

# Dead Bodies on Display: Museum Ethics in the History of the Mütter Museum

(死体の展示：アメリカ合衆国フィラデルフィア・  
ムター博物館の歴史にみる博物館倫理)

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**SUMMARY IN JAPANESE:** 本研究は、全米初の医学博物館ムター博物館の歴史をひもとき、博物館及び科学の公共的な役割を考察するものである。1858年、アメリカ合衆国フィラデルフィアに創設され現在も続く本博物館の目的は、設立当初に掲げられたものから大きく変容を遂げた。即ち、医学知の前進を目指す専門家が標本などの医学資料を共有する基盤組織から、広く「アメリカ人」一般に向けた啓蒙的な医学教育施設への転換である。これに貢献したのが、間接的には、モノを主体とした病理学的な医学理論からの脱却であり、公共性という博物館の持つ理念であった。そして直接的には、母体組織の経営改革と、1976年のアメリカ建国二百年祭を受けた博物館の観光地化であった。小論は博物館の制度改革の過程を議事録や展示記録から検証することで、人体の展示を例に、科学・博物館の公共性と娯楽性の相剋の在りようを探った。

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## Introduction

In light of visitors' increasing demand that museums be more entertaining, how can museum professionals meet that demand while also keeping exhibitions thoroughly scientific? Exhibits at museums displaying human remains contain information that is, to say the least, morally sensitive. How can museum professionals respect that moral sensitivity while also constructing an environment that is fun and accessible? And how and why can we display the "human being" as an object for exhibit? This paper answers these questions by providing a case study of the human remains exhibitions at the Mütter Museum, the first medical museum in the United States. By analyzing how the museum displays dead bodies, all in the name of science education, this paper demonstrates how it can be problematic for a museum to juggle authenticity and entertainment simultaneously, and (re) considers the ethics of museum education.

## Museum Politics and Ethics in Body Studies

Methodologically, the museum studies' approaches of "museum politics" and "new museology" have argued, since the late 1980s, that museums or exhibitions are political sites of intersections/power struggles among various agencies. They focus on museums and exhibitions that became major sites to generate political or scientific debates.<sup>1</sup> This trend in museum studies was a part of the rise of critical historical studies, which Michel Foucault named "effective history." These studies have attempted to reconsider the history of science, art, and culture. Tackling histories of institutions relating "gaze," or seeing and being seen in modern society, such as school, penitentiary, exposition and museum, this new history has been analyzing these institutions as apparatuses of power politics. For example, an incarceration system controls the prisoners by peer pressure in its disciplinary mechanisms and self-regulations.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, museum studies scholars, especially those in the group of the new museology, have sharpened Foucault's perspective of effective history and have analyzed various institutions of display, including expos, public museums, and art galleries. Tony Bennet has discussed the transformation

and elaboration of the gaze system in modern Western society around the nineteenth century. For example, he explored the history of the Paris Exposition of 1889. His discussion revealed that the nation states in this era began to enforce a national identity on the public through these entertainment events. They showed their national power and possessions through expositions constituted of pavilions of artworks, industries and ethnic groups. By developing these entertainment apparatuses, such nation states could provide the notion of the “nation” to the masses. In other words, through displays as a recreational apparatus of seeing and being seen, they came to discipline the public effectively and comprehensively.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, particularly since the late 1990s, museum studies have also explored the history of exhibiting human bodies.<sup>4</sup> By adapting studies of human bodies, they have expanded their scope of research. A focus on bodies on display encouraged them to explore how bodies were treated in the public sphere, facilitating a discourse on how to be more ethical in such cases. More recently, they have published anthologies in the field of museum studies, focusing on the topic of “ethics.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Medical Museum Studies as a Developing Field: Justification in/by Museums**

Body studies focusing on museum ethics is a rather lively field; however, studies of medical museums have room for discussion of the ethics of exhibiting bodies. So I will explore the intersection of museum ethics, body studies, and medical museum studies, exemplified by the case of the Mütter Museum. Compared with studies of the ethics in “ethnology/anthropology museums” or “expositions,” the study of medical museums is a relatively new field. Although there are a few exceptions of both comprehensive and interdisciplinary approaches and of the case of *Body Worlds* as shown below, previous studies have often failed to analyze the ethics of exhibiting human remains at medical museums.<sup>6</sup> This paper will cover this gap by analyzing the Mütter Museum in terms of museum theory.

Human remains are particularly good cases for exploring modernistic conceptions of the “human body” in terms of ethics because they are the most obvious area to reflect on how human beings define and treat “themselves.”

That is also because this field of study questions how humans think they *should* be. For example, previous literature on exhibiting humans discusses various ethical grounds, including racial issues at human zoos from the perspectives of post-colonial studies.<sup>7</sup> This case study raised the question of what the “human being” was, and of scrutinizing how its category was socially constructed in the early twentieth century. In other words, it exposed the historical structure that can give a clue as to the “ethics” of the time period.

