12 Vivifying the Uncanny: Ethnographic Mannequins and Exotic Performers in Nineteenth-century German Exhibition Culture

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The use of mannequins in ethnographic displays is common in German museums and exhibitions of all kinds. Although regarded as a problematic, even obsolete, display form, mannequins continue a lively existence as media of ethnic and cultural representation. Such objects pose a major paradox: their three-dimensional human appearance occasionally overshadows their designated function as display aid for original ethnographic objects, so that audiences might only too easily mistake them for the display goals instead. In other words, the human likeness and tangibility of the mannequin inadvertently complicates its exhibition purpose, calling for an accurate circumscription of its ontological condition with significant consequences for the interplay between fact and fiction in the production and reception of these museum displays.

This chapter theorizes the ethnographic mannequin’s medial condition as situated between the lifeless, albeit life-like, and therefore uncanny object used in the service of cultural representation, and the cultural performer who often served as its model. The claim is that, in terms of audience reception, the mannequin’s potential uncanniness emerges as the imaginary reverse of the delight caused by its inspiration and flip side, the living human performer.

I read these contradictory yet related reactions through the lenses of Sigmund Freud’s concept of the “uncanny” and Eric Ames’s “vivification,” which conceptualize receptive imagination with the help of literary fiction as paradigm for interpreting the facts of external reality. The theoretical focus on these two “domain[s], emotional movement[s], concept[s]” helps account for the reasons why the mannequin has survived to this day as a means of mediating cultural information. Beyond their literary foundation, both concepts coincide in their performative spin: just as scientific
and aesthetic interpretations of external facts (at least in these two theories) follow an analytical dynamic that deconstructs the scrutinized object, one can conceptualize theatrical roles as the fragmentation of human behaviour and its subsequent reconstruction on stage.

By following this line of argument, the chapter complements Peter McIsaac’s incisive analysis of the effect of museum techniques on the creation of literary fictions which are guided by equally transgressive and fragmenting strategies. While McIsaac explores how display ideologies and methods have informed the German literary imagination in the last decades, this analysis is interested in how, a century earlier, audience perceptions of tangible museal and entertainment displays of human-shaped objects and human beings were influenced by the literary fiction as guiding principle for engaging with the culturally unfamiliar. At this time, when numerous new media technologies appeared and the market for print products increased dramatically, fiction texts offered accessible and ubiquitous models for imagining ontological and cultural Others. Although in time this mode of conceptualizing imagination changed under the impact of audiovisual media, it still (and famously) came into play in numerous of Freud’s writings – not least in his seminal essay “The Uncanny” (1919). In theorizing “vivification,” Ames also acknowledges literary fictions as crucial element for the reception of turn-of-the-century exotic shows. Read together, McIsaac’s and the current essay reveal that, at least in the last two centuries, the processes of imagination that shape aesthetic creation and reception have relied on the indissoluble bind between literary fictions and scientific and performed facts.

1. Turn-of-the-Century Technologies of Human Representation

One finds mannequins in exhibitions worldwide. This article focuses on such exhibits in German locations because the theories used to describe them were designed in or in reference to German-speaking cultures. Certainly, this correspondence is not obligatory and one could just as easily select other examples to discuss naturalistic museum figures. Nonetheless, drawing from German contexts ensures not only the cultural cohesiveness of the argument, but also integrates the article into the cultural framework of this collection.

Ethnographic mannequins range from hyper-realistic and lifelike to abstract and stylized ones. They were and continue to be used to display ethnographic items and artefacts and to illustrate scenes from the lives of distant cultures. I am interested particularly in those that represent
individual human beings with a high degree of realism. Not coinciden-
tally, the heyday of these objects was in the last decades of the nineteenth
and the first of the twentieth centuries, that is, in a period of rapid tech-
nological innovation that brought forth audiovisual recording media such
as photography, film, and the phonograph. These technologies made pos-
sible the precise recording of human bodies and significantly affected their
hyper-exact reproduction with various materials. During the same era, the
emergence of modern scientific disciplines such as anthropology, ethno-
logy, and ethnomusicology (which, in their turn, profited from this media
development) impacted the foundation and design of Germany’s imperial
museums and exhibitions. Not least, as this was also a time of innovations
in entertainment technologies and genres, the boundaries between fact and
fiction, scientific display and spectacle were not always drawn clearly.

Unlike other media and exhibition modes of this era that soon became
obsolete, the ethnographic mannequin has not disappeared for reasons
that this argument hopes to illuminate with the help of two examples: the
figure of a Piegan Blackfoot woman exhibited in the Native Ameri-
can exhibition at the Karl-May-Museum in Radebeul near Dresden (fig-
ure 12.1) and the figure of an Australian Aboriginal dancer from the Tiwi
islands displayed at the Grassi Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig (Grassi
Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig) (figure 12.2). While controversial,
the Karl-May-Museum’s Native American exhibition is one of the sig-
nificant German collections of Indian arts and artefacts. Modelled by
artists Vittorio Güttner (1869–1937) and Ernst Grämer (1899–1966), its
mannequins, busts, and sculptures depict major indigenous groups from
the North American continent (Hoffmann, “Zur Geschichte” 109–10). Nu-
merous, their main function is that of display structures for the
museum’s original ethnographic objects. Most of the figures look static,
according to the taste of the time when they were created, the first decades
of the twentieth century. Only their flexed legs or bent elbows suggest
some movement. Among them, the “costume figure” of a young Piegan
woman stands out. Portrayed in an upright position, “she” serves to
present a spectacular dress of mountain sheep leather richly decorated
with the teeth of a Wapity stag (Dräger and Krusche, “Ausstellung” 78).
The figure holds a bag and wears exquisite beaded accessories as well as
indigenous jewellery of silver and bone. Its relaxed appearance invites
immediate fantasizing: one can easily imagine that “she” has stopped dur-
ing a leisurely stroll, perhaps because “she” encountered a friend or the
viewer. The Piegan mannequin’s almost impishly smiling lifelike coun-
tenance attracts the attention of less adept visitors (such as the author)
Figure 12.1 Piegan woman, Karl-May-Museum Radebeul, near Dresden (1928). Copyright by Karl-May-Museum Radebeul. Photos courtesy of Karl-May-Museum.
immediately, just a moment before they become aware of its superb original attire.

Nearly one hundred kilometres away, at the Grassi Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig, a diorama features the figure of a middle-aged Aboriginal dancer whose process of creation and exhibition is far better documented than that of the Piegan woman. This figure’s composite portrait of a father and a son was created on the basis of photographs. By collaborating with the figure’s two Aboriginal models, their families, and cultural community, the makers of the exhibit took pains to ensure that the mannequin offers both an accurate and a dignified depiction of an imaginary yet lifelike figure and a specific culture. The mannequin shows the dancer in the final moment of a Pukumani burial ritual. On such occasions, dances can last for days to honour and please the souls of the deceased so that
they return to reincarnate. Visibly exhausted, the dancer steps forward. Far from having a static appearance, the figure lifts arms and hands that hold two ornamented spear-tips called tungaliti and tungatini. These prestige objects reveal their owner’s respected position in the community. The dancer’s gesture indicates that the satisfied soul has finally departed, and the community is allowed to restart its everyday life. The figure’s facial expression is calm and kindly but, to a sensitive and empathetic observer, “his” eyes may appear moist from effort and rapture.

