

Being Humaned: Medical Documentaries and the Hyperrealization of Conjoined Twins

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Nor was it without some reason that I believed that that body which, by a special right, I call mine, belonged to me.

—DESCARTES, *Meditations*

[I]f a foot, or an arm, or any other part, is separated from my body, it is certain that, on that account, nothing has been taken away from my mind.

—DESCARTES, *Meditations*



If anomalously embodied subjects are no longer exhibited in freak shows, as they were for centuries, they remain today the peculiar object of public fascination in which it is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to distinguish simple or even morbid curiosity from outright voyeurism, with all the force of surveillance, objectification, fetishization, and hyperrealization that such forms of looking entail. That extraordinary bodies continue to be the stuff of spectacle is perhaps no more obvious than in the case of conjoined twins, whose birth and surgical separation consistently excite fierce media interest, including the production of full-length documentaries, one example of which is the focus of our attention here. Documentaries about conjoined twins have a mixed inheritance that reflects the complex work they must perform in the subjection of the extraordinary body. These antecedents include the wonder book, which makes specialized knowledge of human oddities available for the polite conversation of lay people; the anatomy lesson, in which the visibility of the flesh, or at least of a deracinated version of it, is inversely proportionate to the visibility of the lived body; the clinical report or case history, whose explanatory narrative transforms the subject into the "patient"; the freak show, with its carefully managed combination of pathos, hyperbole, and prurient amazement; and the television hospital melodrama centered upon the benevolent work of heroic physicians. These elements are woven into the earnestly instructive framework of the documentary genre, whose naturalistic strategies conceal the degree to which the film stages the spectacle it purports to describe. Notwithstanding significant shifts in the cultural construction and reception of the humanly "monstrous," contemporary representations of the extraordinary body in documentaries therefore provide a uniquely illuminating instance of what Neil Harris said of P. T. Barnum's career, namely "the involvement of the politics of

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entertainment with the politics of life.”¹ Our chief interest here is “the politics of life,” or, more precisely, the political history of the body, both ordinary and extraordinary, that documentaries about conjoined twins inherit, reiterate, and displace in spectacular fashion. What roles do the twins and their physicians play in this theater of surgery performed internationally before a potential audience of millions? What does it mean to watch the televised representation of these fused and exotic bodies, at once maximally visible and coolly distant, while they undergo the most radical forms of morphological transformation at the hands of the surgeons?

By way of addressing these admittedly large questions, this chapter examines *Siamese Twins*, a documentary written, produced, and directed by Jonathan Palfreman for the PBS television series *Nova*.² First broadcast in the United States in 1995, *Siamese Twins* is about Dao and Duan (their full names are never provided), nearly three-year-old conjoined twins born in Thailand and living in what is vaguely identified as “a Bangkok orphanage.” The film follows the twins for about eighteen months, after they have been brought to the United States by an international adoption agency for the purpose of separation. The narrative falls roughly into three unevenly divided sections: the first section begins with the twins’ arrival in America and includes scenes of family life with their caregivers, Barbara and David Headley, punctuated by various tests in Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia to determine the viability of separation surgery (summer 1993); in the second segment, we witness the preparations for surgery, as well as the pre-separation and separation surgeries themselves, under the direction of Dr. James O’Neill, head of pediatric surgery (September to December 1993); the concluding section focuses briefly on postoperative life, including rehabilitation therapy (May 1994), a fourth-birthday party (June 1994), and the twins attending preschool (January 1995).

In its most affecting moments, and there are many of these, *Siamese Twins* powerfully conveys the spirited endurance of Dao and Duan, who are subjected to a series of stark dislocations, both physical and psychical: their transportation from their home in Bangkok to an alien culture in Philadelphia, a series of invasive tests and painful preoperative procedures, the dangerous separation surgery itself, and the subsequent shock of their radically altered bodies. Any alleviation of the pain of this extended trauma comes from Dao’s and Duan’s foster caregivers, whose presence in the film forms a familial alternative to the clinical setting of Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. At their adopted home, the children receive respite from their subjection merely as “patients” and as anomalous bodies in need of repair, even if it is here that we also witness, inevitably, the shaping effects of other discursive regimes. But it is the medical environment where the film’s greatest emphasis lies: unlike *Katie and Eilish* (a British documentary about a set of Irish conjoined twins in which the details of the separation surgery are deliberately underplayed so as to allow the camera to linger over the twins’ family life),³ Palfreman’s film is arguably not “about” the children at all, except as a means by which to represent the sophisticated medical technology available at Children’s Hospital, and the extraordinary medical expertise—pediatric surgeons, urologists, radiologists, plastic surgeons, neurosurgeons—concentrated there. Although Dao and Duan are rarely absent from any frame, it is the doctors who form the consistent focal point of the documentary, making it the postmodern expression of a *mise en scène* that could be said to have begun with Rembrandt’s *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaas Tulp*.⁴ In other words, Palfreman’s documentary realizes a certain technologized medical gaze, a gaze whose view is insistently actualized in frames filled with images of Dao’s and Duan’s exposed flesh. Under this close surveillance, the twins are

paradoxically both present and absent, because they are reduced to something closer to malformed skin and bones, a "surgical field" in which the new masters of the body will carry out their good, though dangerous, work.

Fully a third of Palfreman's film concerns the graphic details of the fourteen-hour surgery itself, and another third is taken up with the physicians puzzling and triumphing over various bodily "obstacles" to the separation. At no point is the question of *whether* the surgery should take place seriously considered, a startling omission to which we will return; neither are the profound "psychological" implications of the separation addressed, except in passing, and then only *after* the operation has occurred. The suggestion is that in this surgical theater, the physical condition of the twins is so intolerable, and their reconstruction as separate individuals so imperative, that these other considerations are without consequence, or, significantly, of interest mostly to the foster parents. The questions faced by the physicians and caregivers alike prior to separation are represented as mostly surgical in nature, never truly ethical, epistemological, or phenomenological, notwithstanding the fact that Dao and Duan resistantly *embody* these questions, and do so in such a palpably obvious way, simply by being who they are. In short, the documentary proves the point of Leslie Fiedler's observation that conjoined twins "have become supernumeraries" in a spectacle "starring the doctors who make normal human beings out of monsters."⁵ True to the psychoanalytic framework of his study, Fiedler's term for this spectacle is "psychodrama," and it is there where our work has a different emphasis. For *Siamese Twins* stages something closer to a theater of medical *regimes*, not personalities; the "monsters" that the "doctors" humanize are not those that dwell within, but, as it were, those that live "without," if by that term we mean the disciplined social body whose normative ideals Palfreman's physicians reiterate.

