

Moving Corpses Emotions and Subject-Object Ambiguity

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Introduction

In this chapter, I shall explore the emotional agency of material objects that consist of human remains, or that are casts of human body parts. Analyzing a number of cases, I shall argue that such objects are able to evoke strong and often contradictory emotions, partly because they problematize the 'subject-object' divide—the idea that humans are radically different from lifeless matter. The latter perspective implies, amongst other things, that material objects lack social and emotional agency—properties which are commonly regarded as distinguishing features of the human species. I shall argue, instead, that artefacts can actively trigger emotions and cause social action. The ability to move people to tears, evoke anger, or generate other emotions is particularly strong when material entities consist of human remains. This is not surprising, because encounters with lifeless beings confront subjects with their own *postmortum* object-status.

But what are emotions? In the last decades, anthropological theories of emotions have argued that emotions should neither be regarded as evolutionary bodily processes, a common biological approach, nor as intrapersonal mental states, a perspective that has long dominated psychology.¹ Even though particular individuals may experience emotional processes as 'forces beyond their control', or as 'highly personal feelings', these explanations are limited and reflect dominant Western assumptions which reinforce the Cartesian split between body and mind (cf. Lutz and White 1986). By contrast, as Csordas (1990, 1992), Leavitt (1996) and others have convincingly argued, emotional dynamics involve both physical and mental processes, and connect the individual and the social. People selectively interpret certain (and not other) bodily feelings as emotional states. How they objectify their sensations is shaped by both sociohistorical and cultural dynamics, and by individual idiosyncracies (Svašek 2005a).

This implies that emotions are complex experiential and discursive processes that often function as moral judgements—prescribing how one should (or should not) behave in specific situations. In the words of Michelle Rosaldo (1983: 136):

Insofar as all emotional states involve a mix of intimate, even physical experience, and a more or less conscious apprehension of, or 'judgement' concerning, self-and-situation, one might argue that emotions are, by definition, not passive 'states' but *moral 'acts'*. (italics in original).

The social embeddedness and moral imperative of many emotional processes does not, of course, imply that people can only experience emotions when surrounded by other people, but rather, that 'frequent social interaction is vital to the process of embodiment in which emotions are learned, felt and interpreted, and in which emotional ties are formed with relevant others' (Svášek 2005b: 201). Relevant others who act as emotional agents are not only other human beings, but also include nonhuman phenomena such as animals, landscapes, artefacts and works of art (cf. Knight 2005; Milton 2005; Svášek 2005c, 2007). Furthermore, people's emotional life is not only shaped by direct confrontations with human or nonhuman environments, but also by inner dialogues with internalized presences—embodied memories and imaginations of phenomena in these environments (cf. Casey 1987: 244; Svášek 2005b: 201).

But how are lifeless things able to affect emotional dynamics? How do objects actively generate emotional processes, and how do people respond to objects emotionally? In this chapter, I shall emphasize three processes in particular. First of all, people frequently experience and discursively construct the things that surround them as subject-like phenomena. They may, for example, swear at their old car when the engine fails to start, or stroke its dashboard in an act of encouragement. A positive 'response' from the car will evoke genuine feelings of relief, which may be communicated to the car through words of gratefulness and praise. In such cases, objects are clearly imagined and experienced as emotional agents that have the ability to challenge, anger and please. Their subject-like 'behaviour' has real emotional impact, even though the interacting person (in this particular example, the driver) remains conscious of their lifeless object status.

Secondly, the fact that people and objects often move together through space and time also stimulates people's experience of artefacts as active subject-like emotional agents. Imagine, for example, someone who has owned a bag for many years. The bag has accompanied this person frequently on different trips, to different locations, as no other person has done. It has held a variety of possessions, has been endlessly filled, emptied and refilled, thrown in corners, picked up with care, lost, found and cleaned, slowly becoming a personal item with a very familiar shape, touch, weight, colour and smell. From an experiential perspective, the value of the bag cannot, or can no longer, be measured in terms of its commodity value, as the bag has

rather become a 'precious' part of the multiple self, a subject-like emotional agent (cf. Svášek 2005b: 202), and an extension of one's body.

Thirdly, as memories of emotional encounters guide and motivate our continued exploration of our environment' (Milton 2005: 34), expectations vis-à-vis material realities influence the ways in which we respond to them emotionally. Think, for instance, of a Catholic person who has learnt to perceive a crucifix as a sacred sign of Christ and automatically respond to it through proper embodied engagement—feeling respect and making the sign of the cross. Such a person will instantly react with horror when he or she comes across a crucifix that has been sprayed with insulting graffiti. As will become clear throughout this analysis, the knowledge that the manipulation of matter may cause particular reactions in others is a powerful way in which people distribute their own emotional agency.

But what when objects consist of human remains? How are corpses or parts of corpses actively involved in emotional processes? Human remains—as former thinking and feeling bodies—possess a past of emotional subjectivity. As such, they are radically different from subject-like objects that have never cried, blushed or run away in fear (even though people in various contexts may of course imagine material realities as being bewitched or animated in other ways). At the same time, there is no doubt that human remains have object-like characteristics. Through death, they have transformed into lifeless matter, which can be moved around, taken to pieces and 'processed' in various ways. In this chapter, I shall discuss the emotional and moral dimensions of such transformative processes, and offer some initial thoughts about the emotional agency of human body parts and their casts. The discussion will focus on five rather different categories of objects: death masks, national monuments, works of art, anatomical specimens and ethnographic objects.