Oftentimes, visitors who encounter objects such as the Piegan and the Aboriginal mannequins experience the “peculiar emotional effect of the thing” (Freud, “Uncanny” 227) as a “disquieting strangeness” (Cixous 525) or even disgust. Others are fascinated by them and wish to learn more about the cultures they represent. Thus, although they are meant to render cultural information in the most accessible and – in the absence of living individuals – in the most realistic three-dimensional manner, mannequins usually elicit reactions that are difficult to pinpoint and describe. They are caused by the viewer’s imaginative engagement with the object that subtly complements, even overrides, the pragmatic and scientific facts these figures are called upon to convey. In other words, such exhibits may inadvertently evoke spontaneous fantasizing although they are designed to render facts. As facts and fictions intermingle in them, mannequins have the potential to puzzle us with their tangible and life-sized human form and to confront us with an ontological and hermeneutic conundrum.

Theorizing the ontological status of three-dimensional objects made to portray human beings – from statues, dolls, and robots to waxworks figures and ethnographic mannequins – cannot dispense with the Freudian concept of the uncanny that approaches them via their fundamental ontological ambiguity; although they are inanimate things, they often appear eerily alive to their viewers. Theories of the uncanny such as Freud’s and Ernst Jentsch’s (to whom Freud was responding) tend to focus on the lifelessness of the human-like object and its effect on the viewer’s psyche without paying much attention to the living person who may have served as its model. The role of imagination in such perceptions can be extended if mannequins used for cultural representation are theorized in conjunction with their models, some of whom performed in turn-of-the-century exotic shows (Völkerschauen in germanophone countries).

This association makes sense especially in the case of hyper-exact ethnographic mannequins like the two described earlier. The stress here is on the
hyper-exactness of the depiction, although the identity of the represented person may be uncertain as in the case of the Piegan woman or factually inexistent as in the case of the Tiwi dancer. The high degree of accuracy of such human portraits, produced industrially since the last decades of the nineteenth century, resulted from the fact that they were created either from three-dimensional plaster imprints or from model sittings and photographs of living individuals. As performances of “commercial ethnography” (Bruckner 233), exotic shows corresponded to museum exhibits insofar as they too presented foreign artefacts and cultural aliens, albeit in a live theatrical context. Such performances animated what stood frozen in ethnographic mannequins and dioramas, making possible

what museum exhibitions could not: they presented the foreign humans in the original – living, moving, speaking bodies ... The Völkerschau represented what was [regarded as] typical for a specific ethnicity. Its performers presented traditional clothing, instruments, and objects, and they performed mundane activities that were considered as characteristic [for the represented groups, as well as] profane, and religious ceremonies. (Lange 57–9)14

In short, the Völkerschau breathed life into the exhibits of ethnographic and anthropological museums. The doubling of the living person by his or her objectification in display allows the discussion of these two forms of ethnic and ethnographic display as opposite poles of a spectrum of representation and medialization that depends on modes of spectating and problematizes the relationship between scientific facts and the fictions emerging in their contemplation.

One might claim that, in principle, any medium is at once an effigy and a replica: Technological media purport to convey information about a segment or aspect of transient life, yet can potentially replicate it indefinitely. The recorded information is, however, not the life it purports to present and therefore always calls attention to something that is missing ontologically. In this sense, all media constitute effigies because – even in live broadcasting – they always mark the absence of tangible presences. The tension between external reality and medial effigy is particularly pronounced when the medium’s external form does not reveal its ontological condition immediately, for example, when it adopts the shape of a human being. (In contrast, neither the writing on the page or the screen nor audiovisually recorded information can be touched as self-standing physical entity or even remotely resemble the outer appearance of any
living being, so that the difference between medium and the existential status of the human receiver always remains clear.) Mark B. Sandberg’s concept of the effigy includes the mannequin as only one “tangible manifestation of a wider array of circulating corporeal traces and effects” that, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, aimed to fill in the places of absent persons while offering “new possibilities for imagining space and time” (Living Pictures 5). Wax figures, Sandberg’s object of investigation, and ethnographic mannequins are such replacements. Like photography or film, they implicitly convey to their viewers that the represented individuals and their cultural contexts are absent temporally, spatially, or both.

By one and the same gesture, ethnographic dioramas and exhibits serve as records of geographic, cultural, and personal information as well as evidence of its physical absence. Britta Lange therefore identifies such objects as symptoms of the fundamental paradox of ethnology: the attempt to depict absent cultures while claiming their immediacy (140–1). This paradoxical relationship between presence and the lack thereof has the potential to confuse viewers’ perceptions of the objects that imply it, triggering the reaction of imagining them as uncanny. And yet, as will become apparent later, imagination also has the power to rescue the mannequin if the latter contains a certain amount of representational inexactitude: precisely by giving some leeway to imagination, an inaccurate human representation in fact makes possible a quicker and more exact ontological ascription and therefore opens space for delight.

Like the naturalistic life-size statues, late-nineteenth-century ethnographic figures also occupy “the same volume as the real body” they portray (Flynn, Body in Three Dimensions 21). Although the wax figures of panopticons or cabinets of curiosities are identical with them in this regard, they were usually designed to be unique and perishable and to represent celebrities and well-known historical, spectacular, or fictional scenes. Instead, museum mannequins were created to be reproducible and durable, and to represent anonymous individuals in mundane or extraordinary scenes from the lives of “exotic” cultures (Lange 69). The actual information they conveyed through original objects and accurate cultural contexts was (ideally) obtained by direct scientific, cultural, and personal interactions of Europeans with the represented groups. Since this specific information was ultimately presented by means of generic, homogenized human types, however, an abundance of scientific facts was transmitted on the basis of their shortage on an individual level. Precisely the lack of personal information in the mannequin constitutes a major point of critique.
for this medium because such a depersonalized mode of representation is not only guided by but also invites an objectifying, oftentimes colonial, and levelling perspective in contemplation.

The anonymity of mannequins also stands in contrast to their high degree of aesthetic realism. Long before the advent of the museum figure, the tendency towards an idealized naturalism in European sculpture already manifested itself in “objects which directly mimic the body – dolls, waxworks, automata, robots – [that] have been present as sculpture’s doppelgänger, or double, since time immemorial” (Flynn 7). Whereas naturalistic sculpture and body mimicry share the same quest for accurate representation, however, waxworks models, death masks, or plaster effigies – many of them produced as direct imprints of human body parts – do not serve primarily as means of aesthetic expression but oftentimes as memento mori of deceased individuals (16–17). Such objects fulfil a recording function comparable to that of photography, yet they conserve human features also for tangible memory. As three-dimensional, exact-scale records of past persons that broadcast from the ever-absent netherworld, such objects potentially become “uncanny presence[s] for the spectator” (21), and therefore fully deserve the designation of “media” in its entire ambivalence.

A person’s absence owing to death complicates the effect of ethnographic mannequins further. Although the individuals who serve as models for such figures are usually alive at the moment when their likeness is taken, their personal historicity inevitably associates them with death sooner or later. For example, if the model for the Piegan woman was still alive in the 1920s, she cannot possibly be alive anymore today. Similarly, the Aboriginal’s portrait conflates the likenesses of a father and a son because the initial model, the father, passed away during the lengthy production process of the figure. Even if they were modelled from living humans, the ontological condition of such objects gradually and inevitably shifts to that of memorabilia of the deceased as they outlive their models and makers. The ethnographic mannequin accrues its function as a memento mori only inadvertently, given that it is designed specifically to transmit scientifically ratified, not personal information. And yet, this function resonates permanently beyond its purportedly objective, naturalistic surface.

