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Autor: Kornmeier, Uta

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Uta Kornmeier

Faces and Figures

Towards a comparative analysis of Madame Tussaud's and the National Portrait Gallery, London

Famous and Infamous

Flicking through London's weekly magazine 'Time Out', two curiously similar entries can be found. Under the heading 'Major Tourist Attractions' is listed 'Madame Tussaud's [...] Waxworks of the famous and the infamous...' while, a few pages later in the arts section, included under the heading 'Public Spaces and Museums', we find the 'National Portrait Gallery [...] collection of portraits of the famous and infamous'. Despite the fact that these two institutions would not usually be mentioned in the same breath, they are advertised using precisely the same words. Yet, where the description appears to conflate the two in terms of content, the classification – tourist attraction or museum – could hardly differentiate them more clearly. Madame Tussaud's, defined by its public, is contextualised as *entertainment,* geared to the credulous tourist seeking undemanding enjoyment of an inconsequential kind. The *museum* National Portrait Gallery on the other hand appears in the context of high culture, addressing an audience of art lovers and others with an interest in history, catering apparently for more delicate, refined and altogether serious needs. This simple categorisation corresponds to a readily accepted and opposing evaluation of the institutions in the consciousness of the public, although the description unwittingly reveals a hidden connection between the two.

What these two apparently very different establishments have in common is a remarkably unified idea at the heart of their collections: they both set out to gather images of public figures. It is indeed possible to describe both institutions as 'museums of noteworthy people'. Both their origins lie within a concept of history and culture as representable through a selection of key figures. These selections, however, are controlled by two different sets of criteria. Furthermore, their developments and methods of accession and display are fundamentally different. As a consequence, their respective places in society have come to be defined by their museological practices rather than the concept of their collections.

This essay is drawn from my MA report at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1995. I would like to thank Michael L. Phipps for his assistance in reworking the original text as well as discussing its problems. I am also grateful to Dr. Simon Ward for his advice. My Ph.D. thesis at the Kunsthistorisches Institut, Humboldt-Universität, Berlin, entitled 'Das Kabinett der Madame Tussaud – Wachsfiguren zwischen Show und Museum', will examine Madame Tussaud's first fourty years in Britain within the context of England's early museum landscape, and is planned to be completed by May 1999.

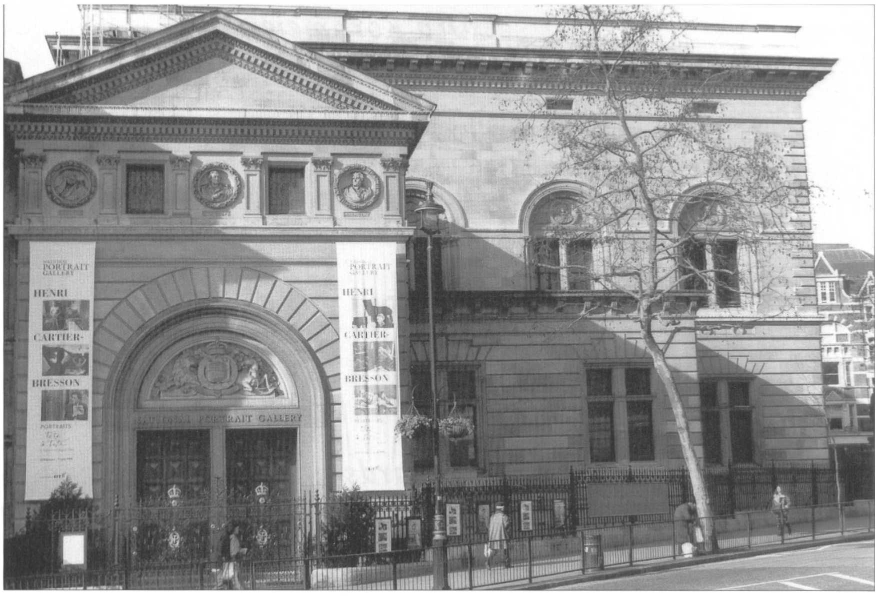

Fig. 1: Ewan Christian, Exterior of the National Portrait Gallery, 1896, London, St Martin's Place. Photo 1998.

In this essay I want to examine some of the similarities and differences between the National Portrait Gallery and Madame Tussaud's more closely, in order to uncover the roots of their acknowledged levels of social standing and ascertain the relevance of the latter in a strictly museological sense.

Origins and Development

When, in 1856, the Earl of Stanhope proposed to the House of Lords the establishment of a national collection of portraits,[1] his idea was to collect 'Portraits of the most eminent Persons in British History' as a means of historical and moral instruction, especially for the 'industrious classes'.[2] Furthermore, it would be a tool for historical research, a means of promoting the arts in general and portraiture in particular, and provide aesthetic pleasure for the public. The Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, supported the idea. He stressed its educative potential when he summarised the functions of the future gallery thus:

'There cannot [...] be a greater incentive to mental exertion, to noble actions, to good conduct on the part of the living than for them to see before them the features of those who have done things which are worthy of our admiration, and whose example we are more induced to imitate when they are brought before us in the visible and tangible shape of portraits.'[3]

Apart from the assumed social benefit of the institution, Stanhope drew attention to the fact that many family portraits were lost to the nation when sold by the heirs. The State needed to continue the aristocratic tradition of the ancestral gallery when the upper classes failed to do so. Stanhope's ideal was to preserve the portraits and form a gallery of the new, nationally defined 'family' Britain. In addition, the aristocratic need for self-representation and legitimization of power through a long line of ancestors was also of concern to the new ruling classes of the 19th century, the industrialists.[4] Lacking their own sense of tradition, the latter

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[1] The historian Philip Henry, fifth Earl of Stanhope (1805–1875), had already requested the establishment of a portrait gallery for the nation in the late 1840's and in 1852. Only this third attempt in 1856 came to fruition.

[2] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 3rd series, vol. CXL (1856, March 4th), col. 1770–1789, quotes: col. 1789, 1771.

[3] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 3rd series, vol. CXLII (1856, June 6th), col. 1113–1124, quote: col. 1120.

[4] On the transformation of agricultural England into an industrial nation see Thomson, David, *England in the 19th Century 1815–1914*, Pelican History of England, vol. 8, Harmondsworth 1967, pp. 73–74.