On the other hand, my study of the Mütter Museum, based on discussions regarding the studies of human exhibitions, analyzes how humans have been involved with cadavers, because I aim to consider present-day museum ethics. The most famous case that discusses the ethics of exhibiting human bodies is probably *Body Worlds* by the German medical doctor Gunther von Hagens. Other scholars, who have discussed the ethics of displaying human remains, have been attracted to this controversial case.<sup>8</sup> The exhibitions, which showed human remains fixed and posed by a newly invented medical scientific method of display, originally began as a purely academic interest. Hagens patented this method as “plastination.” After the first exhibition of his plastinated bodies in Japan, he started a series of human body exhibitions named *Body Worlds* in several countries including Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, and China. After proving popular in the 2000s, *Body Worlds* became harshly criticized, introducing controversial issues into the discourse of medical ethics.<sup>9</sup>

While the exhibitions attracted a big market and it was claimed that they embraced educational and scientific values, they were later charged for human trafficking. Since the early 2010s, scholars have actively published studies of *Body Worlds*, at a time when social concerns about this issue were rising. Among the various analyses of these exhibitions, from freak show aesthetics to the ethics of posing cadavers, I would like to adapt Peter McIsaac’s analysis of science narrative for justification. He analyzed discourses on the exhibitions in Germany from 1996 through 2004. He worried about the affirmative gesture seen in the narratives of the “democratic values” of scientific knowledge, which is a label and statement as “science” to legitimize the universal value of something to share it among the public. *Body Worlds’* promoters often use this narrative to try to encourage visitors to consume these controversial and sometimes rather uncomfortable exhibitions.<sup>10</sup>

McIsaac criticizes this trick as the hypocrisy of “democracy” by analyzing “scientific and educational value” narratives seen in consumer behavior in the public sphere. The subtle but substantial difference is that this labeling is not science itself but a guise of science. For promoters of these narratives, it is not important whether it is science or not; it is merely significant that it be believed as “science” regardless of its authenticity. They just want to share/show something in public under the label of the “democratic values” of “science.” Confusingly, though, the “real” scientific value itself is sometimes promoted under such a label.

Drawing on his analysis of “democratic values” as a label in scientific knowledge distribution in consumer culture, I will discuss how the Mütter Museum functioned as an apparatus for justification. To polish an analytical tool, I develop this scientific justification theory into a museum analysis version. Namely, modern museums started with a principle of being open to the public, expanded their target from a closed scientific community to the general public, and transformed into tourist destinations. As social anthropologist Sharon Macdonald states, science museums since the 1960s, such as science centers or industrial heritage sites, have developed as recreational facilities, as seen in nickname of *edu-tainment* place. By applying the “exhibitionary complex” theory of Tony Bennet to her analysis of postwar era science museums, Macdonald revealed that museums at that time generally came to stress both entertainment and educational traits, and sometimes suffered from the conflict between the two. Combining the scientific justification theory with the theory on science as entertainment at museums, I analyze how the Mütter Museum justified its role as both an educational and entertainment facility.

In the following section, by tracking the history of the Mütter Museum’s reforms since the 1970s and its educational displays of the “human body” in public, I attempt to examine the transformation of self-definition and treatment of humans, and finally consider what role medical museums in the United States since the 1960s have played in public society.<sup>11</sup>

## Origins of Mütter Museum and Principle of “Open to Public”

The Mütter Museum was originally the medical collection of Dr. Thomas Dent Mütter, a medical doctor born in Richmond, Virginia, who contributed to the great advancement of American surgery in the nineteenth century. The museum was founded by the first medical association for mutual-aid among physicians, the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, in 1858. Dr. Mütter had collected a wide-range of medical specimens and equipment throughout his life within and outside the United States and donated his collection of over 1,700 items to the association (see Figures 1 and 2). The collections’ original purpose was to gather, share, and provide medical specimens and equipment for the college members. In other words, in the early stage of its history, the purpose of the collection was to be used for research and training for physicians and medical students, or for the “scientific expert” at that



Figure 1 : Entrance of Mütter Museum. The sign with catchphrase of “Disturbingly Informative” put on the wall. (Photographed by author, August 2016)

time. After this collection was converted into the form of a “museum,” the members discussed making the collection open to the public. In the late nineteenth century, it was extremely rare for a medical museum to permit the public to use its collection. The Mütter Museum was thus the pioneer of the open-to-public medical museum in the United States.<sup>12</sup> In her influential volume *Civilizing Rituals*, cultural and art historian Carol Duncan argued that American museums functioned as “civilizing” apparatuses in the late nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Americans were civilized through the early art museums such as the Metropolitan

Museum of Art. Around the same time, the Mütter Museum, which made its collection open to the public, became an educational facility to civilize the American citizen.

### Shift from “Scientific Expert” to “Non-Expert” Visitors

In principle at least, the Mütter Museum was open to the public. It aimed to educate the public to make them “good” American citizens; however, this aim seems to have not been achieved directly. Almost all visitors from the earlier time through approximately the late 1960s were actually science experts. They were physicians, nurses, and students of medical schools.