Both the mannequin and the body souvenir were created by technological methods that served to replace earlier and even eerier forms of human representation, such as taxidermied human bodies. In them, the human epidermis generated another type of memento mori of individuals who
were paradoxically present and absent at once thanks to the tangible presence of their skins. This proved to be also the most problematic aspect of such specimens. Not only did human skin cause problems for mounting and preservation, but it also had an eerie effect on viewers because it highlighted the person’s genuine dead-ness and thus the object’s artificiality (Lange 111). A classical example for such an exhibit is that of Angelo Soliman’s body, the “Moor of Vienna” (Mohr von Wien), an African-born Freemason, valet, and tutor at the court of Liechtenstein. In 1796, his mortal remains were preserved and displayed without his or his family’s consent in a private imperial Viennese collection. Although, during his lifetime, Soliman had been an educated, cosmopolitan, and politically engaged man, his remains were used to portray him as a clichéd noble savage wearing a feather headdress and belt, porcelain beads, and a shell necklace (“Angelo Soliman”). The racial stereotyping that Soliman may have evaded in life became literally affixed to his skin after death, raising questions about the limits of personal agency and the respectful treatment of human remains. Regrettably, this mode of human representation was accepted until the end of the twentieth century.

Although techniques for producing death masks were not new when they were adopted by the natural sciences in the nineteenth century, they now offered a welcome alternative to human taxidermy. As they were put in the service of novel scientific goals such as the precise registration and cataloguing of human physical features, mask- and body-casting techniques benefited from the development of accurate anthropological measurement techniques and innovations in visual recording (photography and, later, film). Scientists took natural casts of living humans (“Naturabgüsse”) while on expeditions, or from the performers of the exotic shows that toured Europe in this period (Lange 78). In effect, this was a print method: not only were the created moulds called clichés or stereotypes according to terms from print vocabulary, but the objects created with their help were often made of papier-mâché (a mix of paper pieces, glue, and water) and thus, technically, paper prints. Paradoxically, paper gave a better impression of human skin than preserved skin itself, so that figures created in this manner were described as “naturgetreu” (true to nature), “natürlich” (natural), “streng nach Natur” (strictly from nature), and “lebensecht” or “lebenswahr” (true to life), indicating that the mannequins were considered adequate plastic representations of human bodies, but not identical to them (72).

However, neither were all ethnographic figures produced in this manner nor were the body casts restricted to the natural sciences: sculptors
and plastic artists used them too. Édouard Joseph Dantan’s naturalistic painting *A Casting from Life* (1887), for example, depicts the moment when a painter and his assistant remove the plaster negative from the leg of a female nude (figure 12.3). Adolph Menzel’s oil study *Atelierwand* (1872) represents a wall, to which casts of human body parts (the front of a female and a male torso, death masks including those of children) have been attached next to measuring tools (figure 12.4). Significantly for the current argument, Dantan’s and Menzel’s artworks illustrate the contradictory hermeneutic potential of three-dimensional body prints. Dantan’s painting thematizes the technological creation of a perfect human representation according to a classical aesthetic of elegance and beauty. Not without blatant gender implications, it narrates the positive story of a media negative, the plaster cast. However, this snapshot from an artist’s studio ultimately withholds the final aesthetic product for which the cast was made (if it is not the female nude or the painting itself), so that the story that the painting tells offers viewers the hope but not the certainty that the technological process glorified by the image will eventually generate an exceptionally beautiful naturalistic artwork.

Contrary to Dantan’s affirmative interpretation of the sculptural negative, Menzel’s study offers a dissenting vision of the casting technology as a process of fragmentation. It agrees with aesthetic practice, however, in that a complete body imprint cannot be taken in one sitting but only through partial castings. Accordingly, in Menzel’s grim still life, positives created from the moulds of body parts hang desolately from walls, testifying to disintegration and lifelessness in the service of art. Like Dantan’s, his image also denies viewers insights into a finalized artistic product. However, unlike Dantan’s well-lit, wholesome, and hopeful scene that represents (male) artists evidently working at something remarkable, Menzel’s pessimistic and literally dark vision focuses on how technological replicas of the human body in fact dismantle life in the service of portraying it accurately. Only dimly illuminated here and there by a flickering glow, Menzel’s suspended copies of human parts hover in an expressionistic twilight between life and death, between organic being and its life-less objectification, withholding rather than promising aesthetic wholeness. And yet, as viewers might well imagine while contemplating these images, artworks will be created with the help of the methods and means depicted by both painters, artworks whose graceful appearances will obfuscate their fragmented origins. Although it might exist, so far I have not found evidence
Figure 12.4 Adolph Menzel, *Atelierwand* (1872). Copyright by Hamburger Kunsthalle/bpk. (Photography by Elke Walford.)
of an aesthetic or ethic meditation about the production of ethnographic mannequins by their makers, so that Dantan’s and Menzel’s painterly comments on methods of accurate human representation must serve here as contiguous reflections. The two painters’ diverging engagement with techniques of body copying do not only illuminate how technical facts come into play in the creation of visual fictions, but also illustrate the major concepts at stake in this argument, the uncanny and fragmentation, as precursors and preconditions to the ideal aesthetic reconstitution of the human body into an imaginary, even living and breathing artwork (in performance).

A conjoint discussion of the visual arts, physical anthropology, and ethnology as fields of the mannequin is not so far-fetched as it might seem, considering that modern European aesthetic and scientific explorations of the human body have employed biometrics at least since the second half of the eighteenth century to uncover what were considered typical features of ethnic and cultural groups and individuals. At this time, anthropological theories were often influenced by aesthetic thought such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s reconstructivist idea that the ideal human body did not exist in reality but could only be assembled from the most beautiful parts of multiple bodies (Kaufmann 108–10). Further developed in the following decades, the purportedly scientific assessment of the mental and psychological capacities of individuals and groups through biometric measurements eventually contributed to the virulent American and European racisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and peaked in Arthur de Gobineau’s Aryan theory and its appropriation by the Nazis (Burke 270–1). The interplay between the European aesthetic and scientific interests in the human body ultimately imagined race as purportedly empirical, measurable, but also aesthetic fact, and one that was literally printed in 3D in the ethnographic mannequin.

While this history renders this medium as extremely problematic from a contemporary viewpoint, at their heyday in the late nineteenth century, the greatest problem that such objects posed to their makers and audiences was their representational authenticity, that is, their medial capacity to broadcast measurable ethnic and cultural information as accurately as possible. The highest degree of natural faithfulness or realism was ascribed to mannequins made from body casts because they contained indexes of original human bodies that Dantan’s and Menzel’s paintings of figures 12.3 and 12.4 scrutinize with such contrasting results. Another category of ethnographic mannequins consisted of those created in portrait sittings or from photographs. Their value was considered merely iconic, however.
Interposed media, such as brochures with explanatory texts and images, had to vouch for the scientific and informational accuracy of these objects (Lange 80).21 Ironically, in spite of the considerable artistic skill required to create an ethnographic figure by modelling rather than casting, the technically produced imprint of a person’s external appearance was ascribed more scientific and economic value, indicating (at least in the case of museum mannequins) that factual information was assessed higher than creative imagination and artistic ingenuity.