We wish to concentrate on the film's strategies in *normalizing* Dao and Duan, especially on the ways that the twins' morphological construction or interpellation—to use Althusser's term⁶—parallels and is reciprocally implicated in their cultural interpellation. By the end of the story, being happily integrated into American society and being "carved" into separately embodied individuals (this is a verb to which one of the surgeons resorts) amount almost to the same thing. The film makes this process of interpellation possible by almost completely erasing any evidence of the twins' life in Thailand prior to coming to Philadelphia. At one point Barbara Headley inadvertently articulates this cultural effacement and its exclusionary premises: "When they first asked us to find a home for these children, they were just children, like strangers," she says: "They didn't have a personality, they didn't have anything." There is a curious slide here between two forms of poverty, one real—for the twins, in the narrowest sense, "have" nothing when they are brought to the United States—the other, clearly hallucinated. What Headley intimates in an offhand and no doubt well-meaning remark, *Siamese Twins* pursues as its working assumption. With their life in Thailand deleted, it becomes much easier to pretend that Dao and Duan are blank slates, when in fact they are slates whose profound cultural inscriptions have been simply been rubbed out in and by the film. Of course, Dao and Duan *do* possess personalities before coming to America, and so "have" a great deal, but of that abundance we see and hear almost nothing. For a fleeting instant, and then only as a flashback, we glimpse the twins sitting on the bare floor of their home in a "Bangkok orphanage." As the only visual image of the twins' Thai life in the film, it comes freighted with significance. Filmed not at eye level but from above so as to emphasize the twins' helplessness and isolation, these images also simultaneously reassure us that Dao

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and Duan nevertheless remain within the benevolently elevated sight of America, whose subject position we as audience members are assumed automatically to occupy as viewers of this documentary. Watching these brief scenes, it is hard not to wonder if the documentary is here also playing on the media image of a "Third World" orphanage—familiar to television viewers from various overseas relief campaigns—as a place of physical deprivation in need of "First World" support and intervention. It seems important to the film's logic that Dao and Duan are orphans, which is to say disconnected from "home" even while at home, and therefore all the more easily figured as "rescuable" and "rescued" from a place that is in any case apparently incapable of offering them either a "true" family or adequate medical care. In the absence of any other details, "Thailand" and "Bangkok" are figures that attract almost exclusively negative connotations, especially concerning children: "Siam" is the prototypical birthplace of malformed infants, and now the site of an AIDS epidemic of almost unimaginable proportions; "Bangkok" is the Asian city of appalling and prurient opportunities, where impoverished rural families sell their children into sex slavery. Compared to Thailand, America can only mean health, prosperity, technological prowess, robust individuality, and familial integrity.

When the film opens, Dao and Duan have already made the long journey to Philadelphia. Their arrival is deemed more important than their departure and all that led up to it, implying that they have come from a place so distant and so foreign that it has dropped out of sight and out of mind before the film has begun. And so their arrival is in effect a nativity scene, in which the twins are born again, borne across the Pacific and delivered safely to America. It is telling that Dao and Duan are first greeted by a flurry of photographers' flashguns, since this celebrity scene anticipates the ways in which their *images* and *imaging* will become crucially important in the documentary. The narrator solemnly tells us that the twins now "begin a new life in a strange land," underlining the fantastic cultural logic of the film, which asserts that lives can stop and start anew with a plane ride. It is not so small a world after all, or rather, it is a world whose geographical imaginary conveniently shrinks and expands according to the ideological uses that this geography serves. Moreover, the suggestion is that an orphaned, Thai life has such a tenuous hold on its infant subjects that mere weeks in America is all it takes to be evaporated, as if it had never happened at all. Throughout the film, Dao's and Duan's indelibly Asian faces and Thai speech form a persistent countermemory to the film's colonialist amnesia. Against the film's dominant logic, these sights and sounds remind us that the elided place where the twins first learned to speak, and love, and learn—generalized as "Thailand"—is not *this* place and will *never be this place*. Barbara and David Headley remark that Dao and Duan know only a few English words, inadvertently calling attention to the fact that, with one brief exception in the opening seconds of the film, no one in the documentary speaks Thai—even of the most elementary kind—to the children in order to help alleviate their isolation. When we are told that the twins nevertheless converse with each other in their native language, the documentary provides us with an image of the children sustaining a tiny island of their "former" lives in a sea of American middle-class culture. When the children are not enduring medical procedures, they are repeatedly shown to be happily embracing this culture, whether eating fast food or watching television: by "culture," the documentary clearly means a culture of consumption.⁷ That acculturation is successfully taking place seems mostly important to those who are observing the twins. One of the first things said in the film is Barbara Headley's revealingly anxious allegation that

within one day Dao and Duan "feel very comfortable." The narrator confirms this expectation of ease when he tells us that "only six weeks after arriving in Philadelphia, . . . [the twins] are getting the hang of American life"—which is to say, a certain bourgeois version of that life, complete with Barney, Coca Cola, McDonald's hamburgers, birthday cake, frilly dresses, and a large, white house in the fashionable suburbs of Philadelphia.

Insofar as Dao and Duan are given a historical context at all, it comes in the specious form of comparisons to the life of Chang and Eng Bunker, the prototypical and stereotypical instance of conporate embodiment whose freak show name also forms the title of the documentary. Although brief, the account of the Bunker twins says a great deal about the documentary's assumptions concerning corporeality, both ordinary and extraordinary, and so it is worth pausing to consider in some detail. As the image of the twins in their Bangkok orphanage dissolves into a photograph of their morphological namesake and precursors, Dao and Duan are identified as "in a sense, true Siamese twins." What constitutes this "truth" remains unexplained, presumably because it is so thoroughly caught up in a web of falsehoods, beginning with the racism that underwrites the identification of a "pathology" with an othered cultural group (as in the case of "mongolism," a term still too often used to name subjects with Down's syndrome). How, then, are Dao and Duan "true Siamese twins"? "True" like Chang and Eng, who were in fact Chinese, not Siamese, and whose conjoined morphology was quite unlike that of Dao and Duan? "True" as Siamese, when "Siam" is itself a kind of lie, a nineteenth-century colonialist projection of the West upon the East that is revived in this film in a way that is at once quaint and patronizing, while at the same time registering a certain exoticism that will soon be tamed by Barney and by surgery? While the identities of Dao and Duan are flattened out to fit the generality of "true Siamese twins," the particularities of their life as *Thai* children are once again effaced, spirited away to a time that the narrator vaguely associates, in the shape of the Bunker twins, with "the last century." Chang and Eng, we are told, "travelled to America, where they found work as entertainers." Of course, this is a hallucination of the Bunker's life, for they did not "travel" to America, but, like slaves, were purchased and transported there by two Yankee merchant skippers. The narrator similarly passes over the freakish nature of their labor, peremptorily translating its voyeuristic exploitation into mere "entertainment," which is to say a form of popular diversion not entirely unlike the television documentary itself.

