



Flesh, Bones and Ideas

On the Cadaver, from Biology to Anthropology, 40 years later

International and Interdisciplinary Colloquium
In French language

Marseille, June 17th to 19th, 2020

Interdisciplinary Workshop on the Mortuary Fact
ADES UMR 7268 (AMU, CNRS, EFS)

Call for communications

The year 2020 marks the 40th anniversary of the publication of Louis-Vincent Thomas's work *Le cadavre, de la biologie à l'anthropologie*. Though oftentimes cited, the anthropologist's work itself still appears to be largely unknown to this day. We endeavor to explore the theses and the impact of this work all the while staying true to the author's own approach, that is, by mobilizing a large spectrum of disciplinary approaches. Our goal is thus to continue to "...break down academic barriers...and to lay hold of the keys that can break up the specializations", in order so that we may better understand the cadaver as a total social fact.

For a scientific community built around the common research interest of the funeral fact, marking the passage of forty years provides us an opportunity to look back and reflect upon the influence of Thomas's work which has placed the cadaver at the heart of scientific debates these past decades. Archaeology, history, law, sociology, social anthropology or psychology have all, in effect, explored the question of death from this angle with many of their studies helping us engage rich debates on the "cadaver" as object. Several themes stand out and will be debated throughout the course of the three days of conference sessions.

1 – Pluridisciplinary approaches on the cadaver

The cadaver is a polysemous object that allows us to think of and study society in different ways; it has thus, for this reason, incited interest in it from different disciplines.

Historians may want to ask what the contribution of Louis–Vincent Thomas’s work may be viewed in comparison to other works that have studied the evolution of the perception of the cadaver and of funerary practices in those vast disciplines that are the history of emotions or the history of the body?

What role has Louis–Vincent Thomas’s work played in the evolution of contemporary archaeological practices? How did it help reveal the centrality of the cadaver in archaeology? In the field of sociology of death, how is one to consider the contribution of *Le cadavre, de l’anthropologie à la biologie*? Did the work help shake up or reformulate certain problematics? Can social anthropologists study the cadaver as object without taking into account Louis–Vincent Thomas’s findings? Have legal scholars, philosophers, ethicists and medical professionals been able to draw from the 1980 work and nourish their reflections? The present conference’s contributions may retrace, or go deeper into the matter with these different disciplinary approaches on the cadaver, all of which oblige us to ask further questions on the epistemology (or epistemologies) of scientific approaches on the corpse.

2 – Treating the cadaver: sacred object, disposable waste, merchandise, scientific object

Following in the wake of Louis–Vincent Thomas’s approach, it appears necessary to us to tackle the question of the cadaver from the point of view of its materiality. It appears equally necessary to enquire into the different statuses attributed to the corpse, be it in its entirety, in fragmented form or in embryonic form.

We thus wish to hear from contributions that examine the different orders of value assigned to the corpse. This can be understood as a sacred object (when the corpse or pieces of it are, for example, considered as relics, inalienable rights of inheritance or, indeed, as ritual objects for processes of mourning). Conversely, the corpse can be studied as disposable waste material such as those cadavers, or their parts, considered as scrap or anatomical objects. Finally, this may also be understood from the angle of objects of scientific inquiry or even as merchandise, such as when it is a trophy or when it is subject to a commercial transaction.

Many other scholars have shown interest in the question of the different processes (synchronic and diachronic) of qualifying or disqualifying human remains. The conference is indeed interested in contributions that retrace the steps followed by corpses with a particular emphasis on special treatments accorded to different parts of the body and which would allow us to develop a typology of the presence of the corpse in the world.

3 – Phantasms and attitudes

Cadavers, however, are also subject to uses and appropriations which are not exclusively of a material order. Images of cadavers (photographs, films, drawings, medical imagery) have raised interest in their study just as they have raised questions into their misuse and eventual transgressions such as with voyeurism, this “cannibalism of the eye”, to which it is susceptible of giving rise.

We look forward to receiving contributions dealing with the different powers or symbolical attributes ascribed to dematerialized dead bodies (phantoms, specters, zombies, ancestors) be they viewed as troublesome or as beneficial. Such contributions could draw from studies on literary texts, works of cinema or of the arts which reconstitute the fictional existence of the dead body.

Paper proposals to be presented orally (30 minutes long) need to have :

- a title
- a two-page summary
- a short biography of the author with contact details

Proposals are to be sent by mail before **January 15th, 2020** to the organizers of the event at the following e-mail address: atelier.mort@gmail.com

The selection of contributions will be communicated starting March 15th, 2020.

A final version of the contributor’s written text of a maximum of 40,000 signs (spaces and bibliography included) will be asked to be handed in by the end of the conference in order for it to be included in the collection to be published.

Organizing committee

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