And yet, regardless of the methods by which they were produced, all mannequins inherited some of the problems reaching back to taxidermied human bodies, first and foremost their unsettling effect on viewers. Thus, in 1902, ethnographic figures representing a group of Australian Aboriginals at the Grassi Museum were touched by visitors, who also pilfered some of the objects they were supporting (Lange 153). This audience response does not only reflect the questionable morals of some visitors, but also suggests that, in the new media-scapes at the turn to the twentieth century, visual and acoustic criteria no longer sufficed for the ontological classification of naturalistic three-dimensional human-like figures. Unlike the three-dimensional digital technologies of our time that usually cannot be touched, however, the mannequin’s condition as a 3D medium was not a visually created illusion, and palpation proved to be the only certain method of establishing its identity or non-identity with a human body.

2. The “Uncanny” and “Vivification” in Human Exhibits and Performances

The reactions to ontological uncertainty that the Leipzig case illustrates also account for the uncanny feelings theorized by psychoanalysts. In his article “Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen” (1906), Jentsch asserts that uncanny feelings are caused by uncertainties regarding the familiar, for example, when the aliveness of a supposedly living being is doubted or, vice versa, when supposedly inanimate beings appear to show signs of organic life (197). He observes this phenomenon particularly in relation to the life-like figures of wax museums, panopticons, and dioramas, which elicit “half-conscious secondary doubts that are caused automatically by renewed contemplation and the perception of fine details” (198). In other words, what is most uncanny about such objects is not what they represent, but the precision of their execution. Indexical body prints can be subsumed under this definition too, considering that their hyper-exact
rendering of a person’s physique might easily elicit doubts, as it did in the Leipzig case.

Freud’s response to Jentsch’s argument in “The Uncanny” adapts this concept to his own psychoanalytical thought. For Freud, the familiar subsumes the home and with it the intimate and the sexual, which have to be concealed. It is not the exactness of representation that causes the uncanny feeling, but the resurfacing of an all-too-familiar which “ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to life” (225) to confront the viewer. According to Freud’s logic, the uncanny effect of an object thus has to do with virtually dead, that is, repressed sexuality. This means that automatons, mannequins, dolls, or waxwork figures frighten us because their absence of life and thus of the capacity to reproduce themselves organically signifies an evolutionary danger to the human species. For Freud, life – and with it successful procreation – is indicated by the eyes (240), whose removal elicits the fear of castration in his reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s novella Der Sandmann (1816), the centrepiece of his reflections on the uncanny. Indeed, the most conspicuous and emotionally most troubling part of the replicated human body is the face, whose eyes are the first checking points for life. Both in death masks and in the face casts taken from living individuals they are shut, suggesting death. By the same token, the colourful and shining glass or painted eyes of ethnographic mannequins have the potential to unsettle us in line with Jentsch’s argument, because they are lifeless objects that nevertheless suggest life. Indeed, a look at the faces of the Piegan woman or the Australian dancer might constitute a viewer’s first reality check for these figures. If the response is positive, we are tempted to give back the jovial smile of the Piegan woman and be moved by the raptness that we sympathetically believe to detect but, in fact, imagine, in the glossy eyes of the Aboriginal dancer. By causing either uncanny fear or eager fascination, however, both reactions confuse the museal reality of the object with that of an imagined person.

One can infer from here that the hyper-realistic ethnographic mannequin is a faulty medium because its physical form interferes with its scientific message so that an unintended and individually fantasized meaning overrides what it has been designed to transmit. Thus, be they indexical or iconic, such objects broadcast first and foremost that they are both copies and proxies of human beings. The fact that ethnographic mannequins do not represent persons with readily recognizable personal identities adds to this effect because viewers might easily believe that they are encountering unfamiliar individuals, which is a mundane and realistic situation for
anyone. (In contrast, when wax figures portray celebrities, their purported identities themselves account for the viewers’ disbelief in the possibility of personal presence, allowing observers to delight in the objects’ false or effigial one.) The anonymous individuals depicted by ethnographic mannequins thus have more potential to cause disturbances in reception precisely because of their familiar unfamiliarity.

Both wax figures and ethnographic mannequins enthrall or disconcert and disgust us not least because they mimic human figures so well that they double, that is, repeat them. Not coincidentally, repetition is a crucial element in both Freud’s and Jentsch’s theories of the uncanny. Jentsch remarks that eerie feelings re-emerge in the repeated contemplation of an object even after its actual nature has been identified (198). For Freud, the “constant recurrence of the same thing” causes uncertainty not least because it alludes to the “doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self” (“Uncanny” 234), in other words to a threat to the self’s integrity that might end with its undoing. Fragmentation begins with the separation between the concepts of the soul and the body of a human being that generates not only the idea of the body’s first abstract double but also that of denying death (235). When the “evolutionary universalist” Freud (Zilcosky, “Uncanny Encounters” 149) moreover equalizes the early mental states of childhood with those of primitivism that have supposedly been surmounted by adulthood and European civilization (“Uncanny” 249, 251), he adds another layer to this double: the “savage” (242) who, like the ghost, uncannily returns to confront and haunt contemporary humans with their repressed cultural past (Zilcosky 139, 149). Precisely these “savages” that Freud had in mind may have served as models for ethnographic mannequins and also appeared in Völkerschauen. Yet, they did not always frighten their viewers.

Instead, the same selves and psyches that were subject to fragmentation in Freud’s and Jentsch’s views of the uncanny, often “persuaded ordinary observers [of non-Europeans] to blur the line between the self and the other, the familiar and the exotic” (Zilcosky 151–2) in Völkerschauen. The fact that spectators bridged the divide postulated by psychoanalysts when they searched for affinities and commonalities in the encounters with performers of exotic shows suggests the possibility of a positive approach to the double. Hillel Schwartz notes, for example, that “our skill at the creation of likenesses of ourselves, our world, our times” (Culture of the Copy 11) generates the “impostors, ‘evil’ twins, puppets, ‘apes,’ tricksters, fakes, and plagiarists” of our pervasive “culture of the copy” (17). Instead of fearing them, however, we can use them to restore a more coherent
sense of ourselves through compassion by reaching out and thus learning intellectually and emotionally. Schwartz’s optimistic take on the copy is theatrical rather than technical in that it assumes a person’s doubling not in an art or science object but in a role whose performance provokes positive changes in the self. An industrially reproduced inanimate medium, the ethnographic mannequin had foils and counterparts in living humans, who often performed themselves culturally, theatrically, or both. The future mannequin and the potential performer became connected indirectly, for example, in the awkward situations wherein anthropologists created face casts of indigenous people. As their body parts were copied, the living models also acted (in the sense of taking independent action). One such instance was reported by Otto Schellong (1858–1945), a doctor from Leipzig, who travelled on an expedition to the German colonial territories in Papua New Guinea in 1885 (Friederici, “Lebensmasken” D2 5). There, he took the face negatives of thirty-nine individuals (D2 6).27 Schellong, who spent extended periods of time among the indigenous people and learned their language, reports that the Papuans were suspicious about the casting process.28 This comes as no surprise if one considers what it consisted of: The model’s face was covered with grease so that the plaster could easily be removed, and two rolls of paper were inserted into the person’s nostrils to allow him or her breathe. A sturdy ribbon wound around the model’s face prevented the cast’s still fluid plaster from flowing off. “Of course,” Schellong declares, “sometimes funny scenes happen, when the Papuan does not hold still, for example when he squints so that plaster gets into his eyes or when he suddenly becomes afraid under the pressure of the mask; then he is up and gone at once and if he [turns around and] looks back, he looks like chocolate with whipped cream” (qtd. ibid. D2 7).