Lest this mirroring connection between the two "shows" go undeveloped, the camera cuts from the faces of Chang and Eng to a flyer advertising their "work" in similarly normalizing terms, "respectfully" informing the "Ladies and Gentlemen of Boston" when and where they will "receive Visitors." Seeing a handbill entitled "Siamese Twins" within a film entitled *Siamese Twins* inadvertently comes close to producing what literary criticism calls a *mise en abyme*, the point at which a text vertiginously becomes the object of its own representation. Given the ways in which the film draws parallels between the two sets of twins, it is almost impossible not to read this advertisement without also considering whether or to what degree contemporary documentaries contain traces of the freak show from which they try to distance themselves. There is a forthrightness about reproducing this advertisement, for it puts to us that for all of its earnestness, the film is, after all, circulated in a medium that is massively committed to the task of recreation. In *Siamese Twins*, "the two great streams of appeal—amusement and instruction"—that Robert Altick describes as finding separate media late in the nineteenth century would appear to be complexly reunited on television late in the

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twentieth.⁸ Does the virtualized universe of television make what was once an obviously exploitative spectacle into something safe, that is, as hygienic and enlightened as the theater of surgery? Fiedler, for example, has written evocatively of what it means to observe conjoined twins: "the beholder sees them looking not only at each other, but—both at once—at him," a moment that Fiedler says breaks the distinctions that normally hold between "audience and exhibit, we and them, normal and Freak."⁹ What, then, does it mean to look at conjoined twins *on television*, where this (uneven) two-way visual communication is short-circuited, thereby providing the viewer with a perfectly panoptic vantage point, freeing him and her to look at will without feeling the ambiguous *anagnorisis*—or re-cognition—that might come of a returned gaze?

At the very least, our gaze as viewers repeats from without what occurs within, for Dao and Duan are caught up in an extraordinarily *spectacularized* environment of redoubled images and imaging. In this thoroughly representational economy, the twins are dematerialized in several ways, even as their material form is maximally displayed. For example, the extreme close-ups of the various surgeries so shrinks the distance separating viewer and object that the body simply dissolves into the meaty and unfamiliar recesses of its own viscera. The twins are subjected to an array of imaging technologies (from crude hand-drawn diagrams and overheads, to CAT scans, MRI, and x-rays) that bring the innermost reaches of their bodies into hypervisibility. Each of these images has its attendant medical observers and interpreters *within* the documentary, making the representation of the twins the object of the film's representation; in other words, at these moments we are watching others watch Dao and Duan. Sophisticated, rotating three-dimensional computer graphics supplement the narrator's visualization of the twins' morphology, momentarily giving their body a ghostly transparency and our eyes a penetrating power that mimics the imaging technologies that the film showcases. If Dao and Duan are captured *in* images, they are also captured *by* images, the most vivid instance being the scenes depicting them listlessly watching Barney on television during a three-month period while they are immobilized in a body cast. This is an experiment in cultural conditioning—Barney, we could say, is the very image of monstrous difference suppressed and domesticated—that even the narrator concedes will be trying. Finally, the narrative includes scenes in which the documentary maker films other photographers in the process of making their own images. The most curious example of this latter form of redoubled spectacularization—of making a spectacle out of a spectacle—occurs during the filming of a large preoperative conference, in which the attending Thai doctors are depicted not as actively participating but as passively videotaping the proceedings. This image comes uncomfortably close to the racist cliché of the camera-touting Asian tourist. Under these theatricalized conditions, the naturalistic distinction between representation and its object wavers and threatens to dissolve into layers of spectacles within spectacles.

Nested within the documentary, ostensibly as medical historical background to Dao's and Duan's condition, the story of the Bunker brothers is in fact two conjoined stories: one of desire fulfilled and the other of desire thwarted. Each story informs our reception of Dao's and Duan's experience in America. In the first instance, Chang and Eng function typologically as "Siamese" twins who escaped a primitive and presumably penurious "Siam" to make their fortune in a more civilized and wealthy America, thereby setting the example that Dao and Duan are destined to repeat. "Chang and Eng Bunker prospered," the narrator assures us, "bought land in North Carolina, married two sisters, and between them fathered twenty-two

children." The accompanying family photograph holds out the promise of a happy, middle-class domestic life that Dao and Duan too can expect. In case we have missed this parallelism, the narrator reminds us in the film's closing moments that "like the Bunker twins before them, Dao and Duan have found a future in America." The fact that the prosperity of the Bunkers was irrevocably linked to the display of their anomalous bodies for the amusement and titillation of America, and that twenty years after buying that land in North Carolina their "prosperous" financial circumstances were unstable enough that they were compelled in their old age to display these bodies once again, goes neatly unspoken.¹⁰ Instead, the Bunker brothers are broadly assimilated to the fertile, heterosexual normality whose middle-class values the documentary unwaveringly shares, here by measuring their success in America by the number of their possessions and the size of their families.

The Bunkers have everything that Dao and Duan are assumed to want—everything, that is, but the most personal and the most valuable of "personal property," the very condition of the possibility of democratic self-sufficiency: namely, individual agency.¹¹ "For all their success, the Bunker twins wanted more than anything to be separated," the narrator baldly states, even though the biographical evidence is, at the very least, that Chang's and Eng's thoughts and feelings about separation changed over the course of their long lives.¹² The syntax of the narrator's apparently neutral description inscribes a narrative of frustrated desire onto Chang's and Eng's biographical history. According to this narrative, the accumulation of ever more precious forms of chattel—land, wives, children—could not take the place of what the twins really wanted, namely discrete corporeality. Embodiment here comes close to being defined as a property relation, exactly as it is in Descartes's *Meditations*,¹³ in a documentary that reduces embodiment to malleable flesh, figuring corporeality in this way comes to have its own perversely rational logic. Did the Bunkers want "more than anything to be separated" (emphasis ours), or is it the case that the narrator—again, speaking on behalf of an audience that is presumed to hold self-sufficiency, both economic and corporeal, as a virtue above all others—imposes this desire upon the Bunkers? We cannot know for sure, since we do not hear from Chang and Eng: the grainy black and white stills of their "inscrutable" faces so easily become a mute surface upon which almost anything can be projected. About the matter of separation we do not hear from Dao and Duan either. But precisely because Dao and Duan are unable to voice their own desires, Chang and Eng in effect speak for them in the film, the assumption being that the prototypical "Siamese" twins can in fact speak for all others. This ventriloquization is in fact doubled in nature, since Chang and Eng are also mouthpieces, here of the documentary's fundamental assumption that nothing could be more desirous than a singular body, nothing more essential to the intelligibility of human beings—not to mention Western, democratic, capitalistic culture—than individual agency. Nevertheless, if this is what the film wants more than anything else, it is a natural virtue and a principle of normality that is not so natural that it does not need to be reiterated through this extraordinary double simulation. In other words, the simple fact that this staged and stagy reiteration of the norm is necessary at all suggests, albeit faintly, that there is nothing natural or given about it.