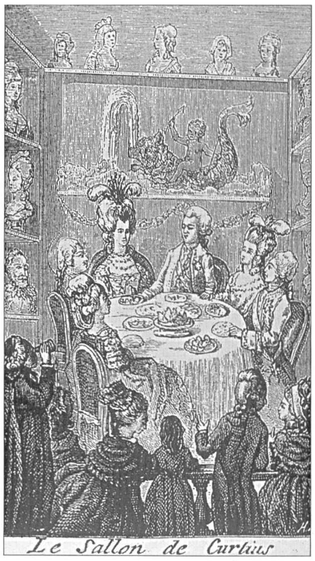
[5] See Pointon, Marcia, *Hanging the Head. Portraiture and Social Formation in 18th-Century England*, New Haven/London 1993.

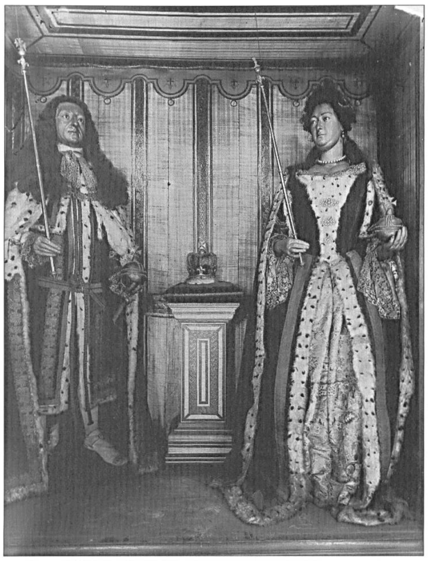
[6] Mr. Spooner, for example, spoke against the expenditure of tax money derived from the labouring people for the 'gratification of the taste of the higher classes'. The Gallery – useful for lower classes as it might be – should not, he said, be financed by the government (*Hansard* [as in 3], col. 1115).

[7] George Scharf (1820–1895), watercolorist, draughtsman and illustrator by education, became an authority on British portraiture while working as Secretary of the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition. He was Secretary and later Keeper of the NPG from 1857 until 1882 but remained involved in its management until his death (Jackson, Peter, *Sir George Scharf*, in: London Topographical Society (publ.), Drawings of Westminster by Sir George Scharf, London 1994, pp. 7–9).The majority of the founding Trustees, including Earl Stanhope, Lord Elcho and Lord Robert Cecil, were members of the Houses of Parliament. Most had an interest in history and were members of the Society of Antiquaries (Scharf, George, *Historical and Descriptive Catalogue of the Pictures, Busts & c. in the National Portrait Gallery on Loan at the Bethnal Green Museum*, London 1888, pp. 11–12; Kerslake, John F., *National Portrait Gallery Catalogue 1856–1947*, London 1948, p. X).

[8] Marie Tussaud (1761–1850), born in Strasbourg as Marie Grosholtz, took her eldest son Joseph (1798–1870) with her to England in 1802. Her younger son Francis (1800–1873) left France to join them in 1822 (Pyke, E. J., *A Biographical Dictionary of Wax Modellers*, Oxford 1973, pp. 150–151, and Leslie, Anita/Chapman, Pauline, *Madame Tussaud. Waxworker Extraordinary*, London 1978, esp. p. 143).

[9] Philippe Guillaume Mathé Curtius (1737–1794), a German by birth, settled in Berne in the 1750s and moved to Paris in 1762. Trained as a doctor, he changed trade to become a successful wax modeller and showman (Pyke 1973 [as in 8], pp. 34–35).





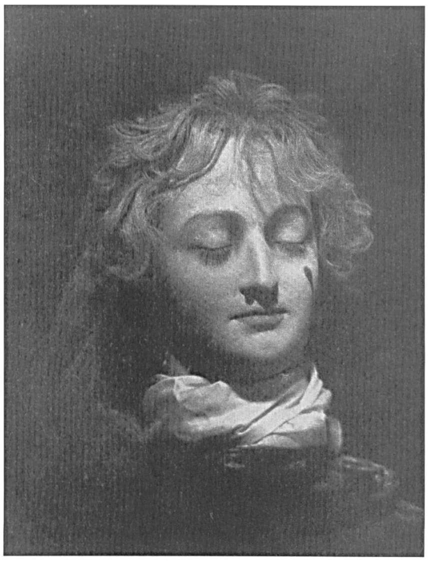


Fig. 2: Anonymous, 'Le Sallon de Cire de M. Curtius', engraving, mid-1780s, Madame Tussaud's Archive, London.

Fig. 3: Mrs Goldsmith (attr.), William III and Mary II, wax effigies, 1725, Westminster Abbey Undercroft Museum, London. The earliest photographic record of this display is c. 1900.

Fig. 4: Marie Tussaud (attr.), Marie Antoinette's severed head, wax cast, first exhibited in 1793, Madame Tussaud's, London. This photo shows the display in 1920.

adopted aristocratic forms of presentation and collected, instead of images of their own undistinguished forefathers, portraits of 'great men' – politicians, writers, and philosophers – in public spaces such as town halls as well as in their private quarters.[5]

In spite of objections from the House of Commons in terms of the selection process and finance,[6] a purchase grant of £2,000 for the foundation of the National Portrait Gallery was agreed at the end of June 1856. In February 1857, the Treasury appointed thirteen Trustees, who were to monitor the acquisitions, as well as a Secretary of the collection, George Scharf.[7] The new Gallery opened to the public in January 1859 at 29, Great George Street, Westminster, moving to various other sites until it finally settled in the present building at St Martin's Place in 1896 (fig. 1).