According to a report in 1945 by Ella N. Wade, one of the major curators of the Mütter Museum during 1932-1957, few non-medical professionals visited the museum until 1945.<sup>14</sup> She guessed this unpopularity partly was due to the complicated process of paperwork to access the gallery.

Unfortunately, the collection at the Mütter Museum retains only a few records of its visitors and some of them are incomplete. Materials on the qualitative change among visitors are limited. Detailed descriptions of visitors in the 1950s and 1960s and of the museum’s response to them are not in the collection; however, we at least know that the visitors’ occupations



Figure 2 : Portrait of Dr. Thomas Dent Mütter, drawn by Samuel Huntington. (Julie Berkowitz *The College of Physicians of Philadelphia Portrait Catalogue* 1984, 142)

had changed by approximately 1970. According to an article in the *Philadelphia Magazine* in 1969 and the annual official report of the museum in 1970, there was an increasing number of new kinds of visitors such as factory workers or salespersons, who differed from the previous main targets, scientific experts.<sup>15</sup> The first turning point took place during the middle of the 1970s. There were financial problems, and the need to increase attendance made the museum and the committee members begin to

discuss countermeasures in 1975.

In addition, the U.S. Bicentennial was also a significant driving source for the shift. In response to the increasing number of new visitors and tourists coming to Philadelphia, the committee members of the museum, the curator, and the director discussed the importance of reforms that would modify the management and the exhibitions for new kinds of visitors who were “non-expert.” In the Bicentennial project, the city of Philadelphia itself was reclaimed as the “Birthplace of America” and historic sites and monuments such as Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell especially in the Old City, or its original downtown district, were remodeled as museums and parks, led by the National Park. In this context, the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia became the “birthplace of American Medicine” by shifting its targets and changing its self-identification.<sup>16</sup> Along with changes to the museum’s interior, how the city officials of Philadelphia treated the museum would also change. In the travel guide published in 1974 by the Visitors Conventional Bureau in Philadelphia, the museum was introduced as an ordinary tourist venue by the city officials.<sup>17</sup> This meant that the Mütter Museum, at the time, officially obtained a position as a tourist venue that mainly targeted the general public in the United States.

The leading figure of this turning point was the third curator of the museum—anthropologist Gretchen Worden, who oversaw reforms, while

introducing a public relations network since 1974 (see Figure 3). Responding to marketing demands, she began to target connoisseurs of “medical oddities” as an audience for the exhibits. She worked from the beginning of this first reform plan as a devoted supporter of the second curator Elizabeth Moyer, and later launched the second reform plan. In the annual report on March 18, 1975, the purpose of the first reform was clearly declared,



Figure 3 : Curator Gretchen Worden in the earlier 2000s. (Worden, *Mütter Museum* 2002)



“[T]o show advances made by medicine which have improved the health and well-being of the American citizen over the past 200 years.”<sup>18</sup> This reform was marked as the official turning point of the shift from within the museum. It functioned as the motive force to make the shift from providing scientific knowledge for medical experts to educating the general public as the “health and well-being of the American citizen.”

As shown in Bennet’s discussion of the “exhibitionary complex,” the Mütter Museum, like other influential modern museums, has functioned as a place that reinforces the visitors’ national identity, being the “birthplace of American Medicine.” Additionally, as Macdonald pointed out in science museums’ shift since the 1960s, it was part of consumer culture as a tourist spot. In this sense, the Mütter Museum traces the history of the atypical “museum” since the modern age. In other words, it is a highly authentic modern museum. This led to the museum identifying itself as a “one and only” museum, different from other museums showing human remains.

### **Bicentennial Tourism and the Reforms**

At the idealistic and conceptual level, the basic and fundamental principle of the reforms took shape at the time of the Bicentennial. Soon after the implementation of this principle, the reports in October 1977 tell us that firstly the plan was physically materialized as a renovation of interiors, and as a development of the way of using the museum space inside.<sup>19</sup> For instance, in 1977 they launched an expansion project of reception halls, the setting up of a laboratory for experimental facilities and storage containers for the increasing collection, an enhancement of the archives of the College of Physicians’ library, and an improvement of the exhibition rooms and displays. This reform was visitor-oriented. The space of the exhibition rooms was redesigned from the perspective of visitors’ preferences, such as what kind of objects museum-goers would prefer and how they would respond to the exhibited objects. As a result of these reforms, the Mütter Museum reopened with renewed exhibits in 1986. At the renovation, Worden installed and displayed many objects that later became the centerpieces of the museum. Furthermore, she was highly conscious of how to display the objects. For example, she carefully revamped captions, display cases and

cabinets, and carpets<sup>20</sup> (see Figures 4 and 5).