While the reasons for the model’s fear become more than understandable from the way Schellong describes the casting process, his report is formulated like a slapstick scene featuring the notorious pie-in-the-face gag from vaudeville and early film. Not only are racial innuendos easily detectable behind the visually and ideologically telling “chocolate and whipped cream” remark, but those involved in the situation are portrayed according to clichéd roles. Schellong, the omniscient first-person narrator and a German doctor, obviously plays the part of the well-informed, rational, and composed protagonist. In contrast, the indigenous character is staged as an innocent fool whose lack of familiarity with scientific procedures causes his irrational fear and his making a spectacle of himself – “he” standing generically for all Papuans. Beyond testifying to a condescending colonial attitude, Schellong’s scene illustrates an anthropological method
in the terms of a theatrical performance. Other than in the doctor’s interpretation, role-play in fact translates here into emancipatory action on the side of the Papuan, who disrupts the casting process.

Casting connects theatre and anthropology. Not unlike creating a collection of anthropological masks through plaster casting, *performance* casting also constitutes a preliminary procedure for assembling acting ensembles. Here the process refers to the choice of physical markers (faces, bodies) and theatrical skills, whose interplay will render the most substantial part of the show. Like plaster casting, role casting also assembles a group (a collection) of individuals intended to be displayed before an audience.

One can easily imagine how, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, indigenous individuals such as Schellong’s Papuan (whose face cast became part of a German museum collection) may have been *cast* for participation in the exotic shows of commercial ethnography. Here, the selection also focused on the individuals’ physical markers (ethnic and physical features) and on their displayable skills (cultural expertise and the ability to present it appealingly to a foreign audience). For example, Native American performers who appeared in Wild West shows not only had to match the visual clichés of American “Indians,” but also to possess skills such as riding or sharp shooting alongside sufficient histrionic talent to fit typified ethnic roles that were already well established in European theatre (e.g., the noble “Indian” chief or prince, the villain, or the maiden or princess).39

Paradoxically, individuals with such capabilities earned a living in popular spectacles that claimed to meet the newest ethnographic standards although they were enhanced by fictional and theatrical elements.30 Scientists like Schellong often collected the physical and cultural information of such performers through technological methods ranging from voice recording to body measurements and plaster casting. For example, a show presented by twenty Omaha at Castan’s Panopticon in Berlin in 1884 included dancing, singing, and shooting tricks. After the group left, Castan’s catalogue of masks featuring diverse “ethnic types” (Völkerotypen) contained thirteen made from members of this group31 (Friederici, “Völker der Welt” D3 6–7). Their example underscores the overlaps between anthropological plaster and artistic performance casting and reveals the ontological and medial relation between ethnographic masks and figures and *Völkerschau* performers, all of which were regarded as vehicles for presenting ethnic features and cultural information.

Beyond their entanglements with anthropological and ethnographic research, ethnographic shows were always also entertainments that responded to the centuries-old European curiosity about exotic aliens. In
Wilhelminian Germany, the degree of this curiosity was remarkable. Scholars’ estimates about the numbers of exotic shows that toured the country until the first decades of the twentieth century range from 120 between 1874 and 1931 (Thode-Arora, *Für fünfzig Pfennig* 168–78)\(^{32}\) to 400 between 1875 and 1930 (Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde* 79). While these numbers are likely not complete, they nevertheless suggest how strong the presence of non-European individuals was in Germany at this time and how heavily it was not only researched, but also marketed. A remarkable example of such a touring troupe is that of nine male Bella Coolas who performed in numerous cities, enthused the scientific community in 1885, and also presented a significant collection of ethnographic artefacts. They inspired the work of German anthropologists and ethnomusicologists (Ames, *Hagenbeck’s Empire* 107–8; Lange 60–1; Penny, *Kindred by Choice*).\(^{33}\) The Ethnology Museum in Leipzig alone bought five hundred of the group’s ethnographic objects, thus acquiring the largest individual sub-collection of its North America inventory (Friederici, D3 12). However, the Bella Coolas failed to attract the attention of a wider public that favoured competing groups from the Plains such as Frank Harvey’s “Sitting Bull Sioux Indians” (Ames, *Hagenbeck’s Empire* 108) or Chief Spotted Tail’s Sioux troupe from the Rosebud reservation,\(^{34}\) because they fitted their publics’ stereotyped expectations about “Indians” better (109).

The Bella Coolas’ example illustrates once again how scientific activities, exotic entertainments, and the production of ethnographic figures overlapped. Scientific facts and performed fictions intersected not least because the individuals involved in them acted in several cultural fields at once. For instance, the Bella Coolas’ impresario, Adrian Jacobsen, worked for Carl Hagenbeck’s company of animal trade that also managed ethnographic shows (Ames, *Hagenbeck’s Empire* 103). Hagenbeck, as it happens, was Johann Friedrich Gustav Umlauff’s brother-in-law (Lange 59), and thus privately connected to the leading producer of ethnographic mannequins in turn-of-the-century Germany. In turn, Umlauff’s company hosted and managed ethnographic shows on its own premises or in collaboration with museums.

The cultural and theatrical self-performances of individuals who appeared in the arenas of exotic shows constitute effigies in their own right. The protagonists of these entertainments were persons with their own biographies and cultural identities who were understood to act out generic scenes from their indigenous lifeworlds – and even did so, to a degree. However, what they also suggested was the spatial and even temporal absence\(^{35}\) of
precisely the cultures that they aimed to represent. The effigial status of such performers serves, in other words, as the flip side of the uncanny mannequin on one and the same ontological and imaginary coin.

While the ethnographic objects selected according to the scientific standards of the time and exhibited on mannequins may have compensated, to a degree, for the cultural knowledge and self-representation of Völkerschau entertainers, they were arranged in inanimate exhibits. Such displays could be easily interpreted negatively as uncanny (in the sense discussed earlier) and associated with the (lifeless) information of science rather than with lived cultures. And yet, they were often staged according to theatrical parameters. Exotic shows also purported to present replicas of scenes from alien cultures, but they did so live. Thus, these popular performances had no overt negative connotations for their audiences because their first condition (even when representing allegedly doomed Native Americans) was incarnate life, not the dead soullessness of the inorganic mannequin. Precisely this liveliness opened Völkerschauen up to an imaginary process that Ames calls “vivification” and theorizes in the example of exotic shows featuring American indigenous performers.

Shows representing indigenous groups from the American Plains – first and foremost William Cody’s “Wild West” – enjoyed an immense success in Germany. To account for their popularity, Ames explains that, unlike the scientists who treated ethnographic performers as literal bodies of data, spectators perceived them as embodiments of the fictional figures they already knew from adventure literature (Hagenbeck’s Empire 105). Far from being an “ontological error,” this “dramatic reinterpretation of ethnographic performances as fantasy” constituted the principle of “vivification” that governed the reception of exotic shows by Wilhelminian audiences (105–6). Spectators thus appropriated the performances not as means of education and self-cultivation, like the mannequins of anthropological museums, but as incarnations of their fantasy dreams of the Wild West: “Rather than preserve the traces of people who were supposedly either dead or on the verge of dying, as ethnographic museums and folk museums would claim to do, the shows were seen as giving ‘life’ to [fictional, literary] figures that never existed” (114).

