driven concurrently by the seemingly insatiable appetites of consumer capitalism. However, while this charge of 'Occidental anthropophagy' (King 2000: 122) may appear to nail an implicitly Western subject as the agent of consumption within the exhibition in a manner that gains particular potency in light of recent concerns regarding the procurement of bodies from China (Stern 2003: Marshall 2006: Tanassi 2006: Valapour 2006: Schechter 2009), I will ultimately suggest that the horror narrative of cannibalism offers an 'exciting but safe' (Stern 2003) tale of terror that consolidates the return to the self without

loss or diminution (Hayes 2003). If, as King (2000) argues, ‘flesh eating is associated with the elaboration of differences’ (King 2000: 108), the charge of cannibalism is not only primarily refracted onto the monstrosity ‘othered’ figure of Body Worlds’ creator, Gunther von Hagens. More importantly, it is also bound up in the construction of an ‘Eastern body’ (Manseau 2008) as the prime ‘meat’ of the display. As a result, the apparent critique of ‘Occidental anthropophagy’ (King 2000: 122) comes rather to secure an inherent link between an implied Western subjectivity and living flesh, thus enabling the continued possibility of ‘beating the meat’ (Sobchack 2004: 170) discussed in Chapter One.

Cartographies of the Cannibal

As Comporesi (1994) argues, the project of anatomy has often been communicated through a travel narrative in which the human body ‘becomes a new world to be discovered, and the anatomist...transformed into the voyager into new lands, probing and scrutinising man’s internal waters’ (Comporesi 1994: 93, see also Walter 2004). This depiction of anatomy as ‘an edifying and devout mission’ (Comporesi 1994: 93) enacted through a pioneering venture into the body’s interior installs it as a mode of inquiry that permits the human body to be mapped; converted into a fixed and readable text (Comporesi 1994: Kuppers 2004: Klaver 2005: Lizama 2008). While this cartographic rendering of the human body offers forth ‘a new anatomical atlas’ (Lizama 2008: 60), it also comes to freeze the body at a particular moment in time, producing a universalised reality that obscures its production as a result of situated vision (Lizama 2008). For Lizama (2008) this means that these bodily maps mask their development ‘as the outcome of particular institutional and representational practices. Maps are granted the status only of passive representation’ (Lizama 2008: 81). Since this standardising ‘cartographic gaze’ (Lizama 2008: 75) is implicated by Lizama (2008) in

subjecting the human body to a forced objectification and immobilisation, it can consequently be associated with the body-as-meat discourse discussed in Chapter One in similarly offering a concurrent revelation *and* critique of the symbolic violence enacted by medical epistemic practices.

However, if the traversal of the human body proffered by *Body Worlds* is linked with an objectifying mode of inquiry, the charge of cannibalism made by a number of commentators against the anatomical voyage of discovery promised by the display instigates a notable intervention into the exhibition's proclaimed narrative of progressive enlightenment (O'Rourke 2001: Cummings 2002: Marshall 2006: Hibbs 2007). Itself a 'spatialising operation' (Walton 2004: 3) historically interwoven with imperial and colonial discourses, the accusing power attached to the figure of the cannibal is now typically understood to have been wielded largely as a means of mapping a foreign and distant 'Other' as the savage antithesis of a 'civilised' West (Walton 2004); a moral cartography carved forcibly alongside the formation of geographical territory. Yet, as anthropophagy comes to be levelled at *Body Worlds*, one finds that within this particular voyage of discovery it is the questing anatomist who is seen as cannibalistic; the charge of the cannibal here referring less to literal processes of feeding than to what King (2000) has deemed a 'neocannibalism' (King 2000: 112) that denotes the metaphorical incorporation of others through processes linked to both desire and domination.¹³ As a result, although Braidotti (1994) may seize upon Haraway's (2002) notion of the 'cannibal-eye' of medical epistemological practice as the ultimate metaphor for

¹³ Neither the idea of cannibalism as a discourse produced by Western colonial projects nor the notion of a metaphoric 'neocannibalism' (King 2000: 113) should obscure the extent to which travel narratives and anthropological studies claiming to have uncovered 'genuine' examples of cannibalism remain subject to heavy debate. Of central importance here is the work of Arens (1979), an author who provocatively asserted that accusations of anthropophagy have always held symbolic rather than literal meaning. Sparking considerable controversy among scholars working in the field of cannibalism, this remains a current topic of discussion (see Arens, R. (1979), *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford: King 2000).

‘unlimited disembodied vision’ (Haraway 2002: 677), the charge of cannibalism in fact promises to fundamentally efface the ‘god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere’ (Haraway 2002: 677) by threatening to render the anatomist visibly mapped as a key participant in a violent project of knowledge acquisition and formation.

The charge of cannibalism certainly places into question both the legitimacy of *Body Worlds*’ oft-vaunted journey into the human body as a project of educational enlightenment as well as the ‘self-chosen placelessness’ (Wetz 2006: 292) of Gunther von Hagens as its primary overseer. However, the increased import of anthropophagy as a metaphor for capitalist consumption also posits the notion that the active and desiring subject could more broadly be understood as the Western self (Bartlovich 1998: Rhodes 2005). In a world seen to revolve around the endless possibilities seemingly brought forth through consumer capitalism. Bartlovich (1998) has argued that the cannibal is invoked where

‘a limit is approached beyond which further expansion of consumer appetite is deemed impossible. Cannibalism, then, is the mark of absolute saturation...cannibals suck blood until the life is utterly departed from the body; they ‘clean burnish bones’ until no flesh is left; they devour whole’ (Bartlovich 1998: 208-213).

As a number of critics see the contemporary taste for bodily extremity – of which *Body Worlds* is a prime exemplar – as marking both the insatiability and limits of consumer appetites forged in the arcs of capitalist accumulation (Azoulay 2003: Stern 2003: Linke 2005: Virilio 2006), then the insinuation of cannibal consumption at work in the exhibition threatens to nail the desires not merely of the anatomist, but also the Western consumer subject constructed by some commentators as the paradigmatic *Body Worlds* visitor (Marshall 2006: Valapour 2006: Manseau 2008).

By ‘forcing the audience to come face to face with their own desire to consume the image of the body’ (Klaver 2005: 138), the notion of a cannibal self at work in *Body Worlds* can consequently be understood to introduce something of a horror narrative into the exhibition. Yet it is horror levelled less at the body in the museum than at both the anatomist and the visitor whose vision is captivated at this very sight. Alongside the body-as-meat discourse, the indictment of Western appetites and tastes through the charge of cannibalism brings the visitor into view as a core site of anxiety. Marshall’s (2006) question – ‘What does it mean that I’m here looking at this? Am I a voyeur?’ (Marshall 2006) – confirms the body of the visitor as an ‘intriguingly in-between threshold space’ (Sandberg 2003: 104) torn between the recognition of one’s own potential to be the ‘meat’ on display or else the subject who feasts upon this carnal body as the exemplary symbol of an all-consuming society.¹⁴ Not only does this place into question the journey into the human body as a project of educational enlightenment, but perhaps more importantly, the charge of cannibalism threatens to map the visitor ‘hovering inside and outside of the display simultaneously...hovering between presence and absence’ (Sandberg 2003: 104) in a moral cartography of consumption; marked as the owner of an appetite that places them tantalising on the precipice between notions of civilisation and savagery.

¹⁴ A short perusal of the many images of *Body Worlds* that circulate on the internet seem to concord with this argument as a considerable number not only depict the bodies on display, but moreover the presence of a visitor staring upon them.

Gobbling Up Gunther

‘He (von Hagens) was fascinated by the possibilities that had remained unused until then to such an extent that *he literally sank his teeth into the subject matter right from the start...thus we come directly to the essence of his personality.*’

(Kriz on von Hagens’ discovery of his pioneering plastination technique 2006: 5

(emphasis mine)

‘Alone in his lab, he spent night after night...’