The Widow and the Death Mask: Grief and Mourning

On 6 September 2003 the German tabloid *Bild*² showed the photograph of an elderly woman behind the wheel, leaning over to the seat next to her, caressing the death mask of her late husband, the famous actor Klaus Löwitz. The widow explained:

To me, Klaus is not dead. I talk to him, and he is always with me. At first I put the mask in bed with me, but then Klaus remarked: 'I'd rather drive around in the car' ... Klaus loves to drive long stretches. When we are on the road, he always wears a warm hat ... I cannot touch him but I feel him. That's a big consolation. (*Bild* 1993: 4)³

The bronze cast did not mean to celebrate the actor's professional status, but rather helped the widow to actively engage with her own memories of her husband. The couple's lifetime emotional interaction and the sad experience of his death had

deceased (graves, urns, portraits, and the like). As a fifty-year-old female, even from Berlin noted: 'She must really love her husband, but this is insane'. This comment reminds us that, in the context of the wider public, the death mask gained new emotional agency, triggering negative, morally loaded responses. Numerous other people I spoke with about the case argued that the widow had overstepped certain ethical boundaries by disrespecting common practices concerning the treatment of the dead. A thirty-five-year-old shop keeper, also from Berlin, suggested that, maybe unintentionally, the widow had made a complete fool of her husband. He thought the mask looked ridiculous with its white cap on, hanging on a string on the front seat of the car. If the actor had known about it, the man argued, he would have been highly embarrassed, and would certainly have objected to his wife's handling of his image. He himself, he added, dreaded the thought that something similar would happen to him after his death. The latter comment shows again the ambiguous subject-object status of corpses and their casts. Thinking about the case, the speaker actively engaged both with the image of the death mask (as object) and the actor it represented (as subject). His comments also illustrate the uneasiness casts of corpses can create, confronting onlookers with their own mortality.

Death as Political Statement: Martyrdom and Nationalist Sentiments

It is interesting to compare the case of the actor's death mask with a second death mask that was produced in a rather different context, namely the death mask of the Czech student Jan Palach. Palach's death had not just been a personal tragedy, but more importantly, a conscious moral and political statement. The anger and despair, which led to his suicide, reflected the feelings of many Czechoslovak citizens when their country was invaded by Warsaw Pact forces in the late 1960s. The Soviet-led invasion put an end to Alexander Dubček's 'socialism with a human face', a liberating political movement which had diverted from hard-line Soviet-style state socialism. On 16 January 1969, in an extreme act of protest to the invasion, Palach burnt himself to death in Prague on Wenceslas Square. Shocked students organized meetings during which they raised 200,000 Czechoslovak crowns to build a memorial in Palach's honour, which would support his cause. The director of Charles University, who did not yet realize how drastically the invasion would change the political climate in the country, commissioned the official Union of Visual Artists to make a memorial plaque, which was to be mounted at the Philosophical Faculty where Palach had studied (Svašek 1996: 109).

During a meeting of the Art Union's central committee, committee members proposed to take a death mask from Palach's face. The art historian Jindřich Chaloupecký stated in an interview with the art journal *Výtvarná Práce* (Creative Work): 'We recommend that a death mask be mounted on the memorial plaque. I think it is really

anchored memories in the widow's body and mind. Active as internalized presences, these memories generated a range of feelings and meanings, including experiences of love and grief.

The externally present death mask played an important role in the mourning process. From the perspective of Peircean semiotics, the cast was both an iconic sign, sharing some of the characteristics with the person it represented, and an index, a "natural sign" ... from which the observer can make a causal inference of some kind, or an inference about the intentions or capabilities of another person' (Gell 1998: 13). As such, it had 'secondary agency', the power to evoke emotions and cause social action, actively influencing the widow's experience.

Gell made a distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' agents, and defined primary agents as 'intentional beings who, through their actions, produce causal reactions in others' (Gell 1998: 20). Primary agents, he noted, use secondary agents to 'distribute their [own primary] agency in the causal milieu, and thus render their agency effective'. It is important to note that primary agents are not just those who produce objects, but also those who use and display them in different ways in different contexts. In the case of the actor's death mask, both the actor, who (I assume) had agreed to the making of the cast before his death, and the widow, who consciously used the cast to express her love and grief for her husband, were primary agents. The actor had extended his agency posthumously, as he had expected that his death mask would set in motion certain, to him desirable, emotional reactions in his wife. The widow distributed her agency through the mask as it actively identified herself as a 'mourning widow', a new status she herself had to get used to.

The widow's interaction with the mask reinforced her feelings of love for her deceased husband, but also (at least potentially) allowed her to slowly come to terms with her loss. Its material presence enabled her to create some sort of continuity with the past, allowing her to enact their relationship in real time and space. In the form of the death mask, her 'husband' was still there to see and touch. As an indexical sign, the object strengthened her husband's active presence in the widow's embodied thoughts. Her dealing with the death mask demonstrates that grief-related behaviour should thus not be understood as purely mentalist reliving of the past, but as a process of active imagination and embodied material engagement (cf. Seremetakis 1994: 9).⁵ What is more, this embodied engagement with the object added another dimension to her relationship with her husband. She could now remember him (as she had done before) as an independent living human being, and as a willing object that could be handled according to her own wishes.