A comparison of the angst of the “uncanny” and the enjoyment of “vivification” reveals that both are caused by the interplay between sensory perception and imagination in contemplation and spectating. However, whereas uncanny reactions relate ontological uncertainty to the fear of death, “vivification” ties factual and ontological certainty to life, so that “the very idea of vivification … at once surprised and delighted viewers,
almost as if the practice of spectatorship had become a form of magical thinking” (ibid. 113) that could bring to life cherished fictions. It is in its recourse to magical thinking that “vivification” coincides with Freud’s “uncanny.” According to Freud, magic is a technique of animism that establishes imaginary relations in external reality where there are none in order to ward off the fear of death. As it thus at least assumes the possibility of immortality (“Totem and Taboo” 865–7), such thinking in fact relies on a “narcissistic overvaluation of [the subject’s] own mental processes” (“Uncanny” 240) and generates erroneous perceptions about one’s “omnipotence of thought” (“Totem and Taboo” 873). Animist magical thinking turns against itself in the uncanny quality of ethnographic figures because, out of a fear of their suspected dead-ness and all it entails in Freud’s vision (as noted earlier), it imagines anxiously that it could bring to life the inanimate human depiction. By a similar token, in Völkerschauen flesh-and-blood human beings with personal and cultural identities are magically animated into fictional, now tangible figures that had hitherto populated only the imagination of fiction writers and their readers. Assessing such individuals by the parameters of literary fiction does not rule out the awareness of their non-fictional personal and ethnic identities, however, and so maintains the ambivalent thought needed for the enjoyment of “vivification.”

Eugenio Barba’s theory of theatrical roles helps cement the analogies between the uncanny and vivifying performance that this argument has carved out so far. As Barba describes it, acting consists of comporting oneself according to elaborate behaviour systems, which are not those of everyday conduct, yet are still determined culturally and acquired by conditioning and training. They are based on body techniques created through the dismantling of functional and unconscious mundane behaviours and gestures and their performative reconstruction in ways that are entirely non-habitual and practically inefficient (Paper Canoe 15–16), yet theatrically effective. The physical body that is recreated in this process only shows actions, but does not necessarily relive them (32). In short, the presence created in theatrical acting “means to remove what is obviously the body’s daily aspect in order to avoid it being only a human body condemned to resemble itself” (32, Barba’s italics). Such a concept of play acting transforms a mundane into an extraordinary body through fragmentation and reconstitution. Likewise, it entails a double effigy as it gestures at both the absence of the fictional persona in mundane reality and that of the private person on stage. And yet, unlike the factual absences hinted at by the ethnographic mannequin, those evoked by human
Performers remain simultaneously present in the performance as mutual doppelgängers (of the person or the persona), demanding from spectators to decide on only one as the focus of their contemplation. (Ideally, of course, the goal of conventional European acting styles is the suspension of disbelief, i.e., voluntarily ignoring the mundane parameters of the event, for example, the private identities of the cast or the artificiality of the sets. The audience must imagine the ever-present everyday backdrop of the performance as absent in order to immerse itself in the theatrical illusion.) Conceptualizing performance in this manner complicates this argument’s reading of Ames’s “vivification” by identifying it too as a kind of effigy. Considering that Völkerschau performers were seen as enacting their private selves and habitual cultural roles (which may or may not have been the case), the fictional identities with which at least their German audiences endowed them compensated for their lack of conventional theatrical acting and fictional identities. As Ames’s concept of “vivification” reveals, audiences collectively drew from the era’s leading provider of fantasy, literature, to fictionalize these real individuals (Seeing the Imaginary 214; Hagenbeck’s Empire 105–6, 133). Moreover, in Barba’s definition, acting techniques are primarily physical activities that deconstruct the body in uncomfortable ways before reconstituting it counter-intuitively in performance. This means that, similarly to the ethnographic figures that are created by way of physical fragmentation, as noted earlier, and therefore always imply its organic consequence, death, the enacted human body is also generated from behavioural fragments, that is, the death of mundane behaviours in the service of suggesting life. In “vivification,” not the actors but the spectators joyfully performed this reconstitution as a result of their cultural habituation as theatre viewers and fiction readers, when they complemented the supposedly authentic exotic performances with their own fantasies that overrode the initial anthropological and ethnographic intentions of the exotic spectacles.

Just as literary or theatrical fantasy hinges on life in “vivification,” the narcissistic fantasies of magic thinking described by Freud fancy themselves powerful enough to maintain life without death, however with the caveat that they might generate potentially threatening ghostly or savage revenants. In both cases, the amount of leeway that is left to the spectator’s imagination ultimately dictates his or her visceral response to the representation. Both Freud’s and Ames’s concepts utilize literary fictions as reference points for conceptualizing these workings of the (European) imagination. Commenting on Freud’s psychoanalysis, Hélène Cixous and Lionel Trilling agree that it is “a science standing upon the shoulders of
a literature” (Trilling, “Freud and Literature” 35), with fiction authors 
serving as its “precursors and coadjustors” (42). Given that specifically 
Freud’s “uncanny” aims to bring forth a definition of uncertainty and 
hesitation, it becomes a metaphor for the undefinable it aims to define 
as it itself oscillates between “figures of science” and “some type of fic-
tion” (Cixous 526). Moreover, as Cixous reveals, Freud does not hesitate 
to adapt Hoffmann’s Sandmann to his psycho-sexual analysis by deliber-
ately obfuscating the significance of the doll Olympia (532–3). Not only 
does Freud thus fictionalize fiction in the service of his scientific analysis, 
but he does so in a theatrical manner: “What unfolds without fail before 
the reader’s eyes is a kind of puppet theater in which real dolls or fake 
dolls, real and simulated life, are manipulated by a sovereign but capri-
cious stage-setter” (525): the psychoanalyst himself. As the text thus stages 
its own argument in a dramatic manner, it posits fragmentation at the cen-
tre stage of a theory of the uncanny, in which the original triggers of this 
reaction, objects that might somehow appear as lifelike, are suppressed in 
the service of a psychoanalytical fiction of castration. This intra-textual 
performance highlights the dynamic relationship between scientific truth 
and the mechanics of fiction in Freud’s prose (531), which aims to design a 
scientific theory about the human perception of external facts.

With less intra-textual artifice, Ames uncovers the model for the col-
lective fictionalization of performers meant to convey ethnographic and 
anthropological information in adventure writing which, in the era of Dar-
winism and colonialism, was dominated by a plethora of exoticist writ-
ings, from pulp fiction and serial novels to the works of popular authors.40 
Although Barba does not specifically refer to textual fictions, for him too, 
the success of the fictional presence that the actor creates from fragments 
depends to a large degree on the viewer’s investment of imagination.

Taken together, Freud’s (alongside Jentsch’s), Ames’s, and Barba’s theo-
ries reveal that, if the form is human, it indeed affects the message. The 
cases discussed in this chapter suggest that representations of human 
beings must maintain sufficient non-identity with a person for their audi-
ences to remain certain about what they are invited not to believe: namely, 
that museum mannequins are living individuals and that Völkerschau per-
formers are ethnographic exhibits. Owing to the fact that these theories 
conceptualize both human bodies and human-looking objects in theat-
rical performances or exhibitions through fragmentation, reconstitution, 
and technological or histrionic reproduction, they posit the “uncanny” 
and “vivification” as polar opposites on the continuum of our imaginary 
engagement with external facts, especially when these facts have to do
with the human form. One can infer from here that a successful reception of such individuals and objects requires space for contemplative imagination: the signals that the body and its copies broadcast have to be calibrated in such a manner, that they unambiguously convey their intended message: ethnographic information or a performed role. If this message is not perfectly adjusted, perturbations such as the uncanny emerge or the performance is perceived as wanting in some way. If the respective representations allow for enough engagement of the imagination in perception, however, then facts and fictions collude in a successful media message about human beings, the life form with which we are most familiar.