(The Anatomists, Morse 2002)

Although the charge of ‘Occidental anthropophagy’ (King 2000: 121) would appear to render visible the apparent nature of the visitor in *Body Worlds*, it nonetheless remains evident that the migration of this image of self-devouring terror from the margins of Western culture to its very centre to become implicated as ‘an active and desiring subject’ (Walton 2004: 3) – as a subject *with* a gaze (Walton 2004: 3) – is most potently exemplified in the specific depiction of *Body Worlds*’ creator, Gunther von Hagens. The character of von Hagens has undoubtedly attracted both staunch praise and firm criticism, serving as the fascinating focal point of so much media attention that it would seem almost impossible to consider the display without some mention of his presence; he is, as Stephens (2007) states, ‘part of the publicity and internal to the representation system’ on offer (Stephens 2007: 10-11). While a number of lurid claims are frequently levelled at the doctor – from those who simply but nonetheless scathingly deem him a ‘huckster’ (Molyneux 2002), to those who more provocatively describe him as ‘the Walt Disney of Death’ (Morse 2002: Thomas 2002) or ‘a modern Frankenstein’ (Morse 2002: Nunn 2005: Goeller 2007: Moore and Brown 2007) – it is his implied role as ‘cannibalistic polymath’ (O’Rourke 2001) in the mould of Hannibal Lecter, the

anthropophagic anti-hero of horror film *The Silence of the Lambs*, that is of particular interest here. If, as Probyn (2000) suggests, cannibalism can be linked to an insatiable appetite for flesh, fame and fortune, then its invocation against the anatomist can certainly be read as an indictment not only of his epistemological project, but moreover its situation within a broader market system that shows no qualms in rendering the human body a consumable good; ‘saleable meat’ (Young Price 2008: 2).

Yet, what is particularly striking is the degree to which allusions to the appetite of the anatomist are not only evident in the work of his critics, sceptics and detractors; they are also a recurring motif within a tribute to the plastinator, *Pushing the Limits* (Whalley 2006). Perusing this volume of seemingly glowing praise, I was struck by the frequency with which von Hagens’ eating habits are discussed. In this book, featuring short essays by around twenty colleagues, family members and friends of the doctor, a considerable number mention his attitude towards food in a manner that becomes implicitly connected to his *Body Worlds* industry. If the cannibal is seen to mark an unlimited hunger, then references to the boundlessness of von Hagens’ taste for food – such as his described compulsion to eat leftovers off the plates of others (Rathget 2005: 255) – help exemplify his concurrent ‘craving for money and recognition’ (Wetz 2006: 285) that extends into his use of bodies. In defence of the anatomist, it could be argued that for every indication of his limitless scope for consumption, there are more numerous references to a contrasting indifference in the face of food (Biskup 2006: R von Hagens 2006: Oostrom 2006: Tiedemann 2006). However this ‘apathetic eating without joy’ (Tiedemann 2006: 98) comes to border on a sinister aversion¹⁵, in part through its suggestion that von Hagens is more than sufficiently nourished by his

¹⁵ This is particularly demonstrated in stories relating how von Hagens had hypnotised fellow prisoners whilst incarcerated in the former GDR for attempting to cross the borders into West Germany into believing they had eaten when they had not; a feat also performed on other occasions upon family members. Although these acts could be read as a means to forestall the hunger of those close to him, they are depicted by his colleagues nonetheless with an overarching sense of unease (Tiedemann 2006; Wetz 2006).

anatomical activities to have even the least culinary interest. These simultaneous stories of gastronomic gluttony and alimentary apathy consequently come to participate in a somewhat monstrous rendering of von Hagens' tastes that does little to assuage the sense of a cannibalistic relationship between the anatomist and his specimens, whilst also enfolded an overarching horror film sensibility into these depictions of his character. This is best exemplified in a tale narrated by a colleague, Kriz (2006), concerning a shared dinner in which he and von Hagens found an opened can of corned beef in the freezer. As Kriz (2006) continues, 'with the help of a hammer and a chisel, we chopped off chunks of these delicacies and heated them together in a frying pan. We had milk and tap water to drink. It tasted great' (Kriz 2006). The eventual punch-line to the dinner – Kriz's (2006) additional confirmation that their meal-time conversation of choice concerned favoured plastination techniques – only serves to demonstrate how each act of narrated consumption comes to interweave the mundane with the macabre.

As with the body-as-meat metaphor discussed in Chapter One, the construction of von Hagens as an anatomist with anthropophagic appetites does indeed appear to offer some form of critical reflection upon *Body Worlds*; here implying that the consumption of bodies within the display represents the extension of eating habits that symbolically imply a thirst for fame, flesh and fortune (Probyn 2000). However it remains crucial to stress that this particular horror narrative is projected, in all its hyperbolic cinematic glory, onto the lone figure of von Hagens. Resulting in the monstrous 'othering' of the anatomist, this process not only comes to construct von Hagens as somewhat of the straw man for the consuming practices identified at the heart of *Body Worlds*. It also introduces a mediating figure between the visitor and the 'meat' on display that arguably provides a reassuring sense of distance from this seemingly dehumanized matter. Consequently Cottom's (2003) argument that the securing of

subjectivity in a safe form requires ‘a body that must appear foreign, like a déclassé actor or a détourné implant, so that humanity may feel at home in its skin’ (Cottom 2006: 145), the construction of von Hagens as a character displaying a ‘psychopathic cannibalism’ (King 2000: 106) bound up in ‘lunacy and obsession’ (Moore 2002) ultimately reassures the visitor that ‘we are not like that, we are not savage...rather we are fully human’ (King 2000: 109). This claim is made even more secure through the distancing this inserts between the visitor and the meat-like specimens on display. In this sense, the construction of von Hagens in the vein of the serial killer/psychopathic cannibal comes to not only ‘make difference, it fabricates humanness’ (King 2000: 109), that is, the humanness of the potentially implicated *Body Worlds* viewer. After all, while the appetites of von Hagens may fall beyond the realm of acceptable eating habits, the viewer can nonetheless be reassured by their own apparent restraint.

Of course it could be argued, with more than a touch of irony, that this comparative restraint on behalf of the *Body Worlds* viewer is somewhat undermined by the recognition that this particular construction of Gunther von Hagens is itself a form of consumption, of which the cannibal becomes the object. This is symbolically exemplified in the work of Schulte-Sasse (2007) who attaches her association of *Body Worlds* to anthropophagy onto the exhibit-piece *The Chess Player*; a figure that for her ‘recalls a familiar on-screen psychiatrist who liked to have old friends for dinner’ (Schulte-Sasse 2007). This repeated reference to Hannibal Lecter – only here as plastinate - exemplifies aptly the capacity of the cannibal to slip between the status of subject and object, thus also demonstrating the extent to which cannibalism itself can be seized upon as a story that provides sustenance (Klaver 2005). While Rathget (2006) may allude to von Hagen’s own complicity in this process in describing his ‘malicious, almost masochistic pleasure in feeding himself to press hounds, in being food for them’ (Rathget

2006: 252), this only serves to further display how the discourse of cannibalism helps create an object of consumption as an ‘exciting but safe’ (Stern 2003) horror narrative on which to feed without real loss to the consuming subject (Hayes 2003). It is in this sense that the tales of cannibalism that circulate around the exhibition serve as more than just ‘frightening tales on which to feast while around the safety of one’s own fire’ (Walton 2004: 3); rather, they actively serve to produce this safety by ensuring that the potential *Body Worlds* viewer is reconciled with a firm sense of their own humanity.¹⁶

Constructing Difference, Consuming Difference

Although the construction of Gunther von Hagens as monstrous other may permit the *Body Worlds* visitor to distance themselves from the body on display as ‘meat’, it can be argued that growing concerns surrounding ‘Eastern bodies’ (Manseau 2008) on display offer a more fertile ground from which to launch the accusation of a cannibal consumption at work in the exhibition. Upon its initial premiere in East Asia and Europe, *Body Worlds* became typically aligned with Nazi Germany in both media and academic discussions (Sewell: Stern 2003: Schulte-Sasse 2006: Virilio 2006: Allen 2007: Moore and Brown 2007). Not only has von Hagens been compared to Josef Mengele (Nunn 2005: Schulte-Sasse 2006: Virilio 2006) and even Hitler (Sewell 2002: Moore and Brown 2007), but its poses of vitality have also been accused of channelling fascist aesthetics by celebrating white masculine virility (Linke 2005: Schulte-Sasse 2006).¹⁷ However, perhaps unsurprisingly, with the move of *Body Worlds* to

¹⁶ An interesting comparison to this image of von Hagens can be offered through the comparative treatment of Anthony Noel Kelly, an artist found to have stolen body parts from a medical school to use as casts for artwork. In contrast to the ‘exciting but safe’ (Stern 2003) horror narrative attached to von Hagens (Walton 2004: 3), Noel Kelly was largely vilified for his actions. With Masters (2001) declaring that ‘there was something suspiciously serial in the repetitive pinning of body parts on his walls’ (Masters in: Boyne 2001: 107), in 2000 Noel Kelly and his accomplice Neil Lyndsay became the first people ever to be convicted of stealing body parts in England thus linking Noel Kelly literally to ‘the murderous, the criminal and the necrophiliac’ (Masters in: Boyne 2001: 107).