After the implementation of this principle and the subsequent renovation plan driven by Bicentennial tourism, the museum director, curator and committee members discussed the re-purposing of the museum. In 1979, they stated:

The museum serves principally the medical community, students and allied health professions as a learning center, but is of increasing interest to the general public as a corollary of the public interest in matters pertaining to health and the delivery of health care. To meet these traditional and new challenges, the Mütter Museum and College Collections Committee has studied the Museum needs and developed a series of high priority projects which, when completed, will enable the Museum to better serve the community and meet the old and changing needs of this historic collection.<sup>21</sup>

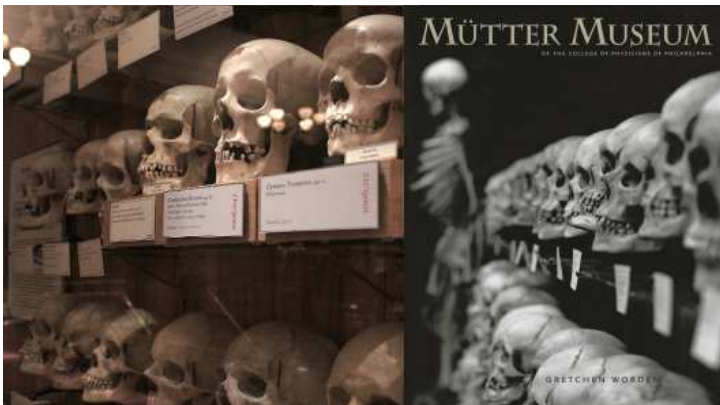
One might think from these statements that the museum at the time did not abandon the role of a highly specialized medical museum. Rather, the officials began to claim the role and uniqueness of the museum as being both the “traditional” and “historic” in contemporary America. In this statement, they emphasized the dichotomous narratives of “changing needs and historic collection,” “traditional and new,” and “medical community and general public.” The invented narratives, which gave a new significance to the museum, intended to revitalize the contemporary Philadelphia community at a time when the number of visitors going to Philadelphia had begun to increase. In the popularization of the Bicentennial tourism movement from 1974 to the early 1980s, this narrative marked the shift of the museum from a specialized scientific facility only for experts into a venue of tourism.<sup>22</sup> In the context of tourism, as cultural studies scholar Pramod Nayar argued in noting how cultures can obtain different meanings by ways of media representations, which he calls “packaging,” this museum recaptured the package of “historic and authorized medical museum” as well as keeping the old narrative of technically innovated scientific facility.<sup>23</sup>



Figures 4 and 5: Before(top) and after(bottom) the museum renovation in 1986. (College of Physicians of Philadelphia, *Images of America* 2012, 33; Photographed by author, Jan. 2013)

### “Ugly but Terrifying Beauty”: Collaboration with Artists

To provide a more recreational way of presenting exhibits, Worden also launched a series of art exhibition programs in the middle of the 1990s. By using artistic values, she tried to romanticize the collection and make the museum more popular. During the process of this reform, some museum visitors showed a strong interest in the exhibited objects and often proposed to use them as materials to create their own artworks. To avoid the problematic usage of human remains, Worden and artists discussed carefully how they should treat the objects in their artworks. After initially holding some collaborative exhibitions with editor Laura Lindgren, she planned a continuous series of art exhibitions.<sup>24</sup> As seen in the examples of the beautiful artworks (Figures 6, 7 and 8), this process presented both the spectacle and the aesthetic value of the exhibited objects at the same time.<sup>25</sup> In addition, they began to develop products for selling at the museum store, such as I highlight with the case of the calendar below. They succeeded in adding a more recreational value and accessible image for the museum by making various kinds of products, including original photo books, DVDs, T-shirts and hoodies, beer and coffee mugs, stuffed heart figures, and even cookie cutters (Figure 9). These values embodied in the art exhibition



Figures 6 and 7: Museum’s centerpiece Hyrtl Skull Collection. Anne Svenson took its photograph (Right), featured on the cover of the official catalog of the museum. (Left: Photographed by author, Jan. 2013; Right: Worden, *Mütter Museum*, 2002)



Figure 8: William Wegman's artwork proposed for the catalog after collaboration. ("Bad Foot," 2000)



Figure 9: Cookie cutter designed by and sold at the museum. A motif of Conjoined Twin (well-known as Siamese twin) is famous as its iconic character. (Photographed by author, August 2016)

series and the selling of goods supported the narrative of “better serve the community and meet the old and changing needs of this historic collection.”<sup>26</sup>

Anthropologist Noah Jones explored the dynamic, constructive narrative-making process at the Mütter Museum, claiming that the actors concerned with its narrative construction can be roughly divided into three kinds: medical experts, tourists, and artists.<sup>27</sup> As well as museum planning on the inside, artists outside the museum took important parts in constructing the narrative. Since the 1990s, the museum began to play a leading role in co-hosting a series of exhibitions with artists. The museum not only invited many artists to collaborate, but began to actively give special exhibits, which aesthetically presented medical apparatuses and technologies.<sup>28</sup> As well as exhibiting artworks and medical collections, the museum adopted aesthetic lighting and new ways of displays when it changed its permanent exhibition (see Figure 10).