By the time of the foundation of the National Portrait Gallery, Madame Tussaud's had already been established as a permanent institution for more than 20 years. As early as 1835, its proprietor Marie Tussaud and her two sons[8] had developed the exhibition after more than 30 years as a mobile show. The exhibition had already had a permanent home once. From the 1770s onwards, Marie's adopted uncle and mentor Philippe Curtius[9] had displayed several life-size wax portraits in his elegant 'Sallon de Cire' (fig. 2) in Paris, which Marie eventually inherited. The 'Sallon' gained its special significance during the French Revolution. Following the initial decapitations of members of the *ancien régime* it featured, apart from full-size figures, an up-to-date display of the most recent severed heads moulded in wax, allegedly from the remains of the convicted themselves.[10] Waxworks had hitherto been utilised all over Europe as a means of reinforcing monarchic power, for example as funeral effigies and representative portraits (fig. 3).[11] Now, they were employed by its enemies as a means of recording and underlining its very demise (fig. 4). As in the case of the ancestral portrait gallery, a cultural practice associated with a social elite was adopted and modified by the class poised to become its successor.

[10] Such as Robespierre or Fouquier-Tinville. Curtius and Marie modelled the first victims of the Revolution perhaps out of patriotism but more likely out of a healthy business instinct (Leslie/Chapman 1978 [as in 8], pp. 44–45. See also Chapman, Pauline, *Madame Tussaud's in England. Career Woman Extraordinary*, London 1992, p. 3). There is no credible evidence that they used actual body parts, as stated in the exhibition catalogues, in Hervé, François (ed.), *Madame Tussaud's Memoirs and Reminiscences of France. Forming an abridged History of the French Revolution*, London 1838, and subsequent literature.

[11] Cf. Schlosser, Julius von, *Tote Blicke. Geschichte der Porträtbildnerei in Wachs. Ein Versuch*, 1911, ed. by Thomas Medicus, Berlin 1993; Brückner, Wolfgang, *Bildnis und Brauch. Studien zur Bildfunktion der Effigies*, Berlin 1966; Harvey, Anthony/Mortimer, Richard, *The Funeral Effigies of Westminster Abbey*, Suffolk 1994. The relationship between effigies and waxworks will be newly discussed in the first chapter of my forthcoming Ph.D. thesis.

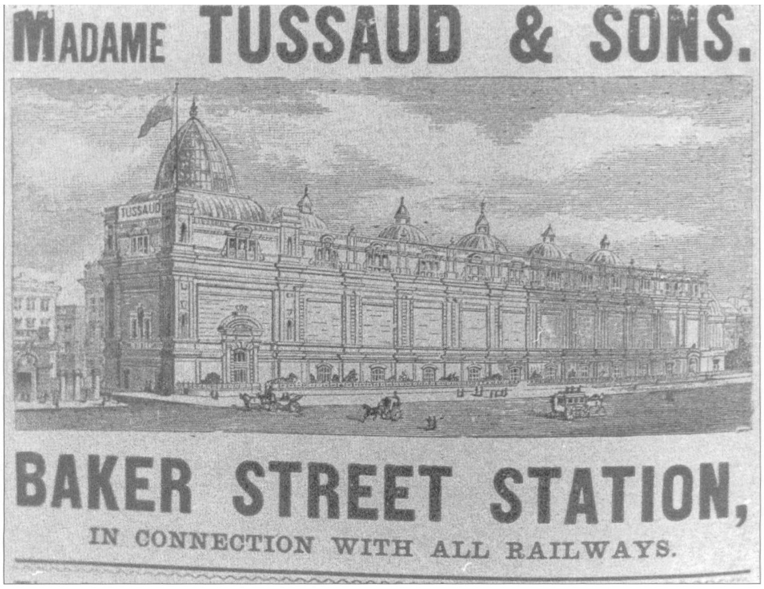

MADAME TUSSAUD & SONS.
TUSSAUD
BAKER STREET STATION,
IN CONNECTION WITH ALL RAILWAYS.

Fig. 5: Exterior of Madame Tussaud's exhibition, woodprint on handbill, 1886, Guildhall Print Room, London.

By the mid-1790s, the Paris business appears to have been in decline[12] and, in 1802, Marie Tussaud decided to move with 34 of her figures to England,[13] evidently hoping for a fresh audience. Although waxworks were by no means new to London,[14] her exhibition seems to have been successful. Most Londoners would have been familiar with the circumstances of the Revolution, and avidly sought more information. Here, the leading participants could be readily observed, lifelike and in three dimensions, 'magnificently displayed'[15] and wearing 'authentic' clothes, with the Paris background of the show doubtless adding extra credibility. Since it was clearly important to make most of this feeling of novelty, Marie Tussaud soon began to move the exhibition around, in the manner of a travelling circus: from April 1803 to March 1833 she journeyed through Scotland, Ireland, and England, during which time she not only expanded her collection by including local celebrities, but also became a very successful businesswoman.[16] When she finally settled in London's Baker Street Bazaar[17] the presentation of the figures, in terms of decorations and costumes, could become more elaborate. Changes were also brought about through the addition of still more characters and groups, as well as the elaboration of themed settings, such as the Chamber of Horrors[18]. Marie Tussaud's death in 1850 did not halt the continued rise of the now well-established institution[19] and, in 1884, it moved into purpose-built premises on Marylebone Road, where it is still exhibiting today (fig. 5).

The beginnings of the two museums are, then, rather different: although both utilised aristocratic forms of representation – the family gallery and the wax state portrait – only the National Portrait Gallery remained loyal to the form and continued it in any strict sense. Madame Tussaud's success on the other hand, at least initially, was based on the violent overturning of the tradition of representing royal power and recording royal death. While the National Portrait Gallery developed in a typically restrained manner as a result of a more or less democratic process and government action, Madame Tussaud's was formed by eruptive and opportunistic reactions to contemporary events, conditioned by the personal situation of its proprietoress and the commercial purpose of her project. The National Portrait Gallery, under the control of the Establishment, was designed to reflect and reinforce the prevailing ideology. Because the waxworks represented the opponents of aristocracy, as much as its splendour, its display lacked an equivalent ideological coherence. This ambiguity is a significant element of the wax exhibition and ultimately defines its less prestigious social status.

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[12] Curtius had died in mysterious circumstances in 1794 and left a substancial debt. However, the exact reasons for Marie Tussaud leaving France are not entirely clear.

[13] The portraits she had selected were likely to have included the royal family of France, the figures of Voltaire, Marat, Madame du Barry, Napoleon and Josephine, and Benjamin Franklin, as well as the heads of Robespierre and Fouquier-Tinville. The earliest surviving catalogue of her exhibition dates from her stay in Edinburgh, six months after she left France; since it seems improbable that she should have had the time or opportunity to modify her imports, the exhibition must have been more or less the same in London (Ex.-Cat. [Madame Tussaud's], Edinburgh 1803, National Art Library, V & A, London).