Although Chang and Eng did not find a surgeon able to divide their bodies, the narrator states that "today," in "the age of high-tech medicine," Dr. O'Neill "would have little difficulty separating them." The surgeon goes on to describe how he would perform the procedure (using, for example, "a thick ligature"). As if working in a virtual surgical reality, he conducts

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the separation of the Bunker twins in advance of the real operation on Dao and Duan, suggesting that the prowess of this "high-tech medicine" is so great that it can reach back into "last century" and repair its malformed bodies after the fact. Dr. O'Neill will today fix in our minds what yesterday could not be remedied in the flesh. Moreover, through Dr. O'Neill's intervention, what remained only the abiding object of the Bunker's desire is now about to become a reality for Dao and Duan, so that one pair of "Siamese twins" fulfills the dreams of another. Like Chang and Eng, Dao and Duan share in the prosperity of America; unlike the Bunkers, however, they can own their own bodies as well.

Dr. O'Neill's return in the documentary signals its shift to the technical spectacle of the surgeries themselves. With that shift comes a panoply of scenes that increasingly disembody the twins, re-creating them as fantastically malleable surfaces to be molded and reconstructed at will by each of the medical specialties in turn. There are scenes displaying their grossly swollen skin ("expanded" by the plastic surgeon to make up for the "lack" of skin that the surgery produces); scenes in which their body becomes a kind of fleshly whiteboard upon which different surgeons trace their incision lines with a black felt pen; scenes in which the pediatric surgeon describes the initial stage of the operation as "opening the pages of a book," as if the interior volume of the twins' body were in fact made up of a layered series of discrete surfaces or leaves; and scenes in which the narrator mimics and confirms the perspective of the physicians by describing the twins as "the surgical field." While from the point of view of the doctors these sorts of details may be unexceptional, within the context of the documentary they serve to emphasize both the two-dimensional plasticity and the compartmentalization of Dao's and Duan's body, and thus to flatten its extraordinary features, rendering them banally vulnerable to the most radical change. As a depthless surface, the disembodied body is infinitely compliant and hollow, a docile ensemble awaiting not only its reconfiguration but also its reanimation by the physicians' touch.

But Dao and Duan *do not* constitute a "surgical field" whose planar coordinates can simply be rearranged. Their body sticks, and overlaps, and melds in extraordinary ways that resist both straightforward separation and the medicalized assumptions about embodiment that underlie it. There is a conceptual and physiological thickness to the twins that resists the cutting force of the surgical regime. This is nowhere more problematically apparent than over the question of how the various "shared" organs, systems, and limbs are to be divided between the children. That these organs cannot simply be halved means that a number of critical decisions must be made about the overall nature of each child's corporeality: the question is no longer *how* the bodies shall be separated, but *who* will receive which organ. Faced with this problem, the physicians are compelled to think of Dao and Duan not only as a body made up of parts and surfaces, but also as persons for whom "quality of life" is in some unspecified way significant. The narrator broaches the issue twice, but both times in a manner that is at once simplistic and defensive: "Dividing conjoined twins is not about equality and fairness. O'Neill and his team have given Duan the third leg, the common rectum, and the largest part of the bladder, because the blood and nerves that serve these organs are principally under Duan's control." And again: "Although it might seem unfair that Duan, who will also get the third leg, also gets the most of the bladder, these decisions are made purely on medical grounds. The point is not to simply divide the shared organs equally, but to give the organ to the twin in whom it has the best chance of surviving and growing. This depends most critically on the nerve and blood supplies."

What do these directions by the narrator accomplish? By informing us that separation is not about "equality and fairness," the narrator reduces a complex ethical question to a matter of literal, physiological "equality," that is, of the symmetrical distribution of body parts. A charged point at which the documentary might reflect more carefully upon the assumptions guiding the surgical regimen is thus allowed to slip away. Instead, Palfreman handily capitulates to that regimen by appealing to "grounds" whose "purity" is a euphemism for being free from the taint of complication, almost as if they were the conceptual equivalent of the sterile "surgical field" that the physicians labor to protect from biological contamination (and that we observe from the safe distance of our televisions). Several questions arise: Why would anyone want to make such radically life-altering "decisions" based on only *one* narrowly prescribed set of "grounds"? Why are "medical grounds" assumed to be wholly divorced from the question of "fairness," and from many other ethical questions that could here be fruitfully evoked?¹⁴ Is the renunciation of "fairness" as a treatment criterion not itself a profoundly ethical decision, if only in a negative mode? Speaking on behalf of the doctors, our narrator is not the one to pose these questions, since they would only compromise the putatively disinterested position of the attending surgeons. In terms of the narrative of the documentary, when the issue of separating the twins' organs is raised, we are already deep inside the technicalized environment of Children's Hospital, long past what the narrator calls "the point of no return." Thus it is all the more difficult to imagine other sets of criteria, other interests that could inform the decision-making. Here Palfreman's physicians risk committing what Robert Veatch calls "the technical criteria fallacy."¹⁵ By arbitrarily narrowing the means by which treatment decisions are made to "technical measures of prognosis," these decisions are deemed to be solely "the doctors' responsibility." This "fallacious generalizing of the physicians' expertise to matters of moral and other value choices"¹⁶ obscures the fact that *no* treatment decision is or can be made "on purely medical grounds." Value judgments with ethical motivations and implications are always already present even if they are unacknowledged or only partly examined. Palfreman in fact concedes this point when, slightly earlier in the film, he states that the choices made by Dao's and Duan's doctors "not only determine the success or failure of the operation, but also the quality of each twin's life." In the medical ethics literature, "quality of life" is a notoriously difficult term to define, precisely because so many interests are involved in determining what it means and to whom. For this reason, it exceeds the competence of those who proceed "on purely medical grounds"; yet this is precisely the competence that the documentary assumes the doctors possess. As it is represented in the documentary, the "medical" criterion used by Dr. O'Neill and his team to judge which twin ought to get the third, "shared" leg or the major part of the bladder or colon is the "technical" determination of which of the two twins has "control" of these body parts, and of the blood and nerves "supplying" them. In this way, the doctors believe they can decide in which twin the organ or limb in question "has the best chance of surviving and growing." But we should remember that we are speaking here not only of single organs or limbs "surviving and growing," but also of persons whose postoperative existence directly depends upon the viability of these body parts. If the subject who thrives is the one who will most decisively take her "place in society and be productive" (to cite Dr. O'Neill's concluding characterization of the proper object of separation surgery), then the "purely" technical criteria behind the surgical decisions turn out to be "impurely" *utilitarian* in nature.