Comments on the objects by Worden reflect the museum’s policy of collaborative work with artists. She notes in the forward section of the museum’s official catalog, “While these bodies may be ugly, there is a terrifying beauty in the spirits of those forced to endure these afflictions,”



Figure 10: “Artful Bones” at the Ossuary Exhibit, permanent exhibition displaying human bones categorized and ordered by form. (Photographed by author, Jan. 2013)

and she gives readers a narrative that romanticizes human remains or other objects concerning life and death.<sup>29</sup> She knew romanticizing objects is the most artful way of showing these “ugly” but curious objects to the public.

Many artists have so far been attracted by the museum and have created various artworks and films in collaboration with it.<sup>30</sup> The art exhibitions continue to be held as a series of museum programs. This means that the museum officially authorizes and utilizes these artworks as a means of reform. In addition to physical renovation plans, the contents of the art exhibition series support the reforms in order to popularize the museum and to shift its role.

### **Medical Museum as Popular Culture and the Control of Ethics**

As a result of the reforms led by Worden within the context of the tourist movement in Philadelphia in 1976, the narrative of the museum began to change. The number of visitors did not grow immediately, however. It was not until after the management reform of the middle 1990s, when attendance at the museum drastically increased. However, while the museum gained popularity, journalists and bioethics scholars sometimes criticized the tourist spectacle of the museum. They claimed that the museum exploited scientifically obsolete collections in an unethical way, for the purpose of creating a kind of “freak show.”

As for the number of museum visitors, reform from 1992 through 1995 triggered an explosive increase. According to the plan documents and reports of the reform called the Three-Year Plan, the Mütter Museum introduced systems of third-party evaluation led by an institution specialized in museum-evaluation.<sup>31</sup> By using results of its marketing research and consultation, Worden organized many exhibitions and developed public relations campaigns, such as appearances on television, in general magazines and newspapers, and at conferences, events and lectures.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, along with the executive director Marc Miccozi, she also developed the museum’s architectural style by introducing plans for building renovation, with new floor plans for the exhibition room.<sup>33</sup>

These development projects resulted in boosting the attendance more drastically. According to my research by calculating the transition from

annual records, statistics by the third-party evaluation institution, and account books of visitor records (see Table 1), the number of visitors increased explosively in 1993.<sup>34</sup> In 1959, the first year in the recorded history, the number of visitors was about 1,800. The figure increased to about 4,000 through the 1970s, and rose to roughly 5,000 through the 1980s. And then it doubled from 1992 to 1993. According to the report of the Three-Year Plan, this rapid increase was due to the success of selling a brand-new souvenir, the “Mütter Museum Calendar.”<sup>35</sup> After the release of the calendar, the number in 1997 was over 24,000. As already shown, the development and release of many museum products, in addition to the art/medical exhibitions, must have helped to boost popularity. In the latest record, the attendance in 2010 reached approximately 120,000.

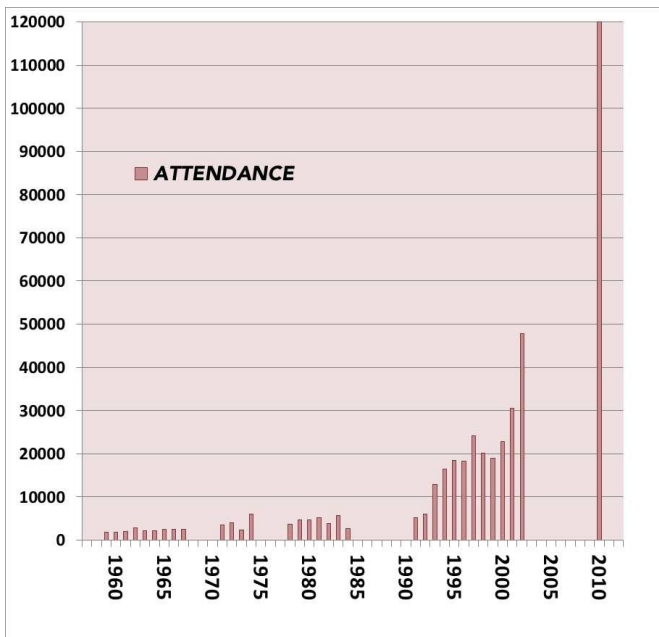


Table 1: Transition of the Attendance at the Mütter Museum. Calculated from official records listed in the note 34. Missing years are due to partly absent records.