[14] From the second half of the 17th and throughout the 18th century, 'wonders made of wax' were on show at fairs, in taverns and as travelling waxwork exhibitions (Broadsheet *The Dagonizing of Bartholomew Fayre...*, London 1647, British Library MF 669f11 (71), quoted in Leslie/Chapman 1978 [as in 8], p. 105). Amongst others, Mrs Goldsmith – who also seems to have modelled the figures of William III and Mary II (fig. 4) – is known to have been the proprietoress of a waxwork museum in Old Jewry at the end of the 17th century. The most famous permanent display of waxworks was that of Mrs Salmon which existed from the 1690s to 1831 (Pyke 1973 [as in 8], pp. 55–56 and 126–127; Altick, Richard Daniel, *The Shows of London*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1978, pp. 50–56 and 332–333).

[15] Leslie/Chapman 1978 (as in 8), p. 102. The splendour and magnificence of the exhibition was regularly mentioned in contemporary newspapers. Marie Tussaud must have recognised the importance of a careful and sumptuous display and taken the presentation more seriously than the proprietors of other waxworks (Altick 1978 [as above], p. 334). She probably learned to develop the strong theatrical element through Curtius (Chapman 1992 [as in 10], pp. 107–109).

[16] Although she was helped by sympathetic French emigrants and other show people at the beginning, from 1804 onwards Marie Tussaud appears to have managed the tours – i.e. packing, transport, renting exhibition space and accommodation, publicity – on her own. Her son Joseph, then six years old, developed into her right-hand companion during this time.

[17] This was an abandoned barrack building on Baker Street, used as show- and salesrooms for all sorts of goods (Timbs, John, *Curiosities of London*, London 1855, 'Bazaars', p. 36).

[18] What was later called the Chamber of Horrors started as a room for the figures connected to the French Revolution, separated from the main exhibition space. It developed over the years into the setting for murderers and execution scenes (Chapman, Pauline, *Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors. 200 Years of Crime*, London 1984).

Objects and Collecting

The most obvious difference between the collections of Madame Tussaud's and the National Portrait Gallery lies in the medium. In contrast to the traditional painted portraits dominating the collection of the Portrait Gallery, Madame Tussaud's wax sculptures have been seen as 'the total negation of all that is vitally necessary to art' in the 19th century, particularly in terms of the 'aesthetic distance' between the model and the artwork, and the personal hand-mark of the sculptor.[20] Although portrait painting occupied an ambiguous and therefore less precious position within the academic hierarchy based on the degree of invention demonstrated in a work of art, its translation of a three-dimensional object (i.e. the sitter) into two dimensions inevitably made it an artistic interpretation. This counteracted the accusation of naive copying of nature which was launched against wax sculpture.[21] Today, in the light of post-modern thinking, wax sculpture as much as painting must be understood as media manifestly charged with meaning, suggesting a particular interpretation of the subject. The distinction between artistic and non-artistic media and the attachment of value judgements to them is however still prevalent today, as the entries in 'Time Out' indeed show.

The way in which objects entered their respective collections contributed further to the social – and 'artistic' – standing of the two museums. In contrast to Madame Tussaud's agglomeration of portraits, where figures were added and taken away impulsively at her own discretion, acquisitions for the National Portrait Gallery had to be sanctioned by the Trustees. The latter were naturally cautious as to whom they admitted into what was effectively a national 'Temple of Fame', the representational character of which was open to attack.[22] Their ambition to provide role models for the whole nation made it ideologically difficult to remove a portrait, should the person represented lose popularity. Thus, the durability of the choice was essential to the project and seen to be achieved by the process of accession through a representative group of Trustees. Marie Tussaud, however, made no claims of national significance for her collection – indeed, she had begun her career exploiting the likenesses of French guillotine victims. Foreign diplomats and statesmen, particularly Napoleon, also featured prominently in her exhibition. Yet her aim to maintain a topical selection of portraits did mean that the collection gradually took on a British flavour, due to the environment she scanned for celebrities. By emphasising topicality and leaving open the possibility of change, Madame Tussaud's implicitly rejected the eternal validity striven for by the National Portraits. This instability made it seem less canonical and therefore a less serious attempt to provide a record of fame than the Trustees' own efforts.

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[19] The exhibition was caricatured in 'Punch' from the 1840s. Articles on the subject in other newspapers and magazines became more frequent during the last third of the 19th century (Leslie/Chapman 1978 [as in 8], pp. 162, 169; Altick 1978 [as in 14], p. 335).

[20] Martienssen, Heather, *Madame Tussaud and the limits of likeness*, in: British Journal of Aesthetics 2, vol. 20, 1980, p. 133.

[21] Academic art theory made a sharp distinction between the 'mere copying' of nature, as portraiture was understood to be, and the idealisation or 'correction' of nature which served to bring out the essence of a subject behind the coincidental, individual appearance (Schlosser 1993 [as in 11], pp. 103, 121, esp. p. 117).

[22] Lord Ellenborough even suggested that reviews be conducted at regular intervals in order to control the quality of the selection and protect the collection against the inclusion of 'unworthies': 'We are prone [...] to exaggerate the reputations of those living in our own time or in times just preceding: therefore, not only do I think the precaution [...] is necessary for the purpose of excluding persons not worthy to be introduced into such a gallery, but I must say it would be most advisable [...] at distant periods of twenty or thirty years to appoint a commission of revision [...]' (*Hansard* [as in 2]).