¹⁷ Although a number of these invocations could be seen as references to ‘pre-packaged memories’ of genocide and war, the reflections of Uri Linke (2005) are of particular note as part of her broader work into the

North America in 2004/5 coinciding with increased concerns regarding the procurement of bodies for the exhibition, the onus has shifting onto the possible participation of *Body Worlds* in an underground organ trade in which bodies of executed Chinese political prisoners are suspected to circulate (Tanassi 2006: Valapour 2006: Schechter 2009).¹⁸ Certainly it is apparent that these fears are more relevant to the ‘copycat’ exhibitions frequently conflated with the project of von Hagens¹⁹, such as those run by North American company *Premier Exhibitions Ltd*. While *Premier Exhibitions Ltd* were recently forced to admit in court that they have no mechanisms through which to ascertain the origins of bodies (Schechter 2009), *Body Worlds* has always been adamant that its staunch voluntary donor schemes operate within the confines of accepted cadaver practice; statements backed up by a review study undertaken by the California Science Center (California Science Center 2004/5). Despite these official confirmations of *Body Worlds*’ claims regarding its treatment of bodies, suspicions nonetheless continue to circulate within both the media and academia that its exhibits could involve the bodies of executed political prisoners and other victims of Chinese human rights abuses (see Stern 2003: Tanassi 2006: Valapour 2006). As a result, the fear that the bodies on display may be of Chinese origin comes to re-direct the charge of cannibalism specifically onto Western consumption of ‘Eastern bodies’ as meat (Manseau 2008) as another reversal of anthropophagic logic onto the Occident (King 2000: 121).

construction of the German body post-1945. Since the links between von Hagens and Nazi medical practice may also bring to mind the work of Giorgio Agamben, the numerous works of this noted scholar may also be of related interest.

¹⁸ This is in part fuelled by the fact that *Body Worlds* has plastination facilities in China, with *Body Worlds*’ Institute for Plastination being specifically located in Dalin. It is to here where bodies are shipped for dissection and plastination (von Hagens and Whalley 2002: Morse 2002).

¹⁹ Such exhibitions include *Bodies...The Exhibition*, *Corps Ouvert*, *Our Body: The Universe Within* (shut down in Paris in April 2009 with the prosecutor arguing that ‘the exhibition is the last step in a horrible traffic operation of human bodies originating in China’ (Schechter 2009) and *Bodies Revealed* (http://bodyworlds.com/en/exhibitions/original_copycat.html). In the case of *Bodies Revealed*, von Hagens has successfully fought a lawsuit against the exhibition on charges of plagiarism (Robin McDonald 2006).

Yet, while this accusation of ‘Occidental anthropophagy’ (King 2000: 122) may be seen to reflect upon the exploitation of difference within *Body Worlds*, King (2000) suggests that ‘flesh eating has always promoted the elaboration of differences’ (King 2000: 108). As Montaigne (2005) elaborates, cannibalism is never a case of

‘like eating like, but the victimization of the opposite of one’s sex devouring the other, of age feasting on youth, of the young feeding on the old, of the living violating the dead and buried, of one ‘tribe’ or race consuming one another’ (Montaigne in: Mirabello 2005: 205).

Viewed from this perspective, if cannibalism can be seen as a performative act whose moral cartography comes to actively produce difference, the growing discourse surrounding ‘Eastern bodies’ on display can be seen as exemplifying this very process. Fears of *Body Worlds*’ cadavers being of Chinese origin appear to have invited several commentators to read signs of ‘Asianness’ onto these bodies (Marshall 2006: Valapour 2006). As both Marshall (2006) and Valapour (2006) speak of ‘the large number of Asian bodies’ (Valapour 2006) within the exhibition²⁰, Marshall (2006) furthermore quotes a comment book in which one visitor speaks of the bodies appearing ‘very small and very Asian’ (Marshall 2006). While Manseau (2008) may criticise *Body Worlds* for obscuring the origins of bodies in order to present ‘the anonymous dead for our unanonymous benefit’ (Manseau 2008) – ‘our’ connoting the implicit Western reader within the context of this article - this criticism of the decontextualisation of the bodies on display is seemingly refuted by the emerging discourse surrounding the use of ‘Eastern bodies’ (Manseau 2008) that encourages the visualisation of particularised difference within the display.

Indeed, if processes of decontextualisation are at all in evidence with regards to the *Body Worlds* exhibition, it is arguably demonstrated precisely through, rather than despite, the

²⁰ What is also interesting to note is that, since Marshall (2006) and Valapour (2006) are both professors of medical programmes at the University of Minnesota arguably come to be given the weight of an additional authoritative medical expertise.

reading of this apparent ‘Asianness’ onto these bodies (Valapour 2006). The observations reported by Marshall (2006) and Valapour (2006) undeniably attempt to focus serious attention upon the fact that in possibly using bodies without regard for their precise origins, *Body Worlds* and other ‘copycat’ projects risk contributing to increased rates of execution in the pursuit of profit (Valapour 2006). However these readings of ‘Asian features’ function far from neutrally; within the lectures of Marshall (2006) and Valapour (2006) they render this a signifier for malnourishment and violent processes of procurement; the implicit antithesis of the ‘European body’ that is contrastingly presumed to have been obtained through choice and consent (Marshall 2006: Valapour 2006). This contrasting construction of Western and Eastern bodies is particularly evident within Marshall’s (2006) account of her experiences within the exhibition, speaking of her deep sense of betrayal in her belief that the organisers of the *Body Worlds* had broken their promise that the display would only show ‘European bodies with informed consent’ (Marshall 2006). In this sense, it could be argued that these bodies come to be circulated in what Michel Foucault (2004) deemed ‘a rhetoric of violence; an order of language that speak violence – names certain behaviours and events violent, but not others, and hence violence as a social fact’ (Foucault in: Dickson 2004: 79). Kupperts (2004) may argue that these bodies put ‘the violence of the vision machine of anatomy under erasure’ (Kupperts 2004: 40) as ‘all marks of death, pain, decay, and dissolution are carefully banished’ (Kupperts 2004: 41). However, what is deemed to be an attempt to nail the complicity of the *Body Worlds* visitor as participant within ‘this vision machine’ (Kupperts 2004: 40), comes rather to map violence onto the ‘Eastern body’ (Manseau 2008) on display. As a consequence, rather than reverse the decontextualisation of these cadavers on display by opening up a broader space for an interrogation of the procedures through which *all* bodies come to have been procured, the insinuation that the notion of ‘Eastern bodies’ is mutually exclusive to ‘informed consent’, being instead demonstrative only of a dehumanized

victimhood under a regime positioned as non-democratic and violent, itself comes to ‘conjure up a general rather than a particular recognition, and that mode of recognition is pity’ (Boyne 2001: 114).