This success can be credited to the popularization of exhibiting cadavers as curiosities, particularly given the narrative was one of an “authorized science museum.” On the other hand, journalists and medical scholars at times criticized the museum, claiming that it is unethical to display human remains in a public manner. As well as McIsaac’s analysis of justification regarding *Body Worlds*, the critiques of the Mütter Museum focused on its double standards, which seem to try to cover the essential trait as a freak show by using the narrative of modern medical science. For example, in an article in a local Philadelphia paper in July 1996, a journalist interviewed Miccozi and public relations official Dick Levinson, as well as Worden, and questioned the narrative that they claimed, which was this need to present authentic and historic medical knowledge to the general public. And he concluded:

The vision of the new crew is to promote the College of Physicians as a source of modern healthcare information, and to change a public profile, which they feel, has been gained by the Mütter’s pop-cult status as a hall of horrors.<sup>36</sup>

In response to the journalist’s questions, these officials repeated their answers justifying the exhibiting of human remains in public on the grounds that the museum was being used for medical education, which generates interest among the general public. But they did not directly answer the questions of how they included the issue of ethics within such justification, or even how they justified the use of the cadavers. There appeared to be no substantial dialogue between them. The museum’s history had a rigid authenticity, both scientific and historical. In this sense, the first American medical museum is different from *Body Worlds*. By using this authenticity and justifying the human remains exhibition, they could avoid critiques from other ethical viewpoints in the discussion.

However, the more entertaining and popular the museum as a public space became, the more complicated it became to balance its recreational usage of ethically sensitive human bodies and scientific authenticity. As explained earlier, the infamous *Body Worlds* proposed the narratives of the “democratic values of science education” as justification. The “historical or scientific values” of the collection and the museum itself and “public interest”

in displays at the museum could function as an excuse for showing and seeing the bodies in public. Both the museum's practitioners as "showmen" and visitors as "spectators" have to be conscious of how narratives work.

### **Two Ironic Consequences: Mütter's Strategy and "Rehabilitation" of Science**

Soon after Worden's death in the summer of 2004, National Public Radio reported her accomplishments: "Worden turned the little-known medical museum into a museum with a worldwide reputation."<sup>37</sup> In analyzing the reforms that she made at the Mütter Museum, I have discussed the issue of ethics regarding the exhibit of human bodies at the widely-known "scientific/medical museum." While the Mütter Museum gained in popularity, Worden came to use the narrative of "authentic science museum." This discourse functions somehow as a defense against harsh ethical critiques of the museum, but another type of interpretation of the museum by visitors actually defused them at the same time, that is, the narrative of "medical oddities" and "hall of horror," which many visitors actually preferred. Contrary to the intention of the museum, this "scientific authenticity" narrative ironically functioned only as a justification for exhibiting human remains as a curiosity.

This ironic consequence is not only seen in the Mütter Museum's case, but is also situated in the history of science and museums. At the museum, all the *curious* visitors can see the human remains *shown* on display. That was supported and reasoned by the "open-to-public" principle and the "scientific authenticity" narrative, and was driven by the Bicentennial tourism. Furthermore, a terminological history of the definition of "freak show" suggests another ironic consequence of the history of science. The freak shows in America, which flourished then faded between about 1840 and 1940, descended from a tradition of the extraordinary body that can be traced back to the earliest human representation. Mysterious and marvelous bodies as seen in ancient paintings such as Stone Age cave drawings had been later called "monsters" by the ancient Greek scientists. P. T. Barnum would name them "freaks." On the one hand, the Latin word *monstra* or monster also means "sign" and forms the root of the modern English word *demonstrate*, which means "to show."<sup>38</sup> In other words, "freak show" terminologically

connotes that freaks that have a certain sign different from others would naturally be shown/demonstrated.

At a time when historically people's curiosity was inspired by such freaks and monsters, scientists pursued their own answers, highly motivated by this curiosity as well as religious interests. Curiosity was the precursor of science, and commerce was the precursor of capitalism.<sup>39</sup> But from around the eighteenth century onwards, science, which sought to classify and master rather than revere freaks, began to satisfy people's curiosity and weaken the monsters' power. Science helped the freak show to fade away; however, when capitalism is growing, science revitalizes the "freak show" and curiosity again in an ironical way: by building the narrative of "scientific authenticity" and giving it to obsolete science through museums, not by using scientific knowledge itself. Considering the second ironical result, or this "rehabilitation" of science at museums under late capitalism, could give us clues to thinking about this newly emerged ethical issue.

This rather sad scenario gives us a lesson in the ethics of displaying human remains at museums and an idea for future studies. Whereas museums provide a message of "education in scientific knowledge," visitors could "misread" it as mere "medical curiosity." This process is contextualized in museum communications: a serial process of sending, distributing, and receiving.<sup>40</sup> It is necessary to anticipate the distributions of the meanings of an exhibit, which inevitably include possible unpredictable readings by visitors. Especially if the museum deals with human bodies, which are extraordinarily sensitive materials, exhibitors of a museum have to contemplate the ethics from every possible angle and the responsibility for their intentions being misread. As well as museum practitioners, museum studies scholars must analyze not only the process of staging exhibitions but also museum communications.

As a result of the reforms at the Mütter Museum, it successfully turned human remains into forms of public curiosity in the age of tourism. In response to the growth in the number of visitors since the museum began targeting the general public, it has been modifying its principle, policy and ethics on treating these sensitive objects. The first medical museum in the United States illuminates the intersection between science history, consumer culture, and the role of museums in modern society. The history of the Mütter Museum offers a lesson in how museums can be conscious of the need

to establish museum ethics through a deep understanding of communication and visitors' reception, as well as an understanding of their demands.