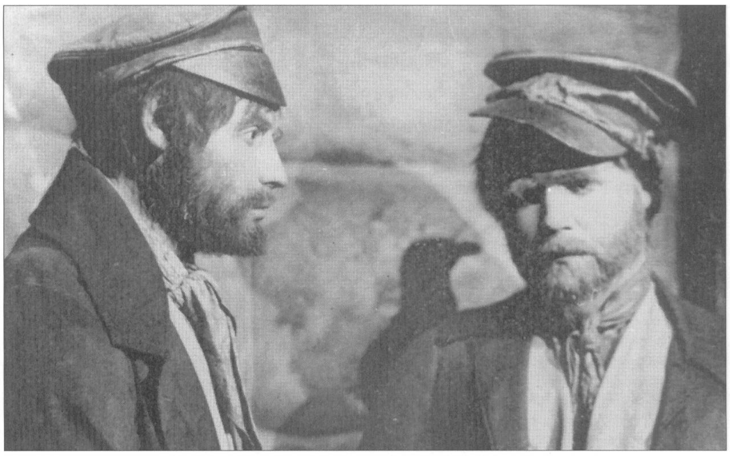

Fig. 6: Marie Tussaud, William Burke and William Hare, wax figures, first exhibited in 1830, Madame Tussaud's, London. This photo shows the display in 1967, which is different from the current display.

Their essential criterion for a consensus on the admission of a person into the National Portrait Gallery was that of 'eminence'. The most important guideline for acquisition was the 'celebrity of the person represented rather than the merit of the artist'. Decisions had to be free from political or religious opinion and should tolerate 'great faults and errors, even though admitted on all sides'.[23] Yet, although this theoretically made room for moral or political offenders, the opportunity was never truly taken up.[24] The emphasis of the collection was therefore to represent persons who had made a positive, honourable contribution to the British nation. Furthermore, the sitter (apart from the 'reigning sovereign and his or her consort') had to have been dead for at least ten years in order to minimise the influence of fashion or personal acquaintance with any of the Trustees. Nothing could be further from the selection criteria at Madame Tussaud's! On the contrary, her exhibition was not commemorative, but appreciative of topical interest.[25] Ephemeral and fashionable characters were highly sought-after by Madame Tussaud, and reactions to temporary shifts in public attention were swift.[26] Her personal acquaintance with the sitter was emphasised wherever possible, since it was understood to add authenticity to the portraits.[27] Where the National Portrait Gallery aimed to accumulate an 'Olymp' of 'eminent' historical personalities, Madame Tussaud searched out 'distinguished characters'[28] of her own time – without limits to the nature of their distinction. Anyone who was talked about, whether murderer or emperor, could qualify for the collection, however fleeting or coincidental his or her fame. The intention was to capture an immediate impact upon the public rather than to underline any long-term, laudable effect on society. In fact, wholly trivial characters such as 'Houqua: The celebrated tea merchant [...]'[29] as well as vile criminals such as Burke and Hare[30] (fig. 6) proved to be crowd-pullers and were as such an especially desirable type of exhibit.[31] However, the exhibition of amusing figures, low-life characters and killers could not pass uncommented even at Madame Tussaud's and necessarily appeared in an educational or moral guise. Thus the justification for the Chamber of Horrors reads:

'[Madame Tussaud and Sons] need scarcely assure the public that so far from the exhibition of the likenesses of criminals creating a desire to imitate them, experience teaches them that it has a direct tendency to the contrary.'[32]

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[23] Cf. *Rules which the Trustees have adopted for their guidance*, in: Scharf 1888 (as in 7), p. 2.

[24] In 1860 the inclusion of Nell Gwyn and the Duchess of Portsmouth was criticised in Parliament on moral grounds, because both had been mistresses of Charles I (Hooper-Greenhill, Eileen, *The National Portrait Gallery: A Case Study in Cultural Reproduction*, unpublished MA thesis, Institute of Education, University of London, London 1980, p. 67). Political dissenters were represented only when historical distance had made them and their opinions harmless for existing political structures. More about gender-specific selection criteria can be found in: Perry, Lara, *Facing Femininities: Women in the National Portrait Gallery 1856–1900*, Ph.D. thesis, University of York, forthcoming October 1998. The most comprehensive catalogue of the main collection is: Yung, Kai Kin (comp.), *National Portrait Gallery. Complete Illustrated Catalogue 1856–1979*, London 1981.

[25] The chief exception was the 'Hall of Kings', featuring a lineage of Kings from William the Conqueror onwards, established only after 1851. During travelling times, the figures on show were only historic when they dated from earlier times of the exhibition, e.g. Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

[26] This was fairly easy since exhibits could be made quickly on request. Reaction time remains remarkably short: during the change of the British government following the general election of May 1st, 1997, the figure of John Major was replaced by that of the new Prime Minister, Tony Blair, even before the election results were officially ratified. (This detail was brought to my attention by Michael Phipps.)

[27] Marie Tussaud took special care to establish personal connections to nearly all the French Revolutionaries (Hervé [as in 10]).

[28] The title of her exhibition catalogues from 1830 onwards reads: *Biographical and Descriptive Sketches of the Distinguished Characters, which compose the Unrivalled Exhibition of Madame Tussaud [...]*.

[29] Ex.-Cat. *Madame Tussaud's*, London 1869, no. 59.

[30] William Burke and William Hare shocked the public in 1828 by being caught as professional body snatchers who killed people to sell the bodies for dissection in anatomy lessons. They were in the exhibition from 1830 (Chapman 1984 [as in 18], pp. 41–46).

[31] The Catalogue of 1851 boasts: 'The sensation caused by the crimes of Rush, the Mannings, etc. was so great that thousands were unable to satisfy their curiosity. It therefore induced Madame Tussaud & Sons to extend a large sum in building a suitable Room for the purpose [...]' (Chapman 1984 [as in 18], p. 66). Another example reads: 'On Boxing Day 1891 a crowd of 31,000 people blocked the streets to see the model of Mrs Pearcey, the murderess of the moment, in her constructed sitting room and kitchen, the actual furniture of which had been purchased by Madame Tussaud's.' (Leslie/Chapman 1978 [as in 8], p. 183).

[32] Ex.-Cat. *Madame Tussaud's*, London 1875.

