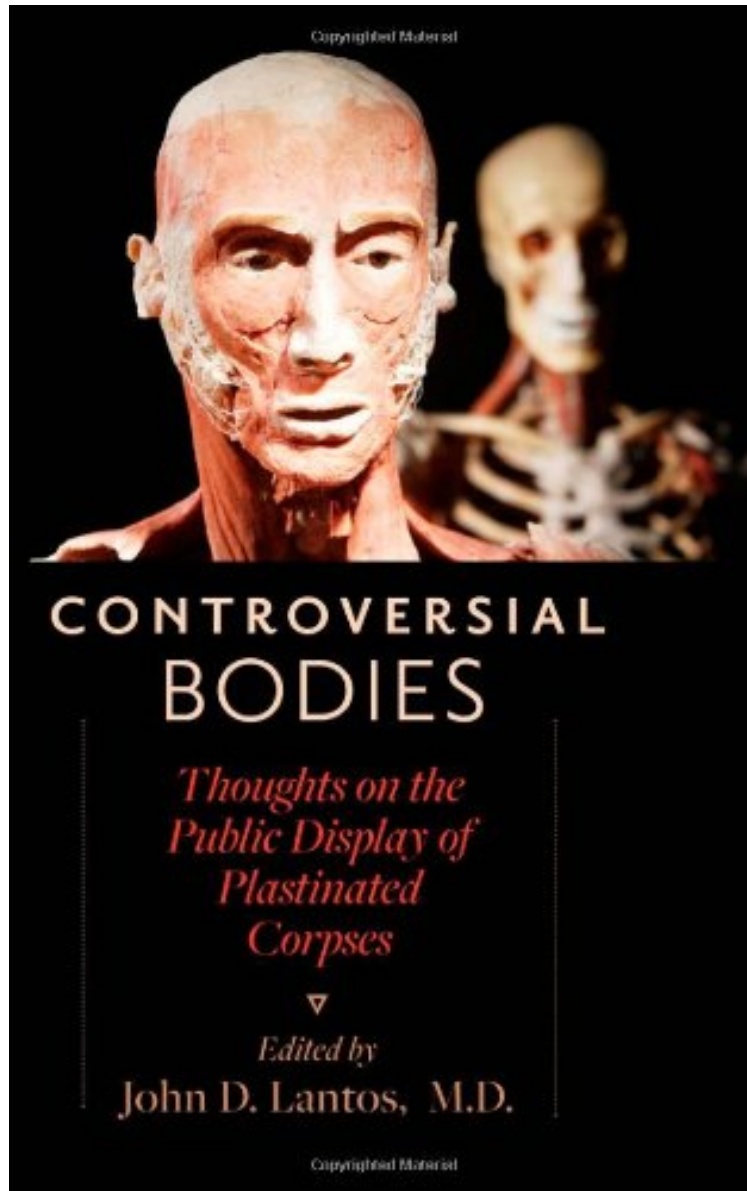


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Controversial Bodies: Thoughts on the Public Display of Plastinated Corpses