Several Germaus I spoke with about the case⁶ noted that they fully understood the widow's need for the death mask, as it obviously helped her to live with his absence. Yet some were shocked or angered by the fact that she had taken the mask out into the public realm, outside the personal space of her home, and outside spaces designed for public mourning that traditionally house material reminders of the

the best solution, a direct cast of his face will remind the students of Jan Palach. Not a heroic portrait but a document, the injured and swollen face of a dead person' (Burda 1969: 10). Yet the plans to create a memorial for Palach were thwarted by the return of an oppressive, pro-Soviet regime. Dubček was sidelined and replaced by hard-line communists, such as President Svoboda and Gustav Husák. The sculptor Olbram Zoubek had, however, taken an imprint of Palach's burnt face, which he hid in a secret place (Svašek 1996: 111).

During the twenty years of political 'normalization' that followed, Palach's corpse was initially buried at the Olšanská Cemetery in Prague.⁷ The grave became an emotionally loaded memorial site, which points out that corpses do not need to be actively seen to have an impact on people's feelings. Through memory and imagination, the dead continue to speak to our hearts. Visitors spoke back, expressing their admiration for Palach's heroic deed, by leaving candles, flowers and other symbolic objects.

In October 1973, in an attempt to stop the illegal pilgrimages, Palach's remains were exhumed and cremated and were moved to his home town of Vsetat. Yet as a brave martyr who had died because of foreign oppression, Palach had become an emotionally evocative symbol of political resistance. As a powerful internalized presence, he continued to trigger antistatist protests and spark off illegal commemorations of his suicidal act. On 15 January 1989, for example, the evening before the twentieth anniversary of Palach's suicidal act, the police prevented a demonstration during which the actress Vlasta Chádimová had planned to read a document written by Charter 77, entitled 'In Memory of Jan Palach'. Fourteen demonstrators, including the well-known dissident (and later president) Václav Havel, were detained when they tried to lay flowers on the site where Palach had set himself on fire.

Not surprisingly, after the collapse of Communism in 1989, 'Palach' became an official symbol of freedom and democracy. In 1990, he was given the T. G. Masaryk Order,⁸ and his remains were returned to the Olšanská Cemetery. The square in front of the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University was officially renamed 'Jan Palach Square', and the sculptor Olbram Zoubek, who had secretly taken the imprint of Palach's burnt face in 1969, was commissioned to use the death mask to design a national memorial. Zoubek mounted the cast on a rectangular bronze plaque, which also showed his signature, and the date of his death.

The symbol 'Palach' was incorporated into a political narrative which imagined the Czechs as a nation of victims who had almost constantly struggled against different forms of oppression. Radio Prague (*Radio Praha*) claimed, for example, that Jan Palach's deed symbolized the Czech past, because

[t]hroughout history, there was hardly any time when Czechs didn't have to fight for their freedom. And throughout history, there were those who didn't hesitate to sacrifice their lives in order to encourage and unite the intimidated and resigned nation. (<http://archiv.radio.cz/palach99/eng/aktual3.html>: 1)

In this narrative, three historical figures acted as freedom fighters and symbols of democracy. First, the Catholic Church reformer Jan Hus who was burnt at the stake in 1415; second, the student Jan Opletal who was shot in 1939 during the German occupation; and third, Jan Palach, who burnt himself to death in 1969. As the Web site notes:

[f]or Czechs, [these] three names will always symbolise truth, freedom and democracy ... three names used to uplift the crushed spirits in times of oppression, and the very names used to trouble the authorities whose power was based on force rather than democracy.

The Palach memorial added a direct, physical presence to this nationalist understanding of Czech history. The fact that the cast showed the 'real' scars of a person who had died 'for the nation' turned it into an even more powerful and evocative artefact. A twenty-year-old female student told me in 2001: 'I normally don't really notice the monument because I'll just be rushing past it to our Faculty. But sometimes I stop and really look at his face. Then I admire Palach for his courage, and feel proud to be Czech.'

As with the actor's death mask in the previous example, this object was both an iconic sign and an index. As a 'secondary agent', it did not only distribute Palach's primary agency (whose main aim had been to discredit the communists and propagate democratic values), but also served as a proof of the 'collective' suffering of the Czech nation. It criticized foreign intervention and heroized public protest, actively reinforcing nationalist sentiments. This again shows that objects can function as active agents, generating emotions and moral judgements. In the Palach case, they had a clear political subtext.⁹

Body Parts as 'Art': Outrage over Anthony-Noel Kelly's Sculptures

In the case of Palach's death mask, no moral objections were made in relation to the fact that a Czech artist had secretly taken a cast of a dead face. As noted earlier, this is understandable, because the making of the mask and its subsequent transformation into a national monument was perceived to be in line with Palach's own political intentions. This public acceptance stands in sharp contrast with the moral outrage that flared up in Britain when it was revealed that the British artist Anthony-Noel Kelly had secretly used casts of human body parts in his sculptures. When Kelly displayed the works in an art exhibition in 1997, some viewers became suspicious and contacted the police. During the investigation, human remains were discovered on the grounds of Kelly's home in Kent, and in the basement of a flat in London. Officers discovered that, with the help of a laboratory technician, the artist had stolen around forty anatomical specimens from the Royal College of Surgeons. In 1998 he was convicted and sentenced to a nine-month jail term.