This ‘pity’ is striking for it arguably brings to mind the reaction of Deleuze to the paintings of Francis Bacon (2005). ‘Pity the meat!’ argued Deleuze, linking suffering to ‘the zone of the indiscernible between man and animal’ (Deleuze 2005: 16). The danger of this ‘pity’ is that in what appears to be contestation of the exploitation of non-Western bodies under the combined forces of Western epistemic practices and consumer culture, ‘Asianness’ becomes reduced to being the passive, objectified, dehumanised ‘meat’ of *Body Worlds*. In a concurrent process, the consent and choice associated with the ‘European body’ (Marshall 2006) on display become an exemplar of a broader subjectivity and intentionality, here mapped within Western borders. Moreover, the construction of *Body Worlds* as being driven through ‘the Western desire for Eastern bodies’ (Manseau 2008) fundamentally obscures the fact that until 2004 the exhibition was displayed in East Asia; a detail that remains rarely acknowledged within discussions of *Body Worlds*. This neglect not only inhibits discussions of responses to the display from within this region, but it is also notable that journalists rarely feel compelled to question whether individuals from within Asia, in particular China, could come to volunteer their bodies to the *Body Worlds* programme.²¹ Furthermore it may also distance many within the West from interrogating its own treatment of dead bodies. It is this that is alluded to by Pascal Bernadin, the manager of *Encore Events*, the company that own the body exhibition shut down in Paris in April 2009 (Schechter 2009). Following the ruling, Bernadin (2009) stated that ‘everyone gets excited because there is the death penalty in China, but you have

²¹ Of all articles I have read concerning the show, only the work of Rathget (2006) seems to have attempted to interrogate as to whether Chinese citizens participate in the donor scheme. Within his piece he suggests that a small number of ‘Chinese intellectuals’ living in and around Dalin do volunteer their bodies as a means, he suggests, of differentiating themselves from the ‘masses’ of the city (Rathget 2006).

the death penalty in the USA...of the 1.3 billion people in China, there must be people willing to donate their bodies to science' (Bernadin in: Schechter 2009). While likely an attempt to defend his company from the damaging ruling made in the Parisian courts, this argument nonetheless does reflect the manner in which many within the West readily forms moral cartographies of accepted cadaver practice that are largely taken for granted. The construction of Eastern bodies as reduced to meat as the victims of violent processes of procurement comes to curtail any broader interrogation of the means by which all bodies come to circulate within the display. To this degree, a discourse that appears to indict the West for its exploitation of non-Western bodies in fact constructs its term in a manner that forestalls contact by promoting assumptions that shut down the possibility of cross-regional involvement and exchange.

For hooks (2001) and Probyn (2000) this construction of the 'Eastern body' (Manseau 2008) could be read as a sign that Western subjects are 'hungry for difference' as an exciting condiment to add to their consumer subjectivity (Probyn 2000: 84). However it rather appears that this desire to paint a specifically wounded difference is stimulated less by the pursuit of 'spice' to alter or escape the dullness of Western subjectivity (King 2000: 121) than as a means by which to actively construct and protect this subjectivity itself. After all, the attempt to read the bodies on display as 'Eastern bodies' (Manseau 2008) produced through inherently non-consensual processes of procurement appears to secure this subjectivity by mapping 'the concomitant terrors of destruction and incorporation onto another alien body or group of people' (Berglund 2001: 10). Coming to represent the abused and dehumanized bodies of a non-Western regime, the notion that it is the Eastern body that is the 'meat' of *Body Worlds* come to imbue them with what has been typically signified in the figure of the cannibal itself;

‘depravity...savagery, and above all, a guarantee of European superiority’ (Schaffer in: Pavlov 2007: 129).

Conclusion

If, as Harty (2008) suggests, to show people interacting and engaging with meat can be a powerful means by which to show the deformation of a people through social and political processes, accusations of anthropophagy can be seen as the logical extension of the body-as-meat discourse discussed in Chapter One by appearing to jointly indict Western epistemic practices and consumer capitalism for exploiting and consuming human bodies. However, if cannibal discourse is seen to draw moral cartographies that produce difference, then it becomes evident that the charge of cannibalism in fact functions as a performative accusation that helps constitute the very difference that it appears to critique. Rather than see the reversal of cannibal discourse provide a mirror image critique of Western consumer practices, it constitutes a decontextualised ‘Eastern body’ (Manseau 2008) as the ‘meat’ of *Body Worlds* – ‘a mindless non-Western other as an observable and transmissible commodity’ (Hayes 2003: 155) – in contrast to the consenting Western body that even in death is presumed to carry the signs of subjectivity and intentionality (Marshall 2006).

Rather than continue to turn our backs upon meat as exemplifying only ‘the annihilation of the subject in itself’ (Adams 2000: 47), in the process contributing to what Sawday (2005) has deemed ‘a culture of dissection and its desire to partition the things of the world’ (Sawday in: Klaver 2005: 14), I suggest that ‘meat’ needs to instead be installed within a reconfigured discourse of consumption circulating around the *Body Worlds* exhibition. Drawing inspiration from Cottom (2003) who enters the bowels of the Enlightenment in order to suggest that

modernity is as much a visceral as a visual affair, in Chapter Three I enter the bowels of *Body Worlds* in order to explore not only the means by which flesh turns into meat, but moreover the ways in which meat turns back into and interacts with flesh, thus troubling the terms of this very polarity (Zajac 2005: 73). Consequently concurring with Zajac (2005) that ‘we should be humble and heroic enough to join the cycle of exchange’ (Zajac 2005: 80), this will demonstrate that ‘meat’ is less a stable signifier in ‘a world of formal bodies and fixed orders of being’ (Curtin 2002: 63) than a potent site of uncertainty – ‘a zone of the indiscernible’ (Deleuze 2005: 16) – in ‘a world of partial and uneasy transformations’ (Cottom 2002: 63) in which the boundaries between subject and object, self and other, human and animal are far from stable, far from self-evident, far from secure.

Chapter 3: Carnavalesque Consumption: Eating the Grotesque Body in the Body Worlds Exhibition

Introduction

In Chapters One and Two I propose that the comparison between the *Body Worlds* exhibition and meat reflects the belief that these bodies are frozen as static signifiers of ‘dead, inert’ matter (Carter 1978: 137). Objectified and moreover dehumanized as ‘an absolute zero point of being’ (Harty 2008), these specimens would consequently appear to reflect Wordsworth’s (2001) observation that ‘we murder to dissect’ (Wordsworth in: Cottom 2001: 13). Yet, inspired by the argument of Cottom (2001) that the Enlightenment should be understood less as a visual than as a ‘visceral turn’ (Cottom 2001: 2: emphasis mine), in this chapter I suggest that we enter into the bowels of *Body Worlds* in order to mobilise the meat metaphor within a broader alimentary economy characterised as much by ‘innovative border crossings’ (Curtin 1992: 1) as by the preservation of staunch ontological boundaries. While the charge of the grotesque has particularly been levelled by a number of critics at the exhibits on display (Ede 2005: Linke 2005: Burns 2007: McCullough 2007: Lizama 2008), I seize upon the ribald triad of eating, social transformation and the grotesque body that Bakhtin (1984) unites under the rubric of the carnivalesque as a means by which meat can be re-envisaged as a ‘vagabond materiality’ (Bennett 2007) whose pleats of matter are enfolded with transformative potential. This dynamism not only challenges pre-figured structural engagements with the body-corpse such as that articulated in the notion of the gendered gaze (MacCormack 2005/6), but moreover introduces a sense of the ephemeral into epistemic practices that seek to freeze the cadavers of *Body Worlds* as though eternal, canonised bodies. Clearly then, to dissect in order to digest the body as ‘meat’ need not necessarily be to destruct. Moreover, while the very transience of carnivalesque insurgency entails the removal of meat and the ‘pressing together

of lips' (Cottom 2001: 23), the invocation of this visceral pulp of carnal physicality positions meat less as a passive pole in the subject/object dichotomy perpetually grinding at the heart of modernity than the excess that disturbs these very binaries; the doubt that gnaws; the meat that roars.