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### Notes

1. "New museology" is a term used by the following museums scholars, which captures the trend of new perspectives into museums. The term has been often used in discussions in the discipline of museum studies particularly since the 1990s. Peter Vergo, ed., *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989); Bettina Messias Carbonell, *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contents* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); Janet Marstine, "Introduction," in *New Museum Theory and Practice*, ed. Janet Marstine (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 1-36; Sharon Macdonald, "Expanding Museum Studies: An Introduction," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 1-12.
2. Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la Clinique: une archéologie du regard medical* (Paris: PUF, 1963); Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité Vol I-III: La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976, 1984).
3. Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations* 4 (Spring, 1988): 73-102.
4. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); James Gilbert, *Whose Fair? Experience, Memory, and the History of the Great St. Louis Exposition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
5. Janet Marstine, ed., *Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2011); Alexander Bauer et al, eds., *New Direction in Museum Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2012).
6. These volumes are exceptional and important studies on medical exhibitions/museums. Especially, Redman's book also explored the earlier history of the Mütter Museum from the perspectives of collecting objects at museums, whereas my paper would focus on the recent years of the Mütter's history. Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991); Samuel J. M. M. Alberti, *Morbid Curiosities: Medical Museums in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Samuel J. Redman, *Bone Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory in Museums* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

7. Phillips Verner Bradford, and Harvey Blume, *Ota Benga: The Pigmy in the Zoo* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).
8. A series of the exhibition *Body Worlds* led by Gunther von Hagens has been investigated from several perspectives as follows. Christine T. Jespersen, Alicita Rodriguez, and Joseph Starr, *The Anatomy of "Body Worlds": Critical Essays on the Plastinated Cadavers of Gunther Von Hagens* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Publishers, 2008); John D. Lantos, *Controversial Bodies: Thoughts on the Public Display of Plastinated Corpses* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Nadja Durbach, "'Skinless Wonders': Body Worlds and the Victorian Freak Show," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Science* 69, no.1 (2012): 38-67.
9. In the United States, after controversies from various standpoints including religion and legal issues or consent occurred, California Science Center set up an Ethical Commission in 2004. Neda Ulaby, "Origins of Exhibited Cadavers Questioned," *NPR*, published on August 11, 2006, accessed on July 20, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5637687>; a news website Red Fox made by independent journalist Fumita Iwaya detailed and globally collected an enormous amount of material concerning *Body Worlds*, including published documents, news and comments on the website, and video and audio materials. Fumita Iwaya, "'Jintai no fushigi ten' no shuryo to kokuhatsu (The End of 'Body Worlds' Exhibition and Accusation)," *Red Fox*, published on January 31, 2011, accessed on May 9, 2015, <http://redfox2667.blog111.fc2.com/blog-entry-249.html?sp>.
10. Peter M. McIsaac, "Worrying About Democratic Values: Body Worlds in German Context, 1996-2004," in *Museum and Difference*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 181-94, 199-202.
11. Other historical researches on human remains or medical museums are the following. They are factual researches, rather than studies posing substantial questions. Ken Arnold, Danielle Olsen and British Museum, *Medicine Man: Henry Wellcome's Phantom Museum* (London: British Museum, 2003); Yuu Kawai, *Hakushin no kyochi: jitsubutsu dori ni chakushoku saretai toshindai no ningyo no rekishi, oubei hen* (Ground of Reality: A History of Life-Sized and True-To-Life-Colored Dolls in Euro-American Countries), (Osaka: Fumiduki Sha, 2004).
12. Gretchen Worden, *Mütter Museum: Of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* (New York: Blast Books, 2002), 4-5.
13. Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 47-71.
14. Ella N. Wade, "Visitors to the Mütter Museum," *Transactions and Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, Fourth Series, no.12 (1945): 40-43; see also documents about the visitors listed in note 34.
15. Anonymus, "139 Heads are Better than One," *Philadelphia Magazine* 60 (1969): 41; Fred B. Rogers, "Annual Report of the Mütter Museum and College Collections," *Transactions and Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, Fourth Series no.37 (1970): 336-38.
16. A catchphrase in the promotion for special event "Wistar at The Mütter Museum" on Wednesday, November 15, 2017.
17. Philadelphia Convention and Tourist Bureau, *1974 Official Philadelphia Visitor and Convention Guide*, (Woodland Hills, CA: Visitor and Convention Publications, 1974).
18. College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "A Reform Plan, March 18, 1975," *Collection of Mütter Museum Records*, Box 23-Folder 5.