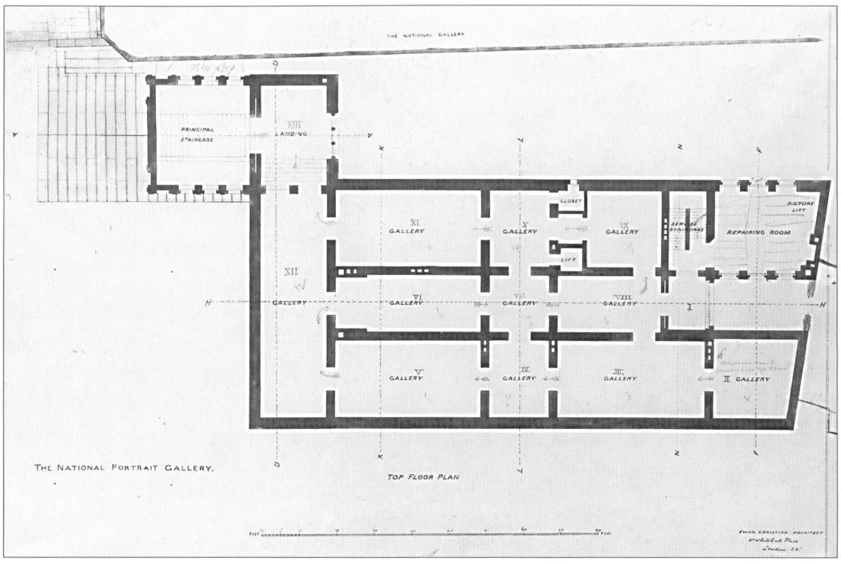

Fig. 7: Ewan Christian, Floor plan of the National Portrait Gallery, 1896, National Portrait Gallery Archive, London.

Napoleon's 'favourite Mameluke' is 'dressed in the costume of his country and is introduced to give effect to the group'.[33] And the presence of Houqua is explained thus:

'The celebrated tea merchant, in the identical clothes and ornaments worn by him, introduced to give an idea of the peculiar costume of China. Greatly distinguished among the Hong merchants for his exceedingly cheerful disposition and for his great attachment to the English nation. He died in 1846.'[34]

The most striking similarity between Madame Tussaud's and the National Portrait Gallery is, then, simultaneously, a crucial point of difference: both museums use the term 'fame' when describing the objects in their collection, yet have differing concepts of how this is constituted. Where the National Portrait Gallery relies on the 'eminence' of individuals of lasting fame to form an honourable body of 'heroes'[35] untouched by the passage of time, Madame Tussaud's collection of 'stars' is founded on the morally neutral quality of public attention, which sometimes needs to be constructed as in the case of the 'mameluke' or the tea merchant. The presentation of negative figures does not disturb this programme unless it impinges on the commercial success of the enterprise. The steadfastness and apparent coherence of the National Portrait Gallery's collection therefore contrasts starkly with the apparently fickle sensationalism of Madame Tussaud's.

Display

For the opening of the new building in 1896 a policy of chronological ordering was adopted by the National Portrait Gallery.[36] Early characters were shown on the top floor, with those from the late 18th and 19th centuries placed on the first and ground floors. The earlier centuries were laid out strictly according to date, the 18th and 19th centuries were grouped thematically according to the sitters' occupation (writers, judges, soldiers etc.). Yet the relationship between the predominantly linear, chronological rationale and the spatial organisation of the building

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[33] 'Napoleon's favourite Mameluke' appears for the first time in 1835, Ex.-Cat. *Madame Tussaud's* 1835, no. 9.

[34] Ex.-Cat. *Madame Tussaud's* 1869 [as in 29].

[35] In the sense defined by Thomas Carlyle in his lectures 'On hero-worship', 1840. He suggested as an educative measurement, that young people should chose a 'hero' from the great men known in order to have an example to emulate in their actions. Carlyle was himself a founding Trustee of the NPG (Barlow, Paul, *The Imagined Hero as Incarnate Sign: Thomas Carlyle and the Mythology of the National Portrait in Victorian Britain*, in: Art History 17 (4), 1994, pp. 517–545).

[36] At 29, Great George Street the objects were placed in a purely functional order according to their acquisition date. In 1870, the collection was ordered chronologically for the first time, but only in the permanent building at St Martin's Place was a lasting structure for the display achieved.

[37] Giles Waterfield sees here one of few examples for the adaptation of classical German museum architecture, such as the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, and explains this in terms of the Gallery's special 'character as a primarily historical museum' (Waterfield, Giles (ed.), *Palaces of Art. Art Galleries in Britain 1790–1990*, London 1991, p. 28). Hanging paintings in a chronological order again derived from the model of the aristocratic family gallery. Furthermore, in conjunction with the emergence of art history as a discipline and the interest in the historical development of styles and schools, chronology became the dominant principle for display in art galleries during the 19th century. In the National Gallery, often quoted by Stanhope as a prototype for the organisation of the Portrait Gallery, the collection was ordered according to schools, and chronologically within them by the 1880s (Waterfield 1991 [as above], pp. 52–54).