A Carnival of Consumption

Amongst the notable metaphors that cluster around the *Body Worlds* exhibition, the comparison of these bodies to meat is arguably one of the most striking, being launched at a display that offers forth the frozen 'anatomical nudity' (Linke 2005: 16) of dissected and skinned cadavers. It is this perceived objectification that prompts a number of commentators to fling these bodies into the realm of meat (Moore 2002: Walter 2004: Ede 2005: Elliott 2006: Virilio 2006: Moore and Brown 2007: Manseau 2008); meat here positioned as 'a product, a consignment, a resource with no connection with the world of the spirit... the lowest common denominator' (Punter 2000: 123). Yet Carol Adams' (2004) assertion that 'we would never want to be seen only as meat' (Adams 2004: 14) is not only fuelled by an association of the carnal with objectification, but moreover a de-individuation to the point of de-humanization. These processes of turning the body into meat are consequently seen to be paradigmatic not only of medical epistemological practices, but moreover a visual regime of modernity driven by an overarching drive for mastery through a gaze that captures in order to conquer (Grosz 1993: Braidotti 1994: Wegenstein 2006). It is in this sense, then, that we 'murder to dissect' (Wordsworth in: Cottom 2001: 13). Absent from this critique however, is a reflection upon the degree to which this staunch rejection of meat as dead and inert matter (Carter 1978: 137) itself participates in a 'neo-Cartesian' (Hacking 2007: 93) desire to 'beat the meat' (Sobchack

2004: 170). In suggesting that we can disembowel ourselves of meat in order to claim status as living flesh, one arguably serves to reinforce the very duality of subject/object relations that this 'meaty' critique would appear to contest.

However, while meat may be positioned as the putrid, passive and somewhat pathological pole of a subject/object dichotomy perpetually grinding at the heart of modernity, within the developing body of literature that Curtin (1992) has deemed 'a food-centred philosophy of human being' (Curtin 1992: 1), the act of eating and its deemed edibles have been brought to the fore of epistemological inquiry (Curtin 1992: Probyn 2000: Cottom 2001: Rachwal 2005: Coff 2006). Visceral processes of incorporation, ingestion and digestion fundamental to feeding are all seen to pose considerable challenge to the conceptualisation of modernity as grounded in the maintenance of stable identities and fixed categories of being (Cottom 2001: Coff 2006). In direct refutation of a world in which we are told we are either somebody or *some body* (Schulte-Sasse 2006: see also Adams 2004), as Llewelyn Price (2003) contends, 'the act of eating distorts limits, opens the body to an ambivalence in which eater and eaten are interwoven and begin to be fused in one grotesque image of devouring and devoured world' (Llewelyn Price 2003: 23). By entering into epistemology less through the eye than through the stomach, the centralisation of consumption comes to disrupt the monolithic depiction of modern bodily relations as the constitution of objects by scopically driven subjects; instead reframing these encounters as metamorphosis through mastication. Inserting the possibility that 'the inside and the outside of the human body might then become as one' (Cottom 2001: 22), within this schema breaking bread *is* breaking borders.

Moreover, although Llewelyn Price (2003) may colour these processes of alimentary incorporation in a certain ambivalence, his invocation of the grotesque is nonetheless telling. Outlined in the notable work of Bakhtin (1984) who sought to rescue this most corporeal of categories from its moorings in the realm of cynical satire, the grotesque implies a body that readily and continually pushes both at and beyond the frontiers of given bodily forms. As Bakhtin (1984) argues, ‘the artistic logic of the grotesque ignores the closed, smooth and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (spouts, buds) and orifices; only that which leads beyond the body’s limited space or into the body’s depths’ (Bakhtin 1984: 318). Yet what would represent a complete castigation of the individualised body that Bakhtin (1984) attributes to the onset of modernity – a body sheathed in an unyielding shroud of skin – is also notable in enfolded a certain revelry into these very processes of boundary deformation and defilement. Rather than have territorial transgression slip automatically into the terror of the teratological, Bakhtin (1984) instead argues that this vision of the body, revelling in ritualistic hybridity and ostensibly monstrous forms, is in fact entwined with the ecstatic eruptive force of what can be deemed the ‘carnavalesque’ (Russo 1994: Stallybrass and White 1997).²² Within such times of festivity, abundant pleasure is attached to the excesses of eating; processes that engender engulfing, engorging, sweating, shedding and always, but always, swallowing whole. These are pleasures that demand the unravelling force of a visceral touch.

While certainly for Bakhtin (1984) the grotesque body of the carnivalesque was infused with doubtless sensual ecstasy, both Russo (1994) and Rachwal (2005) nonetheless underline the

²² As Stallybrass and White (1997) note, although carnival and carnivalesque are often used interchangeably, the term ‘carnival’ can be seen to refer more to the historical occurrence of such festivities, particularly prior to the Renaissance period. However the work of those such as Russo (1994) has come to seize upon the term ‘carnavalesque’ to mark a more symbolic corporeal excess and inversion.

extent to which this pleasure is inherently entwined with political potency. Since the carnivalesque can be seen to offer joy primarily through ‘its violent celebration of the body, dirt, eating, drinking and sexuality’ (White 1993: 170), it carries with it the possibility of ‘low, unofficial social transformation’ (Russo 1984: 8); the ‘threat of insurgence’ (Rachwal 2005: 21). Russo (1997) elaborates upon this capacity for contestation in stressing that ‘the marks and voices of carnival resist, exaggerate and destabilise the distinctions and boundaries that mark and maintain high culture and, in its bloated and irrepressible state, release it in fits and spouts, in all manner of recombination, inversion, mockery and degradation’ (Russo 1997: 325). That this critique is furthermore ‘effected through the intensifying grid of the body’ (Stallybrass and White 1997: 301) consequently installs within the grotesque disregard of the firm fleshy frontiers of the individualised body an implied capacity for social upheaval. In turning the world not merely upside down, but moreover inside out, the carnivalesque consequently has the ability to act as a staunch form of cultural critique (Russo 1997: Stallybrass and White 1997: Rachwal 2005).

Grotesque Meat

This understanding of the grotesque body amidst the ribald excesses of the carnival would certainly seem to offer a space for the meat-like cadaver. In his discussion of the work of the painter Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze (2005) suggests that meat can be characterised as a body devoid of the individuating powers of the face (Deleuze 2005: 15). This notion of meat as that which is unhinged from the centripetal signifying force of the face as the marker of human individuality certainly situates the ‘meaty’ corpses of *Body Worlds* as prime exemplars of the grotesque form that Bakhtin (1984) similarly positions as outside the reassuring sense

of orientation offered by ‘faciality’ (Deleuze 2005: 15). This link between the carnal body and the grotesque is further buttressed by Deleuze’s (2005) additional suggestion that meat congregates in ‘a zone of the indiscernible between man and animal’ (Deleuze 2005: 16). Since White (1993) suggests that the hybrid amalgamation of man and beast is one of the paradigmatic grotesque images, the notion of meat as an indistinguishable body of ‘human or animal at its most base’ (Harty 2008) bolsters its position within the Bakhtinian (1984) understanding of the grotesque form. That Mary Russo (1994) additionally associates the grotesque body with the strange and spectacular sights presented in practices of dissection only further serves to confirm the validity of subsuming the meat-like specimens of *Body Worlds* under the rubric of the grotesque.

If the perceived meatiness of the plastinates offered by *Body Worlds* can be seen to insert them into the realm of the carnivalesque, this arguably offers a fundamental re-conceptualisation of the affective relations engendered between these exhibit pieces and visitors to the exhibition. A number of commentators may suggest that *Body Worlds* encourages a gawping perusal of the specimens on display precisely through the ‘grotesque’ and dehumanizing diversion of the visitor’s gaze from traditional markers of human identity towards swollen lips, threaded veins, hairy flayed skin, and exploded muscle (Ede 2005: Linke 2005: Burns 2007: McCullough 2007: Lizama 2008). However, since the grotesque places the weight of its bawdy pleasures precisely upon these very orifices and excrescences, this rather can be seen to heighten the potential for affective union and merger between the visitor and the displays. As a result, rather than see the *Body Worlds* project as serving only to provoke dismay at the body as a consumable object – ‘humans, becoming prey, turned into Things’ (Hurley 1996: 62) – one comes to recognise that the grotesque status of meat in fact

radically alters the space between the self and the ostensibly ‘othered’ body-corpse in a manner that brings forth the possibility of fascination and even delight in the dissolution of bodily borders.