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The fact that having "control" over the relevant organs and limbs is the metaphor that is most consistently used to rationalize these surgical-ethical decisions is revealing in a film for which individual agency, which is to say complete self-control, is masterfully important: under these conditions, one useful, able agent is assumed to be "better" than two "disabled" agents. And the documentary prepares us for that functional logic by consistently differentiating between the twins on the basis of their relative self-control and ability. Dao and Duan are equal, each deserving of the same care and the same medical expertise, to be sure. Yet from a utilitarian perspective one is more equal than the other. Dao is "more fragile," "weaker," less in "control" of the shared organs and limbs; she is smaller, and, as the narrator tells us early in the film, "Wherever Duan wants to go, Dao must follow." David Headley refers to the children as "the big one" and "the little one," before self-consciously reminding himself that they should be called by their proper names; Barbara Headley asks Duan after the separation to point to "where [Dao] . . . was on you," unintentionally characterizing the smaller sister as a kind of parasitic appendage. Fragility, weakness, littleness, and dependency are all evocatively normative terms whose meanings spill messily over the boundary that is imagined to divide the technical from nontechnical accounts of the twins' bodies. Physical differences between conjoined twins are not uncommon; what interests us here is the way in which these details form not only a morphological background to the evaluative criteria, but also, more important, an *alibi* for their operation. Because she does not have "the best chance of surviving and growing" (the questionable assumption here being that "she" is the sum of her body parts), Dao functions as a kind of living organ donor to Duan; hers is the embodiment—we do not say *body*—that will be more severely sacrificed for the benefit of her bigger, more viable sister.

The resolutely nontechnical starkness of that evaluation tends to be palliated in the documentary, surfacing only after the surgery is over, when, confronted with the image of Dao's wholly altered life, it seems more difficult than ever to continue speaking of decisions being based on "purely medical grounds." With the long surgery completed, we glimpse the full extent of Dao's incompleteness: she "now has only one leg, a partial bladder, and half a pelvis." The narrator appears to realize that this is a fundamentally inopportune time to argue that "dividing conjoined twins is not about equality and fairness," but then makes a supplemental claim whose defensiveness inadvertently brings out how dissatisfying that argument may always have been: "She will require extensive reconstructive surgery to her bladder and colon, but today's procedure will leave her with a complete set of reproductive organs. If she survives, like Duan, she will be able to have children when she grows up." According to this utilitarian calculus, social productivity and re-productivity are interchangeable values. That we have twice been told that "equality" is not a principle that can be applied to separation surgery does not prevent Palfreman from resorting rhetorically to it, here in the curious form of imagining some sort of organ exchange: Dao's intact ovaries and uterus are figured forth as recompense for her absent leg and incomplete bladder. This substitution, moreover, will make her "like" Duan, underlining once again Dao's differentially determined existence. What would motivate this compensatory gesture, except the naive belief—identified by Michel Foucault as the sign of modernity itself—that sex "harbours what is most true in ourselves"?¹⁷ Secure in possessing her sex, the logic of this gesture suggests, Dao remains at the most fundamental level whole, notwithstanding the insults that her extraordinary body has withstood at the hands of her surgeons. Even if her surgery has only allowed her morphology to

approximate the norm, she can look forward to the deeper completeness that will come—and the narrator (speaking for whom? On what authority?) says it *will* come—when she, like her sister, is interpellated into compulsory maternity. Palfreman's remark recalls his earlier references to Chang and Eng Bunker, whose abnormal corporeality is partly redressed by the domestic normality that came of having all those children. We are also reminded that, next to the sex life of conjoined twins, nothing seems to attract more prurient interest than their reproductive capacities. Perhaps the freak show fascination with the one is only a displaced expression of the other.

More astonishingly still, Palfreman's account of Dao's future is framed by the grim suggestion that she in fact may not have a future: "*If she lives,*" the narrator says. Palfreman's qualification cuts in several directions. To begin with, it starkly puts to the audience what was obscured under the rubric of "purely medical grounds." It means that Duan has been deemed as the *salvageable* sister, and the possible consequences of that decision include the death of Dao. But a television documentary, like a nineteenth-century freak show, is meant to entertain as well as teach, and it is telling that Palfreman's qualification serves both interests simultaneously. For the phrase, brief as it is, also powerfully theatricalizes the postoperative scene. Dao *does* in fact live and thrive. Since this is not a real-time live broadcast the *prospect* of her death can only be exploited to create suspense and extract the maximum pathos from the situation. In turn, this pathos contains and palliates whatever concerns we might have about the "equality and fairness" of the separation by suggesting that such concerns are immaterial when Dao's life hangs in the balance.

"I like that. Yeah, I like that," pronounces Dr. O'Neill, as he looks down upon his completed work, giving it a muted blessing. As Palfreman's documentary moves toward its conclusion, the narrator observes that after "ten days . . . both twins are doing well physically, but psychologically, they're having trouble adjusting. . . . Dao and Duan are among the oldest conjoined twins to be separated, no one's sure how two sisters joined for three and a half years will cope with being physically separate individuals." Thus it is not until after the surgery is over, narratively speaking, that the "psychological" consequences of the separation are explicitly addressed. Having assumed that conjoined existence is intolerable, and that the prospect of the twins living separately outweighs the risks of undergoing life-threatening, near-experimental surgery, Palfreman has from the start narrowed the terms by which he might consider these consequences. In a documentary that is crowded with every manner of medical specialist, the absence of a child psychiatrist is revealing, for it points to, among other things, a hierarchical exclusion of nonsurgical concerns even *within* the discipline of medicine. Whatever mental trauma the children suffer is instead left in the hands of the female caregiver, Barbara Headley, thereby safely exiling this "trouble" to a quasidomestic space removed from the hygienic surgical field. There is perhaps no better indication that we are gazing upon a mostly "depassionated" world of the Cartesian body¹⁸ than when we hear the narrator coolly characterize the postoperative recovery in terms of "adjustment" and "coping," as if the twins were adapting to a new school rather than *living* a radically altered form of embodiment. We are encouraged to believe that the problem is one of Dao and Duan positively "adapting" to their new status, when in fact it is more likely negatively a question of mourning the loss of the old body, or, more precisely, of negotiating between the body image that each child possesses as the fundamental matrix of her twinned embodiment and the

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physical morphology that the surgeons have bequeathed her. Even to describe this complex situation as “psychological”—as opposed to “physical”—is grossly to underestimate its nature, since whatever the twins are as embodied beings, both before and after surgery, handily exceeds this sort of deracinating and decorporealizing dualism, even if it is the dualism that made their bodies susceptible to division in the first place.