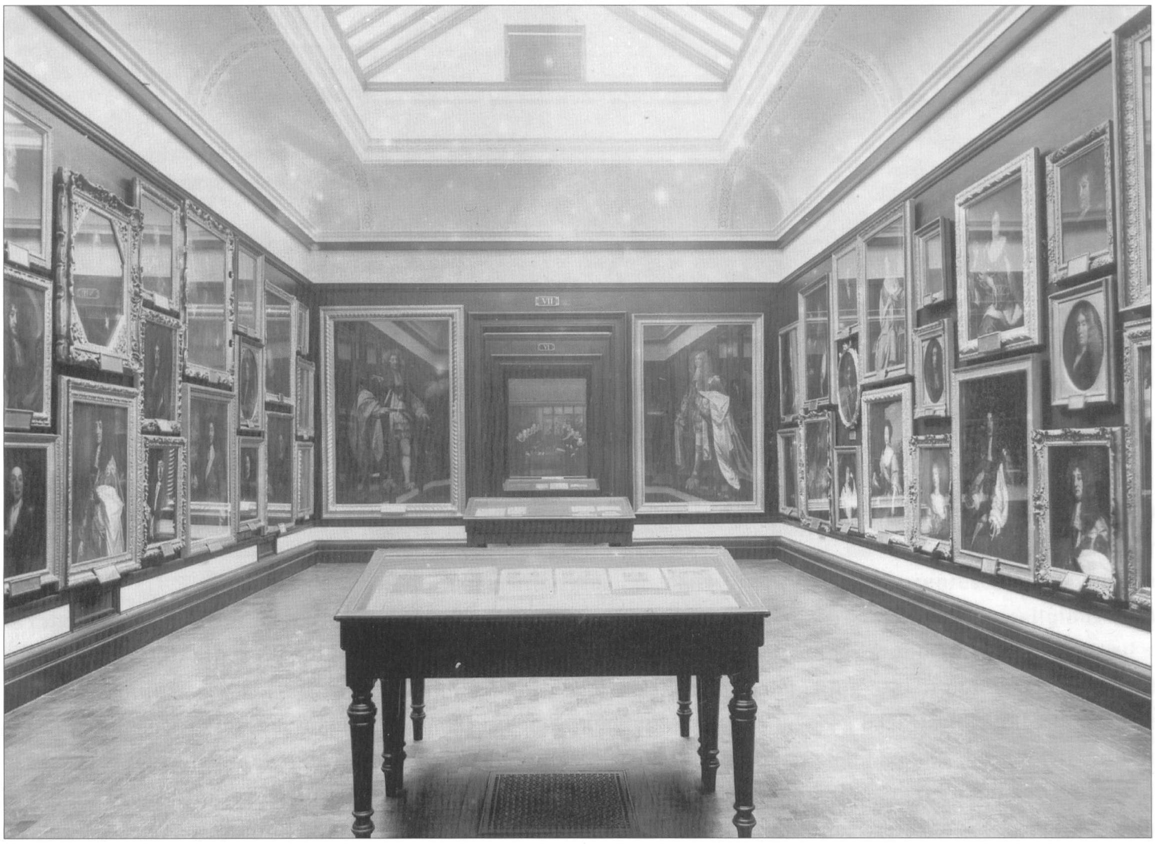

Fig. 8: Interior view of the National Portrait Gallery, Room VII, 1911, National Portrait Gallery Archive, London. This photo shows the dense hanging after the gallery's opening.

in cabinets must have given the impression of a somewhat elusive narrative (fig. 7)[37] before being smoothed out later this century. Sculpture was originally kept separate from the more numerous paintings, which were hung closely together, covering nearly all the wallspace in the gallery (fig. 8). Decoration of the galleries was minimal, in keeping with the practice adopted by other art museums.[38] Attempts to break up the resulting monotony of this approach and to create a more atmospheric setting for the portraits were undertaken only after the Second World War.[39] The new context for those portraits originally meant for the ancestral picture gallery or other private or public places, also involved a new audience as much as a new function (i.e. to represent the British nation rather than show the continuity of a family). All this demanded a descriptive system for objects whose significance was no longer self-explanatory. Labels and catalogues, providing short biographical details and names of artists, were provided for the visitors at an early stage, increasing the rational, intellectual approach to the sitters and their pictures.[40]

The general arrangement at Madame Tussaud's was rather different. While travelling, the exhibition had needed to remain flexible in its inner organisation in order to adjust to changing architectural spaces. However, on tour, Marie Tussaud usually rented theatres or assembly rooms so that she would have one large, undivided hall, reminiscent of galleries in aristocratic palaces and stately homes. The Baker Street Bazaar featured a room of this kind (fig. 9). Here, she would arrange

[38] Waterfield 1991 (as in 37), p. 24 and 63.

[39] It began with the furnishing of the Victorian rooms with William-Morris wall paper in 1956 (Hooper-Greenhill 1980 [as in 24], p. 78; *National Portrait Gallery: First and Second Report of the Trustees* 1956 and 1959). This coincided with the introduction of brocade wall covering at the National Gallery in the 1950s (Waterfield 1991 [as in 37], p. 63).

[40] *National Portrait Gallery: Second Report of the Trustees*, 1859.

[41] In 1803, for example, the first figure was Napoleon Bonaparte; after 1852 it was 'Wellington lying in state'.

[42] The room used to be called simply 'Separate Room'. The term 'Chamber of Horrors' appeared for the first time on a handbill in 1840 (John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera, Bodleian Library, box: Waxworks etc.), not, as has been claimed, in a cartoon of the satirical magazine *Punch* in 1846 (Chapman 1984 [as in 18], pp. 53–54).

[43] Madame Tussaud's has a long tradition of employing effective lighting with candles, gas and, in 1891, the advent of electrical light was celebrated