This potential pleasure at the encounters offered in *Body Worlds* is not only reflected in the small number of visitor studies of the exhibition (von Lehm 2006; Moore and Brown 2007); my own experience at *Body Worlds 4: The Mirror of Time* also indicated that as a participant in *Body Worlds* one is not necessarily affectively distanced from this ‘meat’; instead one comes to entwine with it, ‘building bridges back to your own body’ (Andrews 2008); to the bodies of friends; the bodies of family members.²³ The turning of inside into outside through the consumption of this corpse-meat consequently becomes a source of fascination and a viscerally driven curiosity in a manner that seems to ‘give us eyes all over: in the ear, in the stomach, in the lungs’ (Deleuze 2005: 37). This generates less an urge to recoil – to gut this meat from one’s fleshed body – but rather to revel in the slippage and sensory disorder that these bodies offer. Moreover this engagement across ostensibly bounded bodily and ontological borders interweaves into the pleats of this meat a sense of dynamism which challenges their positioning as dead and inert matter (Carter 1978). This carnal corporeality may not present quite as frenzied an unravelling as Carole Schneemann’s 1964 performance piece *Meat Joy* (1964), in which meat and flesh come together to create ‘a body riot of laughter and indulgence, intestines around legs and across breasts’ (Harty 2008). Nonetheless, rather than see the visitors of *Body Worlds* as passing through the exhibition as though vultures feasting upon the static ‘meat’ of stultified corpses, this visceral alimentary exchange

²³ Concurring with the observations made by von Lehm (2006) in his video recordings of visitor responses, I saw many visitors comparing discussing injuries and illnesses they or others they knew had experienced by referring to and engaging with these cadavers. For von Lehm (2006) this may opens up the possibility of studying the construction of illness narratives within such exhibitions (see von Lehm 2006).

draws both into a ‘mass of ambulating flesh’ (Deleuze 2005: 18) in which living body and meat become far from distinct entities.

Indeed, drawing upon the work of Patricia MacCormack (2005/6), it could even be argued that this radical transformation of relations between self and other offers particular challenge to the presumption of a gendered gaze at work in the exhibition. While Linke (2005) and Lizama (2008) particularly comment upon the impact of this gaze on the representation of female bodies within *Body Worlds*, within her somewhat provocative work *Necrosexuality* (MacCormack 2005/6), MacCormack (2005/6) argues that an engagement with the corpse as ‘actually unravelled and limitlessly unravel-able flesh’ (MacCormack 2005/6), such as that found in the multitudinous array of fragmented forms in *Body Worlds*, cannot be prefigured in accordance to abstract structures of interaction. Indeed, although the representation of *The Pregnant Woman* is undoubtedly problematic, nonetheless the focus of attention upon this particular exhibit piece as a symbol of the ‘gendered anatomical apartheid’ (Lizama 2008: 43) perceived to be in action within *Body Worlds* arguably obscures the degree to which the gender of the bodies on display is often far from evident. Linke (2005) may similarly speak of the hyper-sexualisation of the corpses through enlarged and deformed genitalia, but it is arguable that this engorgement, as with the removal of faces and skin, actually orientates one away from genitals as fundamental signifiers in relating to these bodies. To enter into relation with these cadavers through pre-existing expectations that ‘I am, it is, hence I will desire it in accordance with the sexuality appropriate to object and subject’ (MacCormack 2005/2006) may in fact perpetuate the very objectification associated with the masculinised ocular economy of modernity espoused in the work of those such as Braidotti (1994). Rather, one

finds that the diverse pleats of corpse-meat come to ‘configure the folds of the subject and object differently at every turn’ (MacCormack 2005/6).

MacCormack’s (2005/2006) notion of a perpetual renegotiation of self/other bodily relations in encountering a corpse particularly resonated with a notable experience I had in *Body Worlds 4: The Mirror Of Time* at the London O2 arena. Navigating myself through the exhibition as researcher, my desire to be an attentive recorder of all the exhibit pieces on display had me looking with particular curiosity at one figure of an elderly body, bent over from the affects of a spinal condition. With Russo’s (1994) critique of Bakhtin’s own unreflective seizure of the figure of the wizened crone as the paradigmatic grotesque body reverberating in my head, I went to check the genitals of the body, wondering is it female? Yet, as I circled around the body, this very question – is it female? – became somewhat explosively mocked through the disorientating experience of encountering the back of this body split in two, intestines and spine seeming to clamber over one another as they tumbled out towards me. The sheer visceral vertigo that this induced in me not only somewhat nullified my attempt to fix the gender of this body. It moreover provided credence to MacCormack’s (2005/6) suggestion that

‘our viewing bodies must be thought differently, stratified in a different pattern, undone and repatched so that we are no longer dependent on genitals and gendering eyes as gendering and desiring organs. Viscera and confusion, even repulsion, enter into our viewing bodies’ (MacCormack 2005/6).

It is this capacity for multiple affective responses that arguably makes each encounter within *Body Worlds* something of a unique and unpredictable engagement. Since therefore, ‘meat is the state where the flesh and bones confront one another locally instead of entering into

composition structurally' (Deleuze 2005), then to approach these bodies through abstract pre-formed signifiers such as that suggested in the gendered gaze may not sufficiently capture the potential relations offered by the *Body Worlds* exhibition.

Vagabond Materiality

If the disruption of traditional bodily relations between subject and object, self and other, through the 'meat' of the body-corpse can be seen to make each encounter within *Body Worlds* something of a 'unique event' (MacCormack 2005/6), then this also offers interesting reflections upon the temporality of its epistemological endeavours. In his work *The Birth of the Museum* Bennett (1995) cites Foucault as positioning the museum as 'a place of all times that is itself outside of time, inaccessible to its ravages...an immobile place' (Foucault in: Bennett 1995: 1). However, while for Foucault (1995) the pursuit of knowledge in a process of perpetual accumulation is characteristic of modernity, it also marks the museum as somewhat of a 'deadening' space (Bataille 1947: Bennett 1995: Koppers 2004: Hannah 2004). This idea of the museum as a site of stasis certainly reflects a number of critiques of *Body Worlds* which position the plastinates of von Hagens as though frozen in time, reflecting Bronfen's (1992) characterisation of the corpse as 'the signifier for an arrested and eternalised moment countering all notions of immutability...a moment where narrative, in its conjunction with temporality and change, can be cut off' (Bronfen 1992: 102). Within this framework, the link between the cadaver and 'meat' is seen to reflect its immobilisation in the pursuit of a fixed body of knowledge to be erected outside of time and space; as scientific fact rather than unstable representation.

By contrast, Rachwal (2005) suggests that the particular triadic link between the carnival, the grotesque body and festive consumption is fuelled in part through a shared sense of transience. Within this ‘fleeting, transitory, precarious’ (Foucault in: Bennett 1995: 1) space-time, she argues that ‘each act of eating transforms food, inscribes changeability into the order of the world...which challenges the demand of the permanence of knowledge’ (Rachwal 2005: 11). As a consequence, while the specimens of *Body Worlds* may be famed for their proclaimed capacity to withstand the ravages of 4000 years (Walter 2004), their positioning as metaphorically edible ‘meat’ fundamentally challenges their status as a firm body of knowledge. If the intrusion of the carnivalesque into the museum consequently challenges its pretensions to stable, immutable and constant knowledge by bringing into interplay the ephemeral *and* the eternal, the invocation of ‘meat’ with regards to the body-corpses on display confronts the attempt to form a static and immobilised body by alluding to their dynamic positioning; continuously consumed through a multitude of interactions and engagements with the visitors of *Body Worlds*.²⁴

Indeed, if an understanding of meat as a grotesque body thus marks it as ‘an undifferentiated yet material medium of morphological transformation’ (Paterson 2007: 114) in direct affront to the closed and captive classical body, then its invocation can be seen as a carnal call to carnivalesque uproar in precipitating a more fundamental collapse of the ‘high’ culture of the museum. While *Body Worlds* has increasingly attempted to present a ‘museum ethos’ (Jones 2002: 436) by surrounding its cadavers with Renaissance iconography and literary quotes from Goethe (Moore and Brown 2007; Schulte-Sasse 2007), the comparison of these bodies

²⁴ In a somewhat associated vein, Hannah (2004) proffers forth the notion of ‘putrification’ as a term to signal the temporality of art that utilises decay as a means to challenge this pursuit of fixed bodies of knowledge. Used in reference to notable pieces of meat art such as Jana Sterbak’s *Flesh Dress*, Hannah argues that ‘the notion of art that rots calls into question the economy in which the value of an artwork, and its surrounding architecture, is dependent on their own stability, immutability and longevity’ (Hannah 2004: 295).

with the ‘base’ matter of meat can be seen to perform a hearty inversion of the ostensibly noble cultural aesthetic of the museum that mirrors the destruction of Bataille’s (1947) abattoir/museum binary that I explored in Chapter One. Yet rather than have the invocation of meat insinuate the presence of sadistic slaughter, it instead marks an injection of an insalubrious satirical materiality that evokes a sense of the unseemly. As a consequence, the installation of a certain meatiness into *Body Worlds* can be seen as a carnivalesque intrusion of a more ‘downstairs’ corporeality (Sandberg 2003: 34) that parodies and bloats the canonised, classical and altogether more ‘upstairs’ body that is suggested through the overarching museum aesthetic increasingly adopted by the *Body Worlds* exhibition.