Unlike bacteriological infection, the “psychological” effects of the surgery cannot be one postoperative complication among many, because these effects go to the heart of Dao’s and Duan’s existence as joined incarnate lives. As Elizabeth Grosz suggests, the “corporeal link” that is forged between conjoined twins may not be something that can simply be “effaced.”¹⁹ Even the narrator must admit this fact, conceding as he does that “no one’s sure” what it means for twins to be surgically separated at the relatively advanced age of “three and a half years.” “No one’s sure”: in the wake of that rare concession of the limits of medical expertise, we are left to imagine the depths and extraordinary complexity of the twins’ intertwined embodiment, the corporeal jointures and subtle knots that resist the scalpel as they do our understanding. Of course, their age is also a measure of the risk that the surgeons are willing to assume, a sign of their pushing the surgical envelope. But we might also see it as an upper limit for candidacy for separation surgery, beyond which, presumably, the “psychological” consequences actually *do* begin to impinge upon the decision to perform the surgery. Other questions arise: If age three and a half, why not two, or one? How does one determine the degree or maturity of corporeal—rather than “physical” or “psychological”—linkage in conjoined twins? What is clear is that at three and a half the surgeons are working at an experimental horizon beyond which little is known, but that this ignorance and the dangers springing from it will not stop them from proceeding.

Although there is no doubting the resilience of the twins, the idea that they have “come to terms” with their resected bodies in “ten days” is surely pure wish fulfillment, and it reminds us that this is the accelerated hyperreality of television, in which medical crises are by convention resolved within a miraculously compressed temporality that both soothes the soul and satisfies the sponsors. Unlike *Katie and Eilish*, in which one of the twins dies in the initial days after surgery, Palfreman’s documentary ends happily; the hint of “psychological” problems about which “no one knows” dissolves amid the closing images of Dao and Duan celebrating their fourth birthday and attending preschool “like millions of their peers.” The pressure for the twins to assimilate to a state of sameness organizes the film’s conclusion, notwithstanding the fact that their significant differences go down to their sinews. Where before the separation Dao’s lack of “control” over certain organs and limbs was the criteria that favored Duan in their surgical distribution, after the separation the surgery itself is credited with the twins coming into a morphological symmetry. For example, Dao’s progress is largely measured by how rapidly she becomes more “like Duan” in “height, weight, and appearance.” Although prior to the operation “equality and fairness” were deliberately excluded from decisions regarding the quality of postoperative life, they are treated as signs of the twins’ health as individuals once the surgery is completed. In this way, “equality and fairness” are smuggled back into the documentary’s narrative as working virtues, since they literalize and embody a democratic vision of free and equitable personhood—the very condition of taking one’s “place in society and be[ing] productive,” as Dr. O’Neill says. About what it means to occupy that useful place, of course, Dao and Duan say nothing. But that silence is itself telling, for it

brings out the paucity of firsthand accounts of the lives of conjoined twins, separated or not. In the absence of these undoubtedly extraordinary stories, others—including ourselves—are always willing to speak.

And this also means that we never know, and never have known, how to *cut up* a subject.

—JACQUES DERRIDA, “‘EATING WELL,’ OR THE CALCULATION OF THE SUBJECT”

What provisional conclusions can we draw from Palfreman’s documentary, and what suggestions can we sketch out in the way of a theoretical framework for future research into media representations of the medical treatment of conjoined twins? Media accounts conventionally emphasize that the separation of conjoined twins tests the limits of medical knowledge and surgical expertise, as if anomalous bodies were in a form of contest with the medical regime. Beyond the benevolent desire to help the twins, “winning” this contest has important implications for the prestige and wealth of the hospital (and the surrounding community) in which the surgery is conducted. But the medicalized staging of conjoined twins as primarily a technical challenge conceals the deeper epistemological and phenomenological hazard that they embody: namely, the threat that they pose to normative conceptions of corporeality.

Conjoined twins have always raised disturbing questions about the nature of the “relation” between body and self.²⁰ It is not so much their fused bodies that prove troublesome as the implications that their congregate existence have for conventional expectations about embodiment. Are they two different subjects within one body? Or, more radically, are they two differently embodied subjects? That embodiment is properly a singular condition would appear to be a given, indeed, *the* given of human existence: I alone possess the body that I am. But what seems to be given or “natural” about the materiality of the body is inevitably caught up in a network of culturally and historically variable assumptions—what Foucault calls “regulatory ideal[s]”²¹—that function in prescriptive ways to differentiate between “normal” and “abnormal” forms of corporeality. From the point of view of Palfreman’s documentary, the notion of singular embodiment—one person to one body—operates as one of these ideals and in a way that recalls the regulatory principles by which gendered bodies are constructed and policed. As Judith Butler has argued, characterizing a body as gendered is never merely a description of a preexisting condition, but “is itself a *legislation* and a *production* of bodies, a discursive demand, as it were, that bodies become produced according to principles of heterosexualizing coherence and integrity.”²² In other words, the mutually reinforcing notions that one must have “a” sex and only one sex, and that there is in fact “a” distinct sex to be “had,” operate as normative ideals that produce, shape, constrain, and simplify the irreducibly complex condition of gendered embodiment.

The notion of singular embodiment functions in a similar prescriptive and idealizing fashion. What, after all, does it mean to “have” or “possess” a body? Having “a” body, like having “a” sex, is at best an abstraction that obscures the fact that there is no single “sex” or form of “embodiment” as such, much less a single way to “have” or to “be” these things. Yet the compulsion to assume a properly singular corporeality—again, like singular sexuality—has a tremendous, even killing force in our culture. This constraint is perhaps no more apparent than in the case of conjoined twins, whose surgical separation marks the extent to which the medical regime is willing to go to (re)construct the body so that it more closely

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approximates what is posited as ideal and reiterated as normal. It is important to emphasize that both conjoined and singular bodies can only *approximate* this ideal condition. The notion of a discrete subject inhabiting the self-contained body that it *is* is exactly that: a powerful (yet paradoxically disembodied) *notion* that real, lived bodies of all shapes and sizes are nevertheless compelled to mimic, and against which their normality or abnormality is measured. As Butler points out, the very fact that bodies are repeatedly and forcefully made to answer to these ideals means “that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled.”²³