3. Postscript: Successful or Unsuccessful Human Simulations Today

In recent years, a related dilemma has been particularly felt in another domain that aims to create replicas of the world and its humans: three-dimensional computer-generated digital animation (3D CGI). As designers strove to represent human life ever more accurately, they soon came to learn that excessive mimetic photorealism elicits disturbed, morbid reactions in the viewers of digital animations. Echoing Jentsch, digital designer Saint John Walker explains this effect by noting that “our brains seemingly magnify the slightest imperfections. We note the soul-less eyes, the rigid lips. Our empathy with the character is curtailed, and in some cases we feel a form of revulsion” (“A Quick Walk” 32). Already in 1978, Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori had coined the term “uncanny valley” to describe this reaction (ibid. 31–2). To avoid triggering it, Walker suggests that, instead of “cloning [the] world” (34), digital designers ought to strive for emotional – not representational – plausibility, even if “the temptation to describe the human form and physical objects with oppressive levels of detail will always be there” (38). Currently, 3D digital representations mature aesthetically when they fuse human acting with digitally designed fantasy settings and when they limit themselves to stylized or cartoon portrayals of human beings.

The predecessors of the “uncanny valley” were certainly at work in late-nineteenth-century media, in ethnographic mannequins, and – to a degree – even in the obsolete Völkerschauen. As museums and exhibitions aimed for an ever-higher accuracy of representation by charging their displays with too much factual information, their exhibits curtailed the viewer’s imagination and lost their attention. The Bella Coolas are a case in point, not only because they were culturally too different from the
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The Tiwi man’s devotion and exhaustion, for example, move us because they suggest the emotional depth of the ceremony that this exhibit represents in the first place. As Birgit Scheps-Bretscher, the curator of the Aboriginal figure, explained to me, the choice to create and exhibit a museum mannequin in 2009 was not easy, given the medium’s colonial history. Nevertheless, the museum decided to continue its exhibition tradition (comparable to that governing the Native American displays of the Karl-May-Museum), while actualizing it in line with contemporary sensibilities. Thus, what distinguishes the new figure both in its process of creation and its display, according to Scheps-Bretscher, is the respect for the portrayed culture. No body measuring or cast taking affronted an individual’s physique for the creation of this exhibit. The same care was devoted to creating an appropriate arrangement of the diorama. Such factors were rarely taken into consideration in the past, when exhibits were considered accumulations of data and arranged in purely pragmatic and culturally insensitive ways, to often inappropriate effects.

Today, a critical yet optimistic perspective on ethnographic mannequins at least suggests that they are understood not as mere objects, but as both informative and expressive artistic creations. In the case of the Leipzig exhibit, the adequate depiction of an event of great significance for Aboriginal cultures is achieved by presenting a composite portrait during a ceremony that speaks of emotional and cultural legacies. Coincidentally, the represented event informs about a specific cultural view on an existential issue that also lingers at the core of the uncanny and, why not, of performance: the immortal soul. The goal of the Tiwi islanders’ ritual, however, is not the Western medial one of summoning an absent spirit, but rather the ontological one of inviting reincarnation. This cultural logic excludes the uncanny, because it conceptualizes the life of the soul through organic, not technical reproduction. The museum exhibit depicting this belief permits sufficient distance between these ethnographic, religious, and ontological facts and us observers to allow us to perceive this message in an empathetic and imaginative way through the ethnographic figure.
The Piegan figure also looks real and appeals to us because “she” smiles, but we will ultimately not mistake “her” for a human being. The bright eyes and beaming face suggest an origin in artistic sculpture rather than anthropological face casting and the mannequin appears as charming to us not least because its facial expression opens a window in time, allowing us to imagine how mischievously and yet warmly the model may have smiled at the artist while posing. Just as a Piegan woman might have done, too.

NOTES

1 Britta Lange calls the mannequins used in German colonial exhibitions from the 1920s already “anachronistic” (Echt 265).
2 I am grateful to the independent researcher Hartmut Rietschel (Dresden) and Dr Birgit Scheps-Bretschneider, curator of the Australian exhibition at the Grassi Museum of Ethnology (Leipzig), for generously sharing their materials and expertise with me while I was researching this article.
3 In these words, Cixous circumscribes Freud’s concept of the uncanny as realm of uncertainty and strangeness (“Fiction and Its Phantoms” 525). As I discuss in the course of this argument, “vivification” has affinities with Freud’s concept, so that these terms can be applied to it as well.
4 Today one might even argue that the relationship is inverted, with literature borrowing many of its themes and aesthetic methods from media (e.g., film).
5 For discussions of new modes of scientific and entertainment displays in Wilhelminian Germany see, for example, Ames (Seeing the Imaginary, Hagenbeck’s Empire), Bruckner (“Tingle-Tangle of Modernity”), Lange (Echt. Unecht. Lebensecht), Penny (Objects of Culture), and Zimmerman (Anthropology and Antihumanism).
6 Karl May (1842–1912) was one of the most significant German authors of adventure fiction. Located in his former residence, the Karl-May-Museum is dedicated mainly to his biography and works.
7 For example, in 2014, the exhibition of supposedly Ojibway scalps caused a widely publicized public debate and an agreement between the Karl-May-Museum and representatives of the Ojibway nation. See, for example, media reporting by Liebschner (“Die Kopfhaut”), Oltermann (“German Museum”). For belated accounts, see Eddy (“Lost in Translation”) and Pitzke (“Der Streit”). Leipold (“Über die Rückforderung”) complements them with a curatorial approach.
8 The Karl-May-Museum’s Native American exhibition is located in a separate building called “Villa Bärenfett” (Villa Bear Fat, a name evoking May’s
Wild West fictions). This log cabin was erected in 1926 for Patty Frank (1876–1959), a circus performer, ethnographic collector, and the museum’s later administrator, as an exhibition space and private residence. The quality of today’s collection owes much to Frank’s expertise and connections as a collector. Still, as his memoir reflects, Frank’s attitude towards Native Americans was replete with racism and clichés (Ein Leben im Banne Karl May’s).

To this author, Güttner’s portraits appear more artfully executed than Grämer’s. His most prominent mannequin exhibit is a diorama depicting the family of a Plains Chief that welcomes home victorious warriors. The painted backdrop representing these warriors was created by controversial artist Elk Eber (1892–1941), who is best known for his depictions of German soldiers during the Third Reich. On Eber’s relationship to the Karl-May-Museum and Native Americans, see Penny, Kindred by Choice, chap. 4, “Modern Germans and Indians.” I am grateful to Hartmut Rietschel for the historical details about the mannequins of the Karl-May-Museum.

While its actual production year is unknown, the figure was first mentioned in 1928, the year of the museum’s opening (Hoffmann, “Zur Geschichte” 102).

All information about this exhibit is courtesy of Birgit Scheps-Bretschneider.