Yet, while certainly this collapse of a high/low corporeal divide - such as that expressed in the polarity of the museum and abattoir (Bataille 1947) - can be seen to mark meat as something of a ‘vagabond materiality’ (Bennett 2007) working at the heart of *Body Worlds*, it could be argued that the insertion of ‘meat’ into the display offers a capacity for contestation even more fundamental. In his essay *Prosthetic Gods in Atrocious Places* (1993), White (1993) suggests that meat ‘threatens far too many dyadic oppositions – dead/alive, eater/eaten, inside/outside, body/food, animal/human’ (White 1993: 170) to be deemed a stable signifier of ‘the absolute zero point of non-being’ (Harty 2008). Yet its positioning as a site of the indiscernible arguably means that its invocation in *Body Worlds*, an exhibition undoubtedly shrouded in an overarching sense of Enlightenment traditions of epistemological endeavour, seems to thrust a visceral pulp of unremitting physicality into the figurative heart of this hall of humanist inquiry. The grotesque instability of meat consequently serves as a reminder that even with the loss of human specificity, there exists ‘the ineluctability of matter that resists and exceeds form’ (Hurley 1996: 31). Since Cottom (2001) suggests modernity is typically

depicted as a world confidently carved through formal borders, this instead allows a fundamental uncertainty to undertake 'its shadow escape from the body like an animal we had been sheltering' (Deleuze 2005: 16); instead revealing a world of 'uneasy and partial transformations' (Cottom 2001) in which the division of subjects from objects – including that of human from animal - becomes far from self-evident; far from stable; far from secure.

Farewell to the Meat?

By understanding meat as a grotesque body, one can come to capture at the heart of modernity something which is 'essentially contradictory, deformed and delineated by blurred, highly permeable boundaries' (Cohen Shabot 2007: 61). It is in this light that one appreciates Bakhtin's (1997) declaration that the grotesque forms part of 'the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and reversal...hostile to all that was immortalized and complete' (Bakhtin in: Stallybrass and White 1997: 294). Yet it is precisely the transience at the heart of the carnivalesque that places its potential for sustained social transformation into fundamental doubt. As Stallybrass and White (1997) stress, carnival is 'licensed release' (Stallybrass and White 1997: 299) whose insurgency is itself ephemeral. While its exuberant festivities may mark a period of boundary deformation and defilement, turning world upside down and inside out in a radical blurring of ontological categories, it is nonetheless 'fleeting, transitory, precarious' (Foucault in: Bennett 1995: 1).

The precise significance of this transience is suggested by its very name. Tellingly, carnival itself refers to the 'removal of meat' that inevitably follows the indulgence of insalubrious

carnavalesque appetites (Wolfreys 2004: 24). Viewed from this perspective, if *Body Worlds* can be seen to help build bridges back to the body (Andrews 1998), this appears to be a body once again gutted of ‘carnal organ and orifice’ (Harty 2008), reinforcing the ‘neo-Cartesian’ (Hacking 2007: 93) dream of ‘leaving the meat behind’ (Bell 2000: 555). With the end of the carnival, the grotesque consumption of meat that invites the enmeshment of self and other in ‘an inclusive, heterogeneous, dangerously unstable zone’ (Stallybrass and White in: Hall: 302) comes arguably to return these each to their divided poles; the grotesque being flung once more back onto ‘the marked Other of the defining group or self’ (Stallybrass and White in: Hall: 302). It is in this sense that one may moreover come to recognise the pertinence of Russo’s (1997) warning that those considered or constructed as marginal are most at risk in the carnivalesque for, in the return to sobriety, the grotesque comes once more to mark alterity. Outside of the carnivalesque engagements offered within the enclosed space of the *Body Worlds* travelling exhibit, it is perhaps telling that it is *The Pregnant Woman* and ‘the Eastern Body’ (Manseau 2008) that can be seen to bear the particular mark of meat in the broader media spectacle that surrounds the display.

Yet even within the exhibition itself, one can arguably find indications of this figurative expulsion of meat. Looking at noted plastinate, *Rearing Horse with Rider*, it initially seemed to me to heighten the slippage between animal and human as a dissected man is shown, vertically fragmented, sitting astride a plastinated horse. As Desmond (2002) suggests, to position both the human and the animal in this striated pose creates a ‘compelling intimacy between human bodies and animal ones’ (Desmond 2002: 159). Evoking something of a sense of ‘human taxidermy’ (Elliott 2006), it could consequently appear to aptly represent the challenge that the exhibition may pose to the staunch ontological boundaries between human and animal, here united in a mutual ‘Thing-ness’ (Desmond 2002: 165). Yet, looking more

closely, I noticed that as the human holds out the brain of horse and human in each hand, the horse brain is covered in a swirling crush of red veins and arteries that render it more reminiscent of a bloody mass than the clearly differentiated – and seemingly ‘scrubbed’ – human organ. The more meat-like appearance of the horse is further apparent as its partially flayed status differs dramatically from the carefully dissected human body whose somewhat more artistic fragmented posture reveals more than simply a brute lump of flesh and tendons; instead it elegantly exposes numerous organs, muscles and bones as though cleansed of meat. With the human rider fixed avowedly upon his own brain, *Rearing Horse with Rider* cannot help but suggest some transcendence of this ‘meat’, here identified primarily as animal.

Certainly, then, it would seem that *Body Worlds* invites us to feast upon the body as meat; here as a site of carnivalesque becoming; of boundary deformation and defilement that reveals to us that we are already within the spectacle, already within the ‘mass of ambulating flesh’ (Deleuze 2005: 18). Yet its final act of carnivalesque conversion is nonetheless telling. As Cottom (2001) argues of the Enlightenment, ‘the last metamorphosis is imagined through one of the most intimate of civilised acts: the pressing together of lips’ (Cottom 2001: 23). Since, as Bataille (1947) argues, ‘the magisterial look of the face with a closed mouth’ is ‘the narrow constipation of a strictly human attitude’ (Bataille 1947), to wipe one’s mouth and shut it tight is to redraw the very boundaries that the grotesque body of the carnival would seem to fling into doubt and with it, to remove the meat.

Conclusion

If typically meat is consigned to being ‘an absolute zero point of being’ (Harty 2008) grinding within a subject/object dichotomy at the heart of modernity, the installation of the meat-like cadaver as a grotesque body within *Body Worlds* can be seen to transform these corpses into sites of becoming within webs of productive alimentary assemblages formed through the consuming interactions between the visitor and the bodies on display. Challenging the polarity of live flesh and dead meat, one moreover brings into question pre-figured structures of bodily engagement, such as the gendered gaze, as the processes of figurative feeding engendered in *Body Worlds* arguably forge ‘open systems of connexion’ that reconfigure subject and object differently at every turn (MacCormack 2005/6). In this sense, the representation of these plastinates outside of the individuating power of the ‘sealed, facialised and genitalled body’ (MacCormack 2005/6) need not suggest that to dehumanize is automatically to destroy. While the body as ‘meat’ may suggest a body that is ‘corporeally massacred’ from its human form (MacCormack 2005/6), this is ‘massacre not as murder, but as physical eruption’ (MacCormack 2005/6); an eruption that entwines the possibility of visceral pleasure and fascination within each unique act of inter-bodily engagement.