In the case of the media representation of conjoined twins, this distance between the regulatory ideal and its fleshly approximation is spectacularly evident because the surgical reconstruction of their bodies only approximates morphologically what is imagined to be the case phenomenologically. Here the striking visual image of bodies in the process of being refashioned into a physical condition of separateness must *stand for* or simulate the creation of singularly embodied life. But the division of a conjoinable body no more bequeaths “individuality” to each twin than the surgical creation of sex organs makes a body “gendered.” In both instances, bodies are compelled to comply with normative ideals or “phantasms”²⁴ that make these bodies knowable and pliable—“docile,” as Foucault would say.²⁵ From both Foucault and Butler we know that this forced compliance is a phenomenon as wide and as deep as the social body itself. The media representation of conjoined twins simply reiterates its normative work in a remarkably condensed and vivid fashion. Perhaps this is what makes the medical documentary so compelling, since it gives *both* the force of subjection and the impossibility of a body ever being fully subjected the most lurid display. The documentary does not simply document a surgical triumph; *as* a representation, as the site in which images are trafficked, it is a spectacular expression of the “discursive demand” that bodies become produced according to certain regulatory ideals. Representations of separation surgeries are thus “performances” of subjection insofar as they stage, theatricalize, and cite the *assujettissement*—that is, the simultaneous creation and constraint—of the “human” as singularly embodied. Singular embodiment functions as an ideal to be mimicked because it can only be an imagining of what it might mean to “have” “a” body; it is a figure that simplifies, unifies, and stabilizes the irreducibly excessive condition of embodiment—or more precisely, *embodiments*, since there is no single manner of being incarnate. As such, singular corporeality can be usefully compared to the category of “sex,” since it operates as “a principle of intelligibility for human beings, which is to say that no human being can be taken to be human, can be recognized *as* human unless that human being is fully and coherently”²⁶ in possession of its “own” body. (Re)producing this ideal, reiterating it as the law of human intelligibility, media representations of conjoined twins either underplay or ignore altogether the question of whether they *should* be separated and dwell almost exclusively on the technical conundrum of *how* that separation is to take place; the former question is largely ruled out of bounds because it is assumed that conjoined life, precisely because of its imagined phenomenological *unintelligibility*, must be intolerable. Dividing out the phenomenological and ethical questions from the “medical” difficulties thereby becomes one of the enabling conditions of the division of the bodies themselves.

Nevertheless, as spectacularly anomalous bodies, conjoined twins remain ambiguously resistant bodies, corporeal instances whose strangeness and difference act to throw into sharp relief the exclusionary forces that (re)produce them *as* anomalous. Recalling “the etymological

roots of both *mirabilia* and *monstrum*," Stephen Pender notes that monstrous bodies "are always in some way about seeing."²⁷ But when we observe the separation of conjoined twins in a documentary, for example, at what are we in fact looking? The question is not as easily answered as it might seem, for in at least three related ways media representations of conjoined twins are an example of what Jean Baudrillard calls the "simulacra" or the "hyperreal."²⁸ In each case, the collective act of looking at the twins is also, in a sense, a looking *away*—a failure, due partly to their capture by images and imaging technology, to see that the twins are who they are *because*, not in spite of, the bodies they "have."

1. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston have cogently shown how, with the advent of modernity, the reception of anomalous bodies shifted from viewing "monsters as prodigies to monsters as examples of medical pathology."²⁹ While we cannot disagree with the overall shape of their argument, it seems worth asking how, in the postmodern milieu of media images and simulations, this line of development from the freak as sign or augury to the freak as sickness is complicated, perhaps even folded back upon itself. Contemporary representations of conjoined twins pathologize them, to be sure; yet deviant corporeality remains uncannily portentous, even if what it provides comes in the form of a profoundly secular revelation: through it, we witness the advent of a world of fully instrumentalized bodies, a "high-tech" place of "postmodern plasticity"³⁰ where there will be no morphology, no matter how malformed, that cannot be altered and normalized. Under these spectacularized conditions, we are not so much looking at conjoined twins as peering in awe at the expensive expertise that will transform us by transforming them.

2. In order to be anatomized and resected, the twins must be disembodied. That is to say, their always exorbitant existence as incarnate beings evaporates amid the clinical hypervisibility of their interior and exterior morphology. This narrowing of human life is what makes bodies available to medical knowledge and susceptible to the kind of radical division that Descartes imagines in one of the epigraphs to this chapter. Documentary representations of separation surgery would appear to be the epitome of what Francis Barker calls "the abstracting gaze of science [that] seeks a decorporealized body of and for knowledge." We see this "Cartesian body . . . subordinated to a hygienic and surgical science"³¹ not only in the deliberate reduction of amorphous "individuality" to physical morphology, but also in the assumption that the twins are somehow freestanding entities that are more or less *already* separated within the anomalous body that "disables" or "enslaves" them. ("Free at Last" is the revealing title of an Australian magazine article on a recent separation surgery in New York.)³² But we have known since Sigmund Freud that "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego,"³³ inextricably woven into bodily functions, mappings, perceptions, and desires. Embodiment is not reducible to the body, because "the thought of the body" is also "the thought that *is* the body."³⁴ Notwithstanding the objectifying and deracinating demands of the medical regime, *embodiment* remains an unstable nexus of discursive forces that explodes the distinction between mental and bodily realms. Because it is the site of histories without boundaries or focal points, and of ongoing negotiations and adaptations of flesh and world, corporeality is messy, not hygienic. Conjoined corporeality is, as it were, messier still. It may even be the case, as Elizabeth Grosz points out, that "those who have shared organs, a common blood circulation and every minute detail of everyday life" possess a uniquely complex corporeal connection that cannot simply be dissected out.³⁵ To the extent that medical surveillance fails

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to see that surgical separation tears much deeper than the flesh, conjoined twins are *over-looked*: they are unseen, paradoxically, because they are seen too much.

3. As Mark Poster characterizes it, Baudrillard's "simulation is different from a fiction or lie in that it not only presents an absence as a presence, the imaginary as real, it also undermines any contrast to the real, absorbing the real within itself."³⁶ For Baudrillard, the exemplary instance of this hyperreality is Disneyland, in which the difference between the play-world of the theme park and the surrounding work world is the lie that covers up the fact that American society is so saturated with media images that it is unreal through and through: the "real" world is the fiction that the "unreal" world produces as its own outside, thereby collapsing the difference between what is "true" and what is "imaginary." A roughly analogous phenomenon characterizes Palfreman's documentary in two ways. First, in emphasizing the extraordinary concentration of medical expertise marshaled around the twins, the film reiterates the stark difference between two worlds: the theater of surgery at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (whose grimly appropriate acronym is C.H.O.P.) as the very special place where bodies are transformed; and the world of the viewer, who is momentarily given the unusual privilege of seeing this transformation in the way that the doctors and nurses usually do. But this distinction between the site of radical surgical intervention and spectators who view it from the safe distance of their living rooms masks the ways in which the medical regime everywhere acts to demarcate and discipline bodies, and everywhere compels bodies to assume the regulatory ideals that determine what is intelligible and what is unintelligible, what bodies matter and what bodies do not.