I understand there's a reverence for dead bodies which I don't share. Working with dead things is therapeutic. It gives me pleasure and balance. (http://www.varisty.cam.ac.uk/802567B80049EF7D/Pages/932000_AnohonyNoelKelly_1)

The main cause of anger was, however, not that the artist had simply 'worked with dead things', but rather that he had done this illegally, and without the consent of the deceased. The individuals whose body parts were cast by Kelly had donated their bodies 'to science'; they had not agreed to be turned into objects of art. Their surviving relatives had not given their consent either. Kelly's works thus evoked strong criticism because he had denied the last wishes of the deceased to distribute their own primary agency through the specimens. Instead he had used the corpses for his own artistic aims, turning them from scientifically relevant anatomical samples into objects of personal therapeutic and aesthetic value.

To gather some opinions about this case, I approached some of my friends, a number of anthropology students at Queen's University Belfast, and a few people I met in public places in England. 'I find this disgusting', a thirty-two-year-old hairdresser from London told me. 'It gives me the creeps, the thought of Kelly with these poor dead people, who thought they were helping medical science. A really scary body snatcher, you know, like straight from a horror movie'. The image of the evil body snatcher has been widely used in popular culture, especially in films. Drawing on the emotionally powerful narrative of 'mythical struggles between good and evil', the accusation marked Kelly as an utterly amoral being.

Some people's fury was also directed at Kelly's claim that the works had aesthetic value. As a thirty-three-year-old builder from the north of England whom I met in a pub in Lancashire said:

I thought art had to aspire to try and recreate the best of the human body, like that's what the Greeks and Romans tried to do, but nicking a body and sticking it on a pedestal don't involve no skill, does it. I mean I could have done that and so could my grandma, and it wouldn't make us Michelangelo, and we wouldn't get paid millions for it either, and they expect us to think that this modern art stuff is great. They should learn to fucking paint a picture or something.

In fact, this angry reaction is what many postmodern artists like Kelly aim for, who intend to question the more established boundaries between 'art' and 'non-art' (Svašek 2007). They purposely break taboos, and many have tried to create shock effects through the use of cadavers and body fluids in their art. Damien Hirst, for example, has become famous for his pickled animals. Marc Quinn is

known for his sculptural self-portraits, filled with his own blood, and Andres Serrano created furor with 'Piss Christ', a crucifix submerged in the artist's own urine.

Closer to Kelly's case and the ethical concerns it raised was a statue by Rick Gibson, created in 1985. The work, entitled 'Human Earrings' showed a plastic hairdresser's head in a perspex case with two twelve-week-old dried human foetuses hanging from her ears. As Walker (1999) commented, the case revealed the public availability of dead body parts. Gibson told one newspaper that he was given them by a lecturer in pathology after placing an advert for 'legally preserved human limbs and foetuses' in a gallery window. Not surprisingly, 'Human Earrings' evoked angry responses. When it was exhibited in 1987 at an exhibition in the Young Unknowns Gallery, the police removed the statue and Gibson and the gallery owner were charged. In 1989, they were found guilty of committing 'an act of a disgusting nature outraging public decency' and were fined £500 and £350 respectively.

When I talked about the case with a number of anthropology students at Queen's University Belfast in 2002, some accused the artist of disrespecting human life. In the words of a mature female student and mother from Belfast: 'the fact that these foetuses have been exhibited as art makes me physically sick. I am an open-minded person, but I find this unacceptable. They are, after all, human life. Even though I approve of abortion and do not think that embryos have an automatic right to live, they do have the right to be treated respectfully'. Another student noted: 'It is awful, how can you do such a thing? Unborn life needs to be protected, these are small babies, you cannot treat them like dirt'. These views were close to the accusations expressed during the trial that Gibson had 'mutilated the foetuses' (Walker 1999: 152).

The comments show that the corpses of embryos have a rather special emotional agency. They are not only, like all corpses, ambiguous subject-object phenomena, but they also draw on emotional debates amongst prolife and proabortion activists that question the sometimes unclear boundaries between life and potential life. Anger and disgust, in this case, functioned as a moral judgement and as an attempt to set certain rules.

Interestingly, Rick Gibson claimed to have made the statue in order to address exactly such issues; to pose ethical questions about the use and misuse of human embryos. He proclaimed that he had intended 'not to offend visitors but to intrigue them, to make them think about what materials are suitable for art and adornment, and about the ethics of using such objects' (Walker 1999: 151-2). Whatever the artist's intentions, it is clear that he had deliberately called upon the emotional power of dead embryos to attract the attention of the wider public, thus distributing his own agency as a daring, provocative artist. His critics, by contrast, emphasized the subject status, the personhood of the foetuses, and the fact that neither they, nor

their parents, had had a choice in the matter—whether or not to pose as carrions. Evidently, the critics also used the focuses as secondary agents to communicate their own passionate opinions.