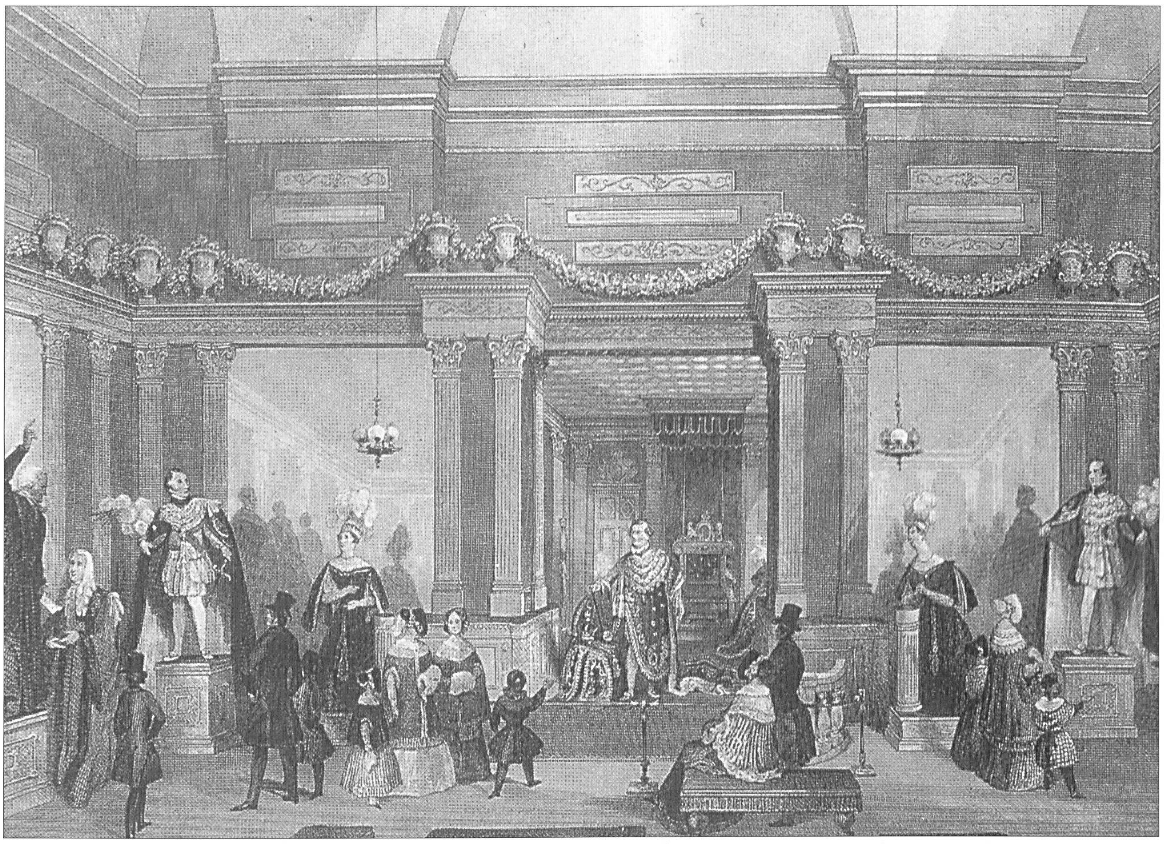

Fig. 9: Interior view of Madame Tussaud's exhibition in Baker Street Bazaar, woodprint on cover for Ex.-Cat. *Madame Tussaud's*, London 1841, Guildhall Library, London.

the figures in lines along the walls and set up larger groups in the middle, thus leaving two aisles for the visitors to promenade along. The narrative started with the most recent, topical figures. From 1820 onwards, for example, this was a group representing the coronation of King George IV (fig. 10).[41] The visitors then viewed a succession of unrelated and chronologically mixed groups of figures before reaching the Chamber of Horrors.[42] This remains roughly the case today: Madame Tussaud's is an ahistoric panorama when compared with the National Portrait Gallery's more rational, historical continuum based on the rather abstract chronology of life dates.

At Madame Tussaud's, monotony was deliberately avoided from the outset. Dramatic lighting[43], splendid costumes and the creation of sumptuous decoration were as important as the mixture of the figures with different media, such as sculpture, paintings, painted scenes, and furniture. Historical items, imbued with a certain 'aura' from having been used by, or associated with, famous characters – such as Napoleon's toothbrush – gave the displays a quasi-religious touch.[44] But most of all, the illusionism of the figures was exploited to its limits. In the form of tableaux[45] not only the figures but the whole composition enacted scenes from real life (fig. 11). Thus, the illusion for the visitors to be present at the actual event was created. In contrast to the displays at the National Portrait Gallery, this kind of presentation aims at arousing instinctive emotional responses in the viewer – not merely the witnessing, but the 'experience' of the subject represented is

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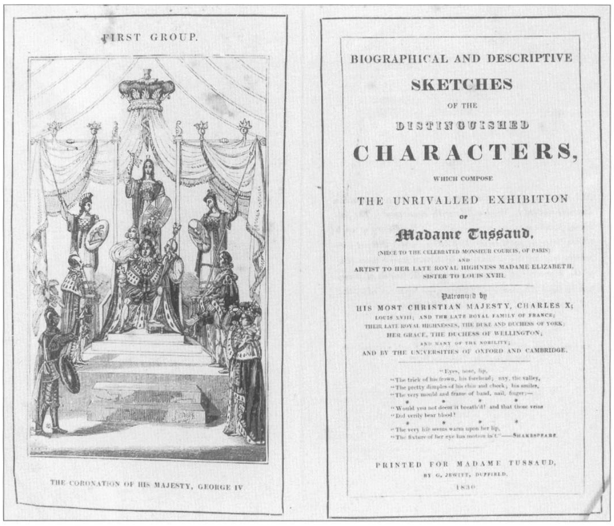
with a dramatic switch-on. Artificial light allowed opening to extend to 10 p.m. The NPG, on the other hand, had to close sometimes as early as 4 p.m. before electrical light was installed in 1936.

[44] Sadly, almost all of these 'relics' burned in the devastating fire that gutted Madame Tussaud's in 1925. In my forthcoming Ph.D. thesis I will look more closely at the various religious allusions in the display at Madame Tussaud's.

[45] From the 1890s onwards these groups of figures, apparently re-enacting a scenic action in a stage-like setting, featured prominently in the display. Early tableaux at Madame Tussaud's were intermediaries between simple figure groups and meaningful composed scenes, such as the royal family at table in Curtius's 'Sallon' (fig. 3). More elaborate versions with precisely positioned props, lighting and backdrops, such as the reconstruction of crime locations for the Chamber of Horrors or staging of well-known paintings, could only develop after the exhibition had settled in Baker Street.


FIRST GROUP.
THE CORONATION OF HIS MAJESTY, GEORGE IV

BIOGRAPHICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE
SKETCHES
OF THE
DISTINGUISHED
CHARACTERS,
WHICH COMPOSE
THE UNRIVALLED EXHIBITION
OF
Madame Tussaud,
(NIECE TO THE CELEBRATED MONSIEUR COURCIS, OF PARIS)
AND
ARTIST TO HER LATE ROYAL HIGHNESS MADAME ELIZABETH,
SISTER TO LOUIS XVIII.

Patronised by
HIS MOST CHRISTIAN MAJESTY, CHARLES X;
LOUIS XVIII; AND THE LATE ROYAL FAMILY OF FRANCE;
THEIR LATE ROYAL HIGHNESSES, THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF YORK;
HER GRACE, THE DUCHESS OF WELLINGTON;
AND MANY OF THE NOBILITY;
AND BY THE UNIVERSITIES OF OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE.

"Eyes, nose, lip,
"The trick of his frown, his forehead; nay, the valley,
"The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek; his smiles,
"The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger;—
* * * *
"Would you not deem it breath'd! and that those veins
"Did verily bear blood?
* * * *
"The very life seems warm upon her lip,
"The fixture of her eye has motion in't."—SHAKESPEARE.

PRINTED FOR MADAME TUSSAUD,
BY G. JEWITT, DUFFIELD.
1830.