Second, the spectacular difference between the blurred and aberrantly fused flesh of the twins and their distinct, more or less intact bodies after separation surgery is the fiction that belies the fact that bodies are never wholly distinct entities to those who live them, as it were, from within. Media images of conjoined twins show their bodies as both "fixed" and "fixable": that is, as something that can be both repaired *and* apprehended, or perhaps apprehended *through* being repaired. (We might recall that conjoined twins are differentially diagnosed and renamed according to where they are "fixed" to each other.) The silhouette of their liberated bodies is as "real," surely, as the surgical incisions that divide one twin from the other, and the suture lines that seal each body up into itself. But in the realm of representation, this too is hyperreal, a reality that passes over into something much less determinate, since the *image* of fleshly closure masks the irreducibly nonclosural and unfixed condition of embodiment. In this way, media representations of surgical separations constitute a kind of Lacanian *stade du miroir* in which the subject is misrecognized (but also fixed and celebrated) as unitary because it appears morphologically intact and distinct. But the difference between the properly proportioned body and the monstrous body is always undercut by the generally improper and ill-proportioned nature of corporeality—neither inside nor outside, subject or object, flesh or spirit, but the site of what Maurice Merleau-Ponty evocatively calls the "chiasmic crossing" of these and other terms.³⁷ Hence Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's point: "If one really thinks about the body as such, there is no possible outline of the body as such. There are thinkings of the systematicity of the body, there are value codings of the body. The body, as such, cannot be thought, and I certainly cannot approach it."³⁸ We can therefore say, after Baudrillard, that although we appear to be looking at the division of conjoined twins, "*separation*" *has not taken place*.³⁹

NOTES

1. Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 292.
2. It is crucially important to emphasize from the start that our analysis of Palfreman's documentary addresses the filmic *representation* of the life of Dao and Duan, which includes the representation of the words, actions, and motives of their caregivers and physicians. In other words, our interest is in how the twins are subjected within and through the narrative of the documentary, and in how this subjection plays out for a television audience. An investigation of, for example, the medical regimen at work in Children's Hospital of Philadelphia *as such* would require a separate and somewhat different form of analysis.
3. Space does not permit us to discuss in any detail *Katie and Eilish: Siamese Twins* and *Life without Katie*, both produced by Mark Galloway for the BBC's *First Tuesday* documentary series. It is interesting to note, though, how the postoperative death of one of the twins in *Katie and Eilish* casts a pall over the film; it is the terribly saddening excess that the documentary's ambivalent allegiance to the medical regime cannot quite contain. *Life without Katie*, the curious short film made after *Katie and Eilish*, plays a complexly supplemental role in the midst of these ambiguities: it is at once an attempt to rationalize the death, a work of mourning, and the filmic equivalent of a phantom limb. Although there are significant differences between these documentaries and Palfreman's film, the subjection of concorporate embodiment remains strikingly similar. In complex ways that still need careful analysis, both documentaries demonstrate Elizabeth Grosz's point that "in spite of the state of health of siamese twins, there seems a medical imperative for surgical intervention, even if surgery may actually endanger lives that may otherwise remain healthy and well." See Grosz, "Freaks," *Social Semiotics* 1, no. 2 (1991): 34-35.
4. For an illuminating analysis of how Rembrandt's painting "point[s] forward to a modern, surgical regime of the body," see Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (London: Methuen, 1984), 73-112.
5. Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Anchor, 1993), 199.
6. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Monthly Review, 1971).
7. The documentary is itself hardly immune to the logic of late capitalism. Television images and plush-toy versions of "Barney" figure so prominently in the narrative that Palfreman is obliged to acknowledge who holds copyright in the credits, lest he be accused of "consuming" or marketing this image without acknowledging whose property it is.
8. Robert Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 509.
9. Fiedler, *Freaks*, 36.
10. See *ibid.*, 214.
11. For an evocative discussion of the complex ways in which the Bunker twins served these and other social interests in nineteenth-century America, see Allison Pingree, "America's 'United Siamese Brothers': Chang and Eng and Nineteenth-Century Ideologies of Democracy and Domesticity," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
12. Kay Hunter points out that the Bunker twins came closest to requesting that they be separated just prior to their marriages, but that their fiancées successfully convinced them "to give up on their idea of being cut asunder." See Hunter, *Duet for a Lifetime: The Story of the Original Siamese Twins* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1964), 86-87.
13. Barker makes this point about Descartes in *The Tremulous Private Body*, 98.
14. For a discussion of some of these questions, see Catherine Myser, "A Philosophical Critique of the 'Best Interests' Criterion and An Exploration of Clinical Ethical Strategies for Balancing the Interests of Infants or Fetuses, Family Members, and Society in the United States, India, and Sweden" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 1994).
15. Robert M. Veatch, "The Technical Criteria Fallacy," *Hastings Center Report* 7, no. 4 (August 1977): 15.
16. *Ibid.*, 16.
17. Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite*, trans. Richard McDougall (New York: Pantheon, 1980), ix.

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18. Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, 97.
19. Grosz, "Freaks," 35.
20. In this context, it seems important to put the word "relation" in quotation marks, since it begs the question of whether we can speak intelligently of the self apart from its embodiment.
21. See, e.g., the final chapter of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: Volume I, An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), 135-59.
22. Judith Butler, "Sexual Inversions," in *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to AIDS*, ed. Domna C. Stanton (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 351.
23. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.
24. Butler usefully distinguishes between "fantasy" and "phantasmatic." The latter term, she argues, is "to be understood not as an activity of an already formed subject, but of the staging and dispersion of the subject into a variety of identificatory positions." "Phantasmatic identification" is the process by which the subject imagines "the possibility of approximating" a "sexed position marked out within the symbolic domain." By mimicking this symbolic image or ideal the subject is compelled into "the assumption of sex." See *Bodies That Matter*, 267n. 7, 96-97.
25. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage: New York, 1979), 135-69.
26. Butler, "Sexual Inversions," 352. Here we partly reproduce Butler's account of the category of "sex" in Foucault's work. Elsewhere Butler argues that "It is not enough to claim that human subjects are constructed, for the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less 'human', the inhuman, and the humanly unthinkable". Our argument is that congregate embodiment is the "less 'human'" against which the fully human ideal of singular corporeality secures its authority. See *Bodies That Matter*, 8.
27. Stephen Pender, "'No Monsters at the Resurrection': Inside Some Conjoined Twins," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
28. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (New York: Sémiotext[e], 1983).
29. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England," *Past & Present* 92 (1981): 23.
30. Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 245-46.
31. Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, 96, 97.
32. Janice Hopkins Tanne, "Free at Last," *Australian Magazine*, 5 February 1994, 14.
33. Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1961), 19:26.
34. We are grateful to Will McConnell for this phrasing and this insight.
35. Grosz, "Freaks," 35.
36. Mark Poster, introduction to *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 6.
37. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).
38. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "In a Word: Interview," *differences* 1, no. 2 (1989): 131.
39. Here we recall Baudrillard's strategically hyperbolic position that "the Gulf War did not take place." See "The Reality Gulf," *Guardian*, 11 January 1991; and "La guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu," *Liberation*, 29 March 1991. If we know that the twins have been surgically divided, this does not necessarily mean that we know what, precisely, "separation" and "separateness" mean.