Displaying Anatomical Specimens: Art, Science or Embarrassment?

Lack of consent and dubious claims to beauty were also major reasons why the German anatomist Günther von Hagen faced fierce protests after he had launched the exhibition 'Body Worlds: Fascination Beneath the Surface' in Mannheim in 1998. Like Hirst and Gibson, von Hagen displayed real corpses and body parts, but his exhibits were not dried or preserved in formaldehyde. Instead, the anatomist had developed the method of plastination in 1977, a technique which replaced bodily fluids in cadavers by reactive plastics in a special vacuum process. This method preserved the original colours of human tissue and allowed the anatomist to manipulate individual body parts in intricate ways.

In 1994, von Hagen established the Institut für Plastination in Heidelberg, which received specimens from various sources. Some came from existing anatomical collections, others from donors who had expressed the wish to be plastinated after their death, and other bodies had been bequeathed to the institute by their survivors. The remaining specimens were unclaimed corpses that had been purchased by von Hagen in China and Russia (<http://www.channell4.com/science/mitrosites/A/anatomists/hagens1.html>: 1–2).

For the 'Body Worlds' exhibition, von Hagen and his team processed human corpses in several ways and displayed them in various positions, playing on their subject-object ambiguity. In 'exploded-view' specimens, body parts were pulled in different directions to enable a good view of all the details. 'Open-door' specimens were hinged, allowing a closer look at the corpses' interiors, and 'open-drawer' specimens included movable parts. Other specimens consisted of thin slices, either of whole bodies or of particular body parts. These samples clearly dehumanized the human body as scientific *objects*—as artefact-like things that could be opened, closed or taken to pieces. At the same time, other exhibits emphasized the *subject* status of the samples, creating humorous or dramatic narratives. A male body, for example, was stripped of his skin, which was hung from one of his raised hands, so that it seemed as if he was hanging up his coat. Another skinned male was riding the corpse of a skinned horse, holding his own brain in one hand and the horse's in another. A third exhibit showed a pregnant woman, reclined on her side. She held her left arm up behind her head to enable a better view of the dead embryo inside her. Other samples showed the result of unhealthy lifestyles, such as the lungs of a heavy smoker. The latter triggered viewers to think about the possible consequences of their own behaviour, pushing them to make a connection between their own and the corpses' subject status.

Von Hagen's Web site noted that 'Body Worlds' was purposefully made visually attractive in order to serve an important educational aim, offering the general public the enjoyment of 'fascinating insights into the human body', a privilege that had, so far, been 'confined to medicine students and anatomists'. On the Web site, visitors expressed strong admiration for von Hagen's hard and courageous work, and claimed to have learned a great deal (<http://www.koerperwelten.com/en/pages/ausstellungeninhalte.asp>: 1).

The controversial exhibition was, however, strongly criticized in German and international media. Religious leaders, philosophers, medics, artists, law specialists and many others participated in the ethical debate about the display of human corpses (cf. Rager and Rinsdorf 2001). This again demonstrates that objects, whether works of art or medical samples, can have consequential emotional agency. Some critics of 'Body Worlds' fiercely objected to the exhibition, claiming that it disturbed the peace of the dead, that it destroyed basic human rights and values, or that it was unethical to use corpses from people who had not given their consent. Several churches held services for the souls of the plastinated cadavers. Other critics argued that von Hagen had turned death into a mere spectacle, or that the exhibits were simply macabre kitsch objects that easily responded to the onlookers' sentimental and artistic expectations, but yet without any real aesthetic value. Furthermore, numerous anatomists pointed out that the display was scientifically worthless because it provided minimal new anatomical knowledge (Wetz and Tag 2001: 9–11). Interestingly, the debates either focused on the bodies' subject status, discursively constructing them as 'souls', or as 'people with certain rights', or stressed that they were worthless objects in terms of their scientific or aesthetic value.

Yet despite the widespread criticism, 'Body Worlds' was a highly successful exhibition. It attracted 550,000 visitors in Vienna, 600,000 in Basel, more than 1.5 million in Cologne and Oberhausen, and over 2.5 million in Japan. But what did the visitors expect, and how did their expectations shape their emotional experience of the display? The sociologist Ernst D. Lantermann (2001) interviewed around 3,200 visitors in Vienna, Basel and Cologne, and found that, before entering the exhibition, 82 per cent of those interviewed had been extremely curious, 25 per cent had felt fear, and 19 per cent had experienced mixed feelings. Most respondents expected to gain anatomical knowledge and to increase their respect for the wonder and beauty of human nature. Others thought the exhibition would urge them to become more reflexive about life and death, or to adopt a healthier life style.¹⁰ Only five per cent feared that the display would offend their moral values. Evidently, these responses are far more positive than those expressed in the public debates, reflecting the fact that the respondents had chosen to visit the exhibition. After having visited the exhibition, 89 per cent noted that they had indeed learned a lot about human anatomy; 69 per cent had become more concerned about the vulnerability of their own bodies, and 39 per cent said they felt more respect for their own bodies. Three per cent of the visitors expressed outrage about the display, claiming that the exhibition makers disrespected basic human values.