In consequently installing meat as somewhat of a ‘vagabond materiality’ (Bennett 2007) that enfolds a dynamic potential within its unravelled pleats of matter, the comparison of the *Body Worlds* cadavers to meat comes moreover to trouble the division between high and low bodily cultures by inserting the most ‘base’ (Harty 2008) matter into an exhibition space ostensibly committed to an overarching ‘museum ethos’ (Jones 2002: 436). However, even more

importantly, it also comes to thrust a zone of indiscernible yet nonetheless irreducible physicality into a hall of humanist inquiry. As Cohen Shabot (2005) suggests, meat thus comes to mark tangibly, in grotesque form, ‘that which exceeds us, that which threatens our sameness, our normality, our well-defined and protected presence in the world...this alterity, this absolute otherness into which, at the same time we are totally immersed’ (Cohen Shabot 2005: 92). Yet it is precisely this excess, ‘this alterity’ (Cohen Shabot 2005: 92) that cannot be maintained come the inevitable end of the ephemeral carnival. With the symbolic removal of meat comes ‘the last act of metamorphosis...the pressing together of lips’ (Cottom 2001: 23). For Cottom (2001) this carving of civilised bodily boundary may be as imaginary as it is violent; nonetheless it demonstrates a conflict still circulating at the heart of modernity. For while to seal the mouth may seem to secure the unstable yet nonetheless seemingly valuable lines between subject and object, viewer and viewer – even between human and animal – one nonetheless finds that gnawing at the margins of this world remains ‘this zone of the indiscernible’ (Deleuze 2005: 16); this zone of the uncertain; *this meat*.

Conclusion: With Lips Pressed Together?

In an animated short entitled *Meat Love* (1989), Czech surrealist artist Jan Svankmajer (1989) proffers a minute-long vision of carnal romance; two steaks shuddering alive to court and caper across a kitchen table before waltzing onto a bed of billowing flour to merge in seemingly ecstatic union. The seduction however is short but sweet; the slaughter swift but brutal, as the film abruptly ends with two prongs seizing these entwined embracing chunks of meat before thrusting them into a pan to fry. The playful and painful elements that co-exist in this short film can be seen to somewhat aptly embody our ambivalent relations with ‘this zone of the indiscernible’ (Deleuze 2005: 16); meat. While the editors of *meatpaper* may declare that we are living in something of a ‘fleischgeist’ (Standen and Wizansky 2007) grounded in a ‘growing cultural trend of meat consciousness’ (Standen and Wizansky 2007), nonetheless Harty (2008) argues that ‘to do other than strike an uneasy truce with meat...is virtually impossible’ (Harty 2008). It is perhaps this ill-ease with meat that explains the seeming reluctance of many thinkers to truly engage with this most ‘base’ of materials. After all, even Irigaray (1981), known proponent of a feminine economy grounded in touch, does not extend herself willingly to this carnal body; rather, declaring ‘no, no meat: I don’t want you dead inside me...I never wanted your meat’ (Irigaray and Werzel 1981: 60).

This aversion to an engagement with meat would seem no more apparent than in the comparison of the dissected bodies of the *Body Worlds* cadavers to filleted flesh. This association between the flayed corpse and meat may well appear to function as a powerful and evocative indictment not only of the clinical gaze of anatomy but a broader ocular economy seen to maintain the stern and violent subject/object dichotomy at the heart of modernity

through its conquering and consuming gaze (Grosz 1992: Braidotti 1994). However I suggest that to cry ‘meat!’ at this display as a synonym for dead, inert and dehumanized matter serves less to expose the sadistic consequences of this scopic drive than to reveal what Hacking (2007) has deemed the ‘neo-Cartesian desire’ (Hacking 2007: 93) to turn away from the body as ‘just stuff’ (Hacking 2007: 93), devoid of transformative potential. In this desire to leave the meat behind (Bell 2000: 555) lies the belief that one can eviscerate oneself of carnal orifice in order to declare oneself a coherent organism (‘...no, no meat: I never wanted you dead inside me...’ (Irigaray and Werzel 1981: 60); to declare that one has indeed beaten the meat.

Having introduced this problematic reading of meat in Chapter One, I bolster my argument by exploring how the association of the *Body Worlds* cadaver with meat as de-individuated, dehumanized matter functions within the context of the current concerns regarding the procurement of bodies for display in the growing number of body museums. If, as Heide Harty (2008) suggests, ‘having people interact with meat...is a way of addressing the typical deformation of people through any number of social and political processes’ (Harty 2008), the reversal of cannibal discourse by commentators onto both the anatomist and the audience of *Body Worlds* could be read as a logical extension of the body-as-meat discourse in seeming to visibly map *Body Worlds* as an exemplar of Western epistemic practices driven concurrently by the insatiable appetites of consumer capitalism. However I suggest that this charge of ‘Occidental anthropophagy’ (King 2000: 122) becomes another strategy through which meatiness is disavowed as one witnesses the construction of an ‘Eastern body’ as the paradigm of the *Body Worlds* plastinate, trapped in passive meat-ridden victimhood in a manner that serves to delimit living flesh to within the borders of an implicitly Western world.

Yet rather than continue to turn our backs upon meat as exemplifying only ‘the annihilation of the subject in itself’ (Adams 2000: 47), in the process contributing to what Sawday (2005) has deemed ‘a culture of dissection and its desire to partition the things of the world’ (Sawday in: Klaver 20005: 14), I install the meat-like cadaver as a grotesque body within a Bakhtinian world of carnivalesque consumption. Consequently transforming meat from ‘an absolute zero point of being’ (Harty 2008) into a site of becoming with dynamic potential enfolded within its pleats of matter, I draw upon MacCormack (2005/6) to argue that encounters with the cadavers of *Body Worlds* come to demand the necessary reconfiguration of self/other relations at every turn (MacCormack 2005/6). Yet it is undeniable that this sense of possibility is nonetheless tempered by the inevitable end of the carnival. If meat can be seen to exemplify in grotesque form ‘that which exceeds us, that which threatens our sameness, our normality, our well-defined and protected presence in the world...this alterity, this absolute otherness into which, at the same time we are totally immersed’ (Cohen Shabot 2005: 92), then it is precisely this excess that must be expelled as the carnival swirls to its climax. With ‘the last act of metamorphosis...the pressing together of lips’ (Cottom 2001: 23) comes, moreover, the removal of meat. Nonetheless the insistent presence of this visceral pulp of carnal physicality reveals meat less as the passive pole within a subject/object dichotomy perpetually grinding at the heart of modernity than as the excess that disturbs this very binary. It is this that I suggest still gnaws at the heart of contemporary epistemology; this ‘zone of the irreducible’ (Deleuze 2005: 15); this zone of the undecidable; *this meat*.

Through this exploration of ‘meat’ I aim to have opened up an understanding of *Body Worlds* that stretches beyond stale ethical debates that typically dominate discussions of the

exhibition. Instead I hope to have brought forth alternative and engaging ways through which we could approach the bodily engagements made possible in this most controversial of exhibits that extend beyond pre-configured structures of interaction such as that offered by the gendered gaze and its centralization of the all-consuming eye. However I would also suggest that this tension regarding meat as a 'zone of the indiscernible' (Deleuze 2005: 16) is not one that should be dismissed easily. While in recent years there appears to have been an explosion of discourses celebrating ontological slippage and boundary defilement - post-humanism and trans-humanism may particularly be cited here— nonetheless meat remains a site of discomfort. While I sought to explore other affective responses to this most visceral of elements than those associated with suffering and violence, nonetheless even within my own work the call to 'pity the meat' (Deleuze 2005: 16) - to hear its scream as Deleuze might have it (2005) - was never that far away. To this extent, if the spirit of times are indeed the spirit of meat, I suggest this reflects less a sense of pleasing reconciliation than a fundamental and continued ambivalence with this potent site of being (or should I say non-being?) that extends far beyond discussions of what we eat into who – or what - we are. Drawing upon the words of Harty (2008) I hope to have potentiated these tensions within the specific context of the *Body Worlds* exhibition, but 'to understand –viscerally – what is at stake' (Harty 2008) in our relation with meat; here I suggest, is where we should next begin.

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