

Attachment 2: letter to the editor from Martin Mendel, 12.09.2012:

„Ethik: Anatomy ad absurdum (Letter to the editor)

„I will now open the scrotum“ – the audience is murmuring and mourning. Zoom on the opened scrotum. The spermatic duct is dissected and the testes opened with a pointed knife. Pan-shot to the audience: Men show empathy, women are covering their mouths. But the spectators are no students of medicine, by no means, no, everybody can watch Gunther von Hagens new serial „Anatomy for Beginners“ on “YouTube” or the Website of the english broadcasting station “Channel 4”.

Themed as public enlightenment (as can be read on the “Channel 4“-Website and reminds of the time, when there were still british colonies) dead bodies are dissected in the parts “Movement”, “Circulation”, “Digestion” and “Reproduction”. In my opinion, Prof. John Lee, british pathologist and Dr. Gunter von Hagens, the well-known „Everybody-and-Anything-Plastinator“ from Heidelberg, agitate in doubtful taste, when they guide the audience as a duo à la Siegfried and Roy through a world of glossy anatomy.

Of course, public sections are not new. Even their content did not change. What changed, is the definition of publicity. These videos can be consumed every time and everywhere – during lunchtime in the canteen, on the way home in the tube or before bedtime. Before the content is really understood, the film runs.

Before you understand the scene that unfolds in front of you, you get totally immersed. Then it is too late. No questions can be asked, only the desperate typing of comments: „mustn't it be smelling like hell?“ (SuuzieQ), „this yellow stuff under the skin is fat?“ (Heron 700) or: „is that a real body?“ (droid4D).

Will you value these reactions as successful drawn interest, you also have to face lots of unfledged or inappropriate comments about the shown genitals, von Hagens admittedly bad Englisch and his hat.

This is anything but a serious examination with this topic. What is missing? It lacks vividness. As often you presses Stop and Play, as near as you zooms, you will miss the point. No 3-D-effect can replace, what the dissecting room offers.

The dissecting room – the sacred hall of the Anatomy. Metal tables in glaring light, grumbling air-exhausts, the unique odour of fixative. Here, new students will spent that part of their studies, which –has unnecessarily been mystified since generations. Strangely enough, nobody shows off to friends about the practical course in biochemistry. In fact, the dissection room is the place, where it is worked, taught and learnt with dead bodies. But the dissection course is not a symbol of itself. Students listen to lectures, get theoretical courses by the assistants and are examined. So the curiosity on the dead-body is not the only incitement for this topic. But let us come back to von Hagens.

Everybody who wants to be an Apple-era solo entertainer with dead bodies (von Hagens describes himself on his webpage as a “public event anatomist and spotter for the mass audience”, must face the danger of trivializing the human body – to create an “i-body”. Without question, a modern Theatrum Anatomicum must use new technologies but it must no catapult and circulate contents into the internet that will swirling around there for ever. This is problematic, because humans with their inherent curiosity and sensationalism have a greedgfor such videos. This is no profound interest at the structures of the human body but the delight at the dissected human body. Making things worse, von Hagens acts more as a butcher than an anatomist. He skins a man and hangs his skin on a rack beside him. He prepares a

frozen woman in polyurethane foam and saws her sagittal with a giant saw in slices. "It's a bit over, is that ok?". A man is dealt a tracheotomy and while both lungs urge out of the opened ribcage, the lucky doctor proclaims, that he saved the patient's life – if he would not have been dead already. Not a hint of delicacy, no impression of the structures, which proceed in microscopic size, so no sense is developed, how we turn from a cell-cluster to the organ-cluster, which we call *Homo sapiens*. So the serie „Anatomy for Beginners“ jeopardizes the foundations of our behaviour: the respect for our own anatomy. Without this foundation, we would try and kill each other.

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