The subject-object ambiguity of the exhibits—the fact that they were real bodies whether positively or negatively experienced, clearly gave the samples a powerful aura. As a British journalistic report noted:

[p]eople who have seen the show have said that they were torn between being fascinated and incredibly frightened by what von Hagen had done. They say that if they hadn't known what they were about to see before they walked in, they would have just assumed they were extremely impressive anatomical models, and if we were all able to think of them as just that—models—we would also agree that they were fascinating. However, at the back of our minds we cannot escape from the fact that they were real people. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/alabaster/A804322>, last accessed 14-11-2006)¹¹

As with famous art works, the 'authenticity' of the corpses strongly increased their emotional force. In von Hagen's words: '[n]either illustrations nor models can convey the individual beauty of these structures to us, for the source of truth is in the originals' (<http://www.koerperwelten.com/en/pages/ausstellungeninhalte.asp>: 2). The anatomist made his aesthetic claims more emphatically by positioning some of the specimens in poses that reminded visitors of well-known art works.

Numerous critics strongly objected to the display of human remains as 'pieces of installation art'. The BBC Web site compared the aesthetic manipulation of body parts to infamous Nazi practices.¹² In Lantermann's study, 29 per cent of the respondents objected to von Hagen's 'artistic' presentation, arguing that anatomical specimens should not be displayed as aesthetic artefacts.¹³ This reminds us of the furor around the art works by Kelly and Gibson, and the arguments about the disparity between artists' and dead subjects' desires. It also brings home that context and context-dependent expectations strongly influence people's perceptions and emotional judgements. The display of corpses may be acceptable to some viewers in scientific environments that breathe an atmosphere of cool rationality, while they would object to their incorporation into more joyful, playful settings that emphatically offer experiences of beauty.

In 'Body Worlds', the causal nature of lifeless matter was also obvious in other ways. Interviewed immediately after their visit to 'Body Worlds', 53 per cent of the visitors claimed that they planned to take better care of their health in the future. Six months later, some had reduced smoking (25 per cent), increased sport activities (18 per cent), or reduced their alcohol intake (11 per cent) (Lantermann 2001). Not surprisingly, the 'Body Worlds' exhibition also stimulated visitors to think about their own postmortem destination, and a number of visitors decided to donate their bodies for plastination to von Hagen's Institute.¹⁴ Noting that over three thousand people had signed the consent forms, the BBC Web site questioned their motivations:

Are the three thousand simply looking for a route to immortality, or do they consider themselves worthy of becoming a 'cultural or educational asset'? If their reaction were

This adds another dimension to the emotional agency of subject-objects—through plastinated body parts, deceased subjects may challenge ideas of the living about the postmortal distribution of human agency. And through public expressions of anger and concern, the latter may openly doubt the morality of the former.

Tsankas: Exotic Human Remains As Ethnographic Objects

The 'Body Worlds' case showed that the scientific status of anatomical specimens can justify the appearance of human remains in the public realm (even though, as the case showed, it does not necessarily convince all members of the public). In my own discipline of anthropology, human remains have also been presented under the umbrella of science, discursively constructed and displayed as 'ethnographic objects' in ethnographic collections. This last section will analyze the changing emotional agency of Jivaro *tsankas*, shrunken heads from the Amazon region, as they were moved from this region to changing museum settings in Europe.

Traditionally, the Jivaro regarded shrunken heads as powerful matter which possessed transferable human agency. Roughly until the second half of the twentieth century, Jivaro men had the obligation to avenge death within their own lineages through headhunting, killing a member of a rival lineage. The opponent's head was shrunken through a complex procedure, taking out the skull, boiling the remaining head, and filling it with hot stones or sand. The aim of the captor was to paralyze the spirit of the enemy, and take its power to please the ancestors and increase one's own status and well-being. By stealing the dead, Jivaro believed they diminished the capabilities for future existence of rival groups, and increased the chance for survival of their own lineage. As Anne Christine Taylor (1993: 671) has noted:

The ritual of the *tsankas* ... is built around the gradual transformation of an unknown foe first into an affine, and at a later stage into a focus to be born of a woman in the captors' group. The purpose of head-hunting is not therefore merely to kill an antagonist and display him as a trophy, but rather to capture a dead enemy, and then operate on the elements that constitute him.

After the ritual transition of life potential, *tsankas* were regarded as empty, powerless objects. They were tossed away or kept as harmless war trophies.

In the nineteenth century, European and American collectors of exotic artefacts became fascinated by the phenomenon of the *tsankas*. The shrunken heads embodied everything they regarded as 'primitive'—'jawless, uncontrolled fierceness—and they

materials are interpreted in a respectful manner. In other words, the new displays intended to prove and distribute the new moral claims of the museum staff. Instead of presenting the *tsamisas* as spectacular indices of primitive otherness and horror, as had happened earlier, the museum now aimed to spark interest in human diversity without evolutionary connotations. The museum also worked together with members of ethnic groups to whom the human remains had once belonged. As a result, Maori remains were returned to Australian Aboriginal communities in 1987, and skeletal remains were returned to Australian Aboriginal communities in 1990. The changed policy clearly showed how human body parts can evoke different emotional processes and cause distinct social actions throughout history. Even though the specimens remained constant in terms of their materiality, with regard to emotional dynamics, their symbolic and indexical impact varied considerably.