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19. College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Renovation Plans, 1971-1979, October 1977," *Collection of Mütter Museum Records*, Box 23-Folder 5.
20. Ibid.
21. College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Renovation Plans, 1971-1979, March 1979," *Collection of Mütter Museum Records*, Box 23-Folder 5.
22. Andrew Feffer, "Show Down in Center City Staging Redevelopment and Citizenship in Bicentennial Philadelphia, 1974-1977," *Journal of Urban History* 30, no.6 (2004): 791-825; Elizabeth Grant, "Race and Tourism in America's First City," *Journal of Urban History* 31, no.6 (2005): 850-71.
23. Pramod K. Nayar, *Packaging Life: Cultures of the Everyday* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009).
24. Laura Lindgren, an editor based in New York, completed many exhibitions at the Mütter Museum with Gretchen Worden as her great partner. According to the list she kindly gave me during my email interview, she worked on the following Mütter Museum exhibitions, which include several significant art exhibits in the museum history: "Mütter Museum" (Book Trader, Philadelphia, November 19, 1993-January 9, 1994), "Of Science and Humanity: Treasures from the Mütter Museum" (Museum of Jurassic Technology, Los Angeles, April-July 1994), "Beyond Ars Medica: Treasures from the Mütter Museum" (Thread Waxing Space, New York City, November 1995-January 1996), "Photoanatomic" (Barrister's Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana, December 2000), "Mütter Museum: Photographs" (Ricco/Maresca, New York City, November-December 2002), "Mütter Museum: Photographs" (San Francisco Camera Works, August-September 2003), "Extraordinary Bodies" (Eight traveling exhibitions, Appleton Museum of Art, Mütter Museum et al, October 2, 2004 through December 28, 2009), "Anatomica Aesthetica" (Cleveland Institute of Art, November 5, 2010-December 18, 2010; Mütter Museum, The College of Physicians of Philadelphia, September 22, 2011-February 25, 2012). Laura Lindgren, email to author, January 5, 2017; The most well-known publication edited by her is about the Mütter Museum's medical photographs. Laura Lindgren, *Mütter Museum: Historic Medical Photographs* (New York: Blast Books, 2007).
25. I already published an article analyzing the process of making the artistic value of collections focusing on the Mütter Museum's discourses, 'ars medica' exhibits at art museums, and academic theories like visual culture. Masaki Komori "Geijutsuka suru igaku hakubutsukan: Firaderufia ishi kyokai Muta Hakubutsukan ni okeru kaikaku ('Ars Medica' Strategy at Medical Museum: Reforms since 1980s at Mütter Museum in Philadelphia)" *Tenjigaku* 54, no.1 (2017): 62-71.
26. College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Renovation Plans, 1971-1979, March 1979."
27. Nora Jones, "The Mütter Museum: The Body as Spectacle, Specimen, and Art" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2002), 1-45.
28. Barton Hirst et al, eds., *Human Monstrosities* (Philadelphia: Lea Brothers & Co, 1891-1893).
29. Gretchen Worden, *Mütter Museum*, 4.
30. For instance, stop-motion animator Brothers Quay used to live in Philadelphia as students at Philadelphia College of Art (now, Academy of the Arts) and later they collaborated with the museum and shot the documentary film, which beautifully captured the museum, its collections and staffs. Quay Brothers, dir., *Through the Weeping Glass: On the Consolations of Life Everlasting—Limbo & Afterbreezes in the Mütter Museum*, 2011 (London: British Film Institute, 2016).
31. College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Governance Handbook, 1993-1995," *College of Physicians of Philadelphia Executive Director Records*, Box 44-Folder 4.

32. College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Clippings, 1970s-2004," *College of Physicians of Philadelphia, Collection of Mütter Museum Records*, Box 24-Folder 9; College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Scrapbook of Appearance on the Late Show with David Letterman, Undated," *College of Physicians of Philadelphia, Collection of Mütter Museum Records*, Box 25-Folder 2.
33. Anonymous, "A Needs Assessment Study, by Wallace, Roberts, and Todd, 1992," *College of Physicians of Philadelphia Executive Director Records*, Box 44-Folder 5.
34. Table 1 is incomplete due to partly absent data of the official records. I could have managed to reconstitute the quantitative data by using insufficient records in annual reports of the museum and the statistics of the research institute and by counting the fragmented attendance notes in account books. College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Annual Report of the Mütter Museum and College Collections," *Transactions and Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* (1959-2002); College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Subseries B. Visitor Records, 1887-1985," *Collection of Mütter Museum Records*, Box 18-Folder 1-6; Box 19-Folder 1-6; Box 20-Folder 1-9; College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Museum Admissions Statistics, 1997-1998," *College of Physicians of Philadelphia Executive Director Records*, Box 47-Folder 3.
35. The museum has been publishing calendars every year. College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Governance Handbook, 1993-1995"; College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Mütter Museum Calendar, 1997," College of Physicians of Philadelphia Executive Director Records, Box 49-Folder 13.
36. Margit Detweiler, "Not with My Mütter, You Don't," *Philadelphia City Paper*, July 19/25, 1996.
37. Editorial, "Gretchen Worden, Mütter Museum Director, Dies," NPR, August 6, 2004, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=3823240>.
38. Dudley Wilson, *Signs and Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1993).
39. Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 56-57.
40. Encoding/decoding model of Stewart Hall was applied to the museum communication theory by many museum scholars. See Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Their Visitors* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Sharon Macdonald, *The Politics of Display: Museum, Science, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

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