I did not find detailed information about the sources and production process of the mannequins created by Güttner. However, Rietschel’s private document collection of the historical Wild West scene in Saxony contains a photograph depicting the artist and his wife, as an inscription on the photograph explains. Both were members of the renowned and still existing Munich cowboy club (Cowboy-Club-München 1913 e.V.). In the image, Güttner is dressed as a cowboy and his spouse as a Native American Plains woman. A close comparison between her face and the Radebeul mannequin’s suggested at least to this viewer that the figure might be an idealized and younger depiction of Güttner’s wife whose ethnicity remains to be identified. (Undated photograph by Franz Xaver Lehner, presumably from the 1920s; reference and information courtesy of Hartmut Rietschel.)

In 1916, a natural history collection donated to the Spanish village Banyoles still contained the taxidermied body of a Bushman, who was removed from the exhibition only in 1992 and returned to Botswana another eight years later (Moyano, “Nègre de Banyoles” 145).
18 Under the same title, Menzel painted a predecessor to this study in 1852. This image depicts the casts of two arms hung from a wall between a shelf and a window. One arm is bent, the other holds an elongated object (possibly a carving or drawing tool). Both are suspended above a mummified human hand and a skull. The mood of this painting is similar to that of its 1872 complement: dark and foreboding, it is created by sparse light that illuminates the depicted objects from below. The 1852 painting also suggests morbidity and an ominous sense that technological and organic replication and preservation may (literally) go hand in hand with physical and aesthetic de-composition.

19 Although the subject is clear, this image lends itself to an even more positive reading if the negative’s function is inverted. Thus, the depicted moment could be interpreted not as the taking of a cast but as that when male makers free their flawless creation from its mould, the last trace of its technological origin. Dantan’s painting may suggest that the two artists have created such a naturalistic representation of a lovely woman – “sur la nature,” i.e., from life – and that “she,” the visual focus of the canvas, has come to life just as in the Pygmalion myth.

20 Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s and Samuel Thomas Soemmering’s proto-racial theories, for example, aimed to establish morphological classifications of “nationalities” or to derive the psychological features of human groups on the basis of biometric and cranial measurements. (Burke, “Wild Man’s Pedigree” 268–70, Kaufmann, “Vom Zeichen” 108–12). See also Zimmerman’s excellent discussion of German methods of anthropological measurement at the heyday of Wilhelminian imperialism (Zimmerman 86–171).

21 Authenticity was defined not least economically. One of Umlauff’s product catalogues from 1909 not only lists the various nationalities depicted by mannequins, but also indicates the price distinction between the more expensive full-body figures made of durable papier-mâché and the cheaper ones with doll bodies and wax or papier-mâché heads, hands, and feet. All figures, however, came with “original and authentic” clothes, jewellery, and weapons (Lange 267–9).

22 As he notes himself, Freud borrows this idea from Schelling (“Uncanny” 225).

23 Freud also observes that our organs of sight are often connoted negatively, for example, as the ominous and potentially deadly evil eyes of popular beliefs.

24 Freud notes that uncanny reactions vary from person to person. Scheps-Bretscher also reported that many visitors encountering the Tiwi man’s portrait feel enthralled, not repelled by it.

25 Or would anyone be easily convinced that the actual Angela Merkel, John F. Kennedy, or Barack Obama gather in the same building of Madame Tussaud’s Berlin branch? (“Wen möchten Sie treffen?”)
Freud notes that he draws from Otto Rank’s theory of the double (“Uncanny” 235).

The casts were meant to complement Otto Finsch’s collection in Berlin that consisted of 164 life masks.

The fact that they were suspicious because they did not comprehend the procedure calls into question Schellong’s degree of transparency towards his collaborators.

Warren’s *Buffalo Bill’s America* (2005) and Sagala’s *Buffalo Bill on Stage* (2008) offer insightful examples and analyses of such staple-fare ethnic characters in the context of the theatrical performances of William Cody (a.k.a. Buffalo Bill).

For example, at the time when it toured Germany, Buffalo Bill’s “Wild West” was regarded as the latest trend in ethnographic exhibits (Ames, *Seeing the Imaginary* 213).

They were incorrectly listed as “Sioux.” Coloured reproductions of the face masks were commercially available at the price of 15 marks (Friederici, D3 7).

Of these, Carl Hagenbeck’s animal trade company alone managed 69.

For a detailed and current transnational analysis of the Bella Coolas’ tours and impact on their German audiences, see particularly the subsections “The Showmen and the Sioux” (chap. 1), “German Audiences” (chap. 3), and “Diffusion and Cultural Traits” (chap. 8) in Penny, *Kindred by Choice*.

Like the Omaha, this troupe performed at Castan’s Panopticon in Berlin in 1898–9. It was the last one of five Native American troupes that had appeared in this location since 1882 (Friederici, D3 16).

Usually, performers presented scenes from the lives of contemporary colonized and European cultures. However, because Native Americans were considered a vanishing race in line with the ideology of Manifest Destiny, their performances portrayed – at least in the understanding of their turn-of-the-century audiences – cultures on the verge of extinction.

Presenting mannequins in so-called life groups was one of the most popular modes to exhibit them. Such arrangements were governed by principles of staging borrowed from theatre and spectacle. For example, in his instructions regarding such a display, anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942) wrote: “In order to set off such a group to advantage it must be seen from one side only, the view must be through a kind of frame which shuts out the line where the scene ends, the visitor must be in a comparatively dark place while there must be a certain light on the objects and on the background” (qtd. in Lange 163). Not only through its vocabulary (“view,” “frame,” “scene,” “background”), but also its practical suggestions about how the figures should be positioned and illuminated for best effect, this remark reflects the anthropologist’s familiarity with the aesthetics of conventional theatre and the fact that he aimed to
transpose this aesthetics into the museum. Boas, one of the most significant figures of modern American anthropology, had been a curator of the Royal Museum of Ethnology in Berlin before he moved to New York. He too had seen the Bella Cools. He also made gypsum casts of Kwakiutls and used photographs of Umlauff mannequins in his work in New York (ibid.).

37 Buffalo Bill’s “Wild West” toured Germany in 1890 and 1906, where it performed in over sixty cities and towns (Kort and Hollein, I Like America 230). This and other Wild West shows were so successful that, after the North American groups left, German show producers such as Hagenbeck and Hans-Stosch Sarrasani hired Native American performers for their own Wild West shows in the first decades of the twentieth century. For a recent analysis of these entertainments see Penny, Kindred by Choice.

38 A similar point is made by Josef Rattner and Gerhard Danzer (Literatur und Psychoanalyse 27–43).

39 Olympia’s function in the text as lifelike albeit lifeless figure would have kept the definition of the uncanny too close to Jentsch’s. Cixous further observes that Freud sets up a confrontation between the sandman and the neurotic Nathaniel that is more sustained and obsessive than Hoffmann narrates it. He thus literally reinvents his source text by pruning it of any elements that did not serve his reading (533), i.e., by fragmenting and reconstructing it to serve his own goals.

40 Ames refers specifically to James Fenimore Cooper, Friedrich Gerstäcker, and Karl May (Seeing the Imaginary 214; Hagenbeck’s Empire 109, 131).

41 As it offered its spectators ethnically marked human bodies in acting, on which they could project their German literary fantasies of America, a spectacle such as William Cody’s “Wild West,” for example, left an indelible mark on popular culture whose reverberations are felt to this day in German western films and events, Native American and other American re-enactments, and Karl May festivals.

WORKS CITED