Conclusion: Subject/Object Ambiguity and Emotional Agency

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that matter has emotional efficacy, and that material objects distribute the primary agency of their producers and users who experience and construct them as mediators of their own desires, fears and convictions. Objects are thus often perceived as subject-like forces, which—like human subjects—exist in time and space. Experienced through the senses, they express and evoke emotions and make themselves 'known' as bodily felt and imaged internalized presences. Human body parts and their casts have a particularly strong emotional agency; they are ambiguous phenomena that problematize the subject-object divide more fundamentally. On the one hand, as lifeless substance, human remains and casts of human remains are 'things' that can be moved, displayed or manipulated by adding bits or taking bits away. On the other hand, they are clearly the remains of human individuals, who may be dead but who have a past of emotional sociality.

In the five cases discussed in this chapter, the emotional force of the ambiguous subject/object depended on a number of factors. First of all, the material characteristics mattered. The actual presence of *real* human flesh added an authentic feel to the confrontation between the living and the dead, and this influenced the emotional impact on the onlookers. Even when viewers were presented with *casts* of human flesh, the knowledge that they bore an imprint of 'real people', and that the producers of the casts had touched and handled 'real' human corpses influenced their emotional efficacy. Not surprisingly, questions of authority were frequently asked about people's right to manipulate and display dead bodies and their casts.

This brings us to the second factor of context. In different types of contexts, different professional codes of conduct dominated that corresponded with distinct emotional responses and moral judgements. While the practice of studying and displaying corpses and their casts was generally regarded as an acceptable practice in medical and scientific settings (even though there have recently been numerous cases

were therefore excellent ethnographic examples of the earlier stage of human progress. The so-called civilized nations thus utilized the *tsamisas* to evoke feelings of horror about the primitive bloodthirstiness of early man, and feelings of superiority about their own supposedly rational manners. The changed emotional agency of the *tsamisas* (from triggers of pride over victory to triggers of horror and self-righteousness) shows what was noted earlier, namely that objects can be used by different people to generate different types of emotional reactions. In the Western context, the subject status of the shrunken heads was emphasized in a particular way; the items were displayed as physical examples of people who belonged to a cruel and primitive race.

Not surprisingly, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many ethnographic museums that propagated the theory of social evolution acquired shrunken heads for their collections. The Jivaro were eager to exchange them for more useful goods, such as guns and bullets. From the 1850s onwards, the *tsamisas* trade grew steadily, and this stimulated the production of counterfeit shrunken heads. In the late nineteenth century, an adventurer reported that a counterfeiter in Panama had used the heads of unclaimed hospital corpses, 'white men, black men, Chinese men and natives', to meet the demand of interested tourists (<http://www.head-hunter.com/fakes.html>:1, 2). The growing trade also increased Jivaro warfare, and the Peruvian and Ecuadorian governments passed severe laws to stop the traffic of human heads.

Between 1884 and 1936, the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford acquired ten *tsamisas*. For the biggest part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the ownership and display of human remains, such as shrunken heads, was regarded as unproblematic. Of the over 275,000 objects collected, about 2,000 are human remains, or are artefacts made of human remains. This collection includes 300 skulls or parts of skulls, 600 bones or objects made of bones, 400 specimens of hair, 300 artefacts made out of hair, and several teeth and artefacts consisting of teeth (<http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/human.html>).

In the 1990s, influenced by increasingly critical discussions amongst anthropologists about the ethics of displaying human remains and the issue of cultural ownership, staff from the Pitt Rivers Museum participated in a working group to discuss the ownership and display of human body parts. This led to the publication in 1994 of the UK Museum Ethnographers Group's 'Professional Guidelines Concerning the Storage, Display, Interpretation and Return of Human Remains'. On its Web site, the museum ensured 'the highest possible standard of care for human remains and artefacts made with human remains', and pointed out that it had introduced innovations in its exhibition practices, having 'begun to redisplay cases that include human remains to ensure that the intended educational and cultural information is communicated well and that the displays are respectful to both visitors and the dead'.

The artefacts were recontextualized through the explanation of their local significance in the region of origin and display of them amongst comparative material from around the world. The *tsamisas*, for example, appeared in a case that was rather neutrally entitled 'Treatment of Dead Enemies'. The Web site stressed that '[t]hese

of misconduct in Britain), the outrage over the exhibition of anatomical specimens in the 'Body Worlds' exhibition clarified that human remains cannot, according to many critics, be studied by just anybody, and that there are different opinions as to how human remains should be presented to the wider public. As long as the corpses were displayed as 'scientific samples', and the scientific context was presented as a utilitarian realm of action, aiming to improve human well-being while respecting human rights and values (however defined), the display of human remains seemed more or less unproblematic to most people. When, however, aesthetic considerations came into play, many commentators thought that morality was at stake. With regard to aesthetic aims, the outrage was fiercest when body parts or their casts were presented as 'art' in artistic contexts, as clearly shown by the Kelly case.