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From Brand: Johns Hopkins University Press : Controversial Bodies: Thoughts on the Public Display of Plastinated Corpses before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Controversial Bodies: Thoughts on the Public Display of Plastinated Corpses:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The body as a kind of text
By Neil A. Ward
There is a lot to get you going in this volume, but I would like to draw special notice to Geoff Rees's essay. He begins with the astute observation that the moral universe in which we study human anatomy derives directly from the Reformation ethos that everyone is entitled to read his Bible for himself. From there, he proposes that, since the body is a kind of text, whose business is it to set limits on how to read it? Thence, the development of the anatomy lab and, eventually, other envelope-pushing uses for one's corpse. This thread leads Rees to the speculation that if we are willing to push the use of corpses past a certain comfort zone, why not frame up "persistent, vegetative state" patients as anatomical exhibits as well, to demonstrate the dynamic function of circulatory and endocrine systems, developing suitable techniques for making those functions visible as living displays. The hell of it is, Rees's tone is so imperturbably even that it is very difficult to tell if he's pointing toward a serious policy proposal and prepping the necessary moral culture--or honing Swiftian satire a degree or so beyond the original *Modest Proposal*. Nice work, Geoff!
In the interest of full disclosure, I must point out that I, myself, also contributed an essay to the collection. But I want to make sure that readers at least get to Chapter 3 before setting this salted-peanut aside.
0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good overview of the controversy
By JW
Looking at the traveling exhibit "Body Worlds" from various perspectives these essays by historians, bioethicists, physicians, theologians, anatomists and a novelist pose some interesting questions. I haven't seen the exhibit myself so I'm learning about it from this book. The history of anatomy and autopsy is surprising. As far back as the 1500s, there were autopsies conducted in public venues for the education (and entertainment) of the public. Criminals were hung or guillotined in public and sometimes their bodies were autopsied on the spot. Medical schools were desperate for autopsy subjects and sometimes tuition was waived if med students brought in corpses stolen from cemeteries. But eventually physicians (and med students) became the only people allowed to see autopsies. So the "Body Worlds" exhibit of plastinated corpses violates a cultural taboo by exhibiting dead naked people for anyone who can pay the admission fee. The process was invented in the 70s by Gunther von Hagens, an anatomist. He was enamored with his own brilliance and recognized the educational, recreational, and pecuniary potential of making life-like bodies from corpses and plastic. He even performed a for-pay open-to-the-public autopsy in 2002. According to this book, von Hagens was reported to have offered to sell plastinated body parts for party decorations. Several essayists commented on the detachment effect the display has on the observers - many observers seem to forget the statues were real people and they poke fun at them, point at their genitals like middle school students and walk around the museum as if the bodies were granite sculptures. In other words, they're not respectful; they appear titillated and amused. The maker of these plasticized bodies acts as if they're sculptures also - von Hagens signs and dates them although they are plasticized in a factory in China and, of course, the bodies were in existence before he obtained them so claiming to be the artist is a bit disingenuous. He is from Germany which still has a distinct memory of Nazis making lampshades and other things from Jewish skin so his exhibits were not always welcomed there. There have also been persistent questions about where Von Hagen is obtaining the corpses. There is a lack of concrete evidence of informed consent for some of the corpses and some people believe he is buying bodies of paupers or criminals who did not give consent. Von Hagen maintains his exhibits are for educational purposes - useful to med students and the public who should be more knowledgeable about the human body diseases. In Europe, the exhibits were sited on fairgrounds or similar places of entertainment but in the U.S., the exhibits have generally been shown in museums, complete with artful lighting and educational texts nearby to legitimize their presence. They have been financially successful, despite protests.

Controversial, fascinating, disturbing, and often beautiful, plastinated human bodies such as those found at Body Worlds exhibitions throughout the world have gripped the public's imagination. These displays have been lauded as educational, sparked protests, and drawn millions of visitors. This book looks at the powerful sway these corpses hold over their living audiences everywhere. Plastination was invented in the 1970s by German anatomist Gunther von Hagens. The process transforms living tissues into moldable plastic that can then be hardened into a permanent shape. Von Hagens first exhibited his expertly dissected, artfully posed plastinated bodies in Japan in 1995. Since then, his shows have continuously attracted so many paying customers that they have inspired imitators, brought accusations of unethical or even illegal behavior, and ignited vigorous debates among scientists, educators, religious leaders, and law enforcement officials. These lively, thought-provoking, and sometimes personal essays reflect on such public displays from ethical, legal, cultural, religious, pedagogical, and aesthetic perspectives. They examine what lies behind the exhibitions' popularity and explore the ramifications of turning corpses into a spectacle of amusement. Contributions from bioethicists, historians, physicians, anatomists, theologians, and novelists dig deeply into issues that compel, upset, and unsettle us all.

"A rich survey of the issues provoked by the public display of plastinated corpses backed up by an impressive range of scholarship." (Alastair V. Campbell, author of *The Body in Bioethics*)
"This work is an important contribution to the bioethics literature and one of the first volumes dedicated to the ethics of the public display of plastinated corpses. Highly recommended." (Choice)
"A dozen authors discuss issues surrounding the display of human bodies whose flesh

has been preserved by plastic." (Science News)About the AuthorJohn D. Lantos, M.D., is a professor of pediatrics at the University of Missouri at Kansas City and director of the Children's Mercy Bioethics Center at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City. He is the author of Neonatal Bioethics and The Lazarus Case, both also published by Johns Hopkins.