The factor of consent—had the subject (or the subject's relatives) agreed with his or her postmortal transformation into a particular class of objects?—was vital to the debates, and emotional judgements (anger, outrage, disgust) were clear moral statements. Only in the case of Jan Palach's death mask, nobody doubted that the student would have agreed to the transformation of his facial imprint into a national monument. His primary agency was reinforced through the making of the monument. In all the other cases, critical questions were raised about the right of the living to manipulate or process human corpses. There were accusations of disrespect for the primary agency of the deceased, and of misusing the corpses for other people's own artistic, therapeutic, or political goals. In some of the cases, anxiety about the inability to control their own postmortem existence as lifeless matter strongly shaped negative emotional judgements. This is not surprising, as death awaits us all.

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Notes

1. But see, for example, Parkinson (1995) for an approach in psychology which focuses on the social dynamics of emotions.
2. The article was entitled: 'This is How the Widow Löwitz Takes her Klaus for a Drive' (*So fährt Witwe Löwitz ihren Klaus spazieren*).
3. 'Klaus ist für mich nicht tot. Ich rede mit ihm, und er ist immer bei mir. Die Maske habe ich erst zu mir ins Bett gelegt, aber da meinte Klaus: Ich fahre lieber Auto ... Klaus liebt weite Strecken. Wenn wir unterwegs sind, trägt er immer eine warme Mütze ... Ich kann ihn nicht greifen, aber fühlen. Das ist für mich Trost'.
4. Gell conceptualized subject-object relations as a dialectical process in which subjects produced objects, and vice versa. His theory of art and enchantment attacked semiotic and discursive views of artefacts as sign-vehicles with aesthetic properties. Gell noted that: 'The innumerable shades of social/emotional responses to artefacts (of terror, desire, awe, fascination, etc.) in the unfolding patterns of social life cannot be encompassed or reduced to aesthetic feelings; not without making the aesthetic response so generalized as to be altogether meaningless' (1998: 6). Gell claimed to be the first to have formulated a truly *anthropological* theory of art which refused to be lured by aesthetic arguments. He criticized the culturalist relativist aim to study indigenous aesthetic systems because 'such a programme is exclusively cultural, rather than social' (1998: 2).
5. 'Memory cannot be confined to a purely mentalist or subjective sphere. It is a culturally mediated material practice that is activated by embodied acts and semantically dense objects' (Seremetakis 1994: 9; quoted by Hallam and Hockey 2001: 11).
6. I spoke with eight of my German friends and acquaintances about the case, including five women and three men, all aged between thirty and fifty years old. The group included three nannies, one interpreter, one housewife, two journalists and one shopkeeper.
7. The Web site of Radio Praha noted that on 25 January 1969, Jan Palach was 'buried in Prague at the Olsany cemeteries; the funeral included a ceremony at the Karolinum organized by Petr Josef Vlimek, who was the state's witness

of Palach's dead, Zdenek Tors said farewell to Palach for the Prague student-ry, the funeral became a large demonstration for freedom and democracy; the coffin with Palach's remains was displayed in the Karolinum as an act of last respects. Academic functionaries, artists, students, and several politicians took their turns at the coffin. The evening after the funeral, church dignitaries held a funeral mass for the deceased', <<http://archiv.radio.cz/palach99/eng>> accessed 14 November 2006.

8. Masaryk was the first president of the Czechoslovak state that was founded in 1918. He strongly defended democratic values and became a symbol of anti-communist struggle for those who opposed the state-socialist system.
9. Under Communism, 'suffering for the nation' had not been a common experience at all. To many, Palach's monument was therefore a more abstract symbol of shared nationhood, and a reminder of their own, less heroic political choices at the time of the invasion. It must also be noted that the sculptor Zoubek distributed his own, personal agency as 'dissident artist' through the monument. In numerous art catalogues, the monument was listed as one of his important artistic products.
10. Eighty-eight per cent of the visitors interviewed expected increased knowledge about the human body, 63 per cent expected to gain respect for the 'wonder' of the human body, 53 per cent hoped to be stimulated to adopt a healthier life style, and 41 per cent thought that the confrontation with the corpses would make them more reflexive about life and death. In addition, 41 per cent of the visitors hoped that the exhibition would offer them an aesthetically pleasing experience.
11. Mary Roach pointed out in a study of the handling of human cadavers by professionals (including medical anatomical specimens, human crash test dummies, bodies used for organ transplant and bodies used in forensic studies of human decay): 'The problem with cadavers is that they look so much like people. It's the reason most of us prefer a pork chop to a slice of whole suckling pig. It's the reason we say "pork" and "beef" instead of "pig" and "cow"' (Roach 2003: 21). She further noted that '[d]issection and surgical instruction, like meat-eating, require a carefully maintained set of illusions and denial. Physicians and anatomy students must learn to think of cadavers as wholly unrelated to the people they once were'. Subject-object ambiguity was, for example, clearly expressed at the medical faculty of the University of California in San Francisco, where corpses used for the instruction of medical students were emphatically presented as 'object' as 'the heads and hands are often left wrapped until their dissection comes up on the syllabus'. At the same university, after the corpses have been reduced to neatly sawed segments, a memorial service was held by the anatomy lab students. 'This is not a token ceremony. It is a sincere and voluntary attended event, lasting nearly three hours and featuring thirteen student tributes' (Roach 2003: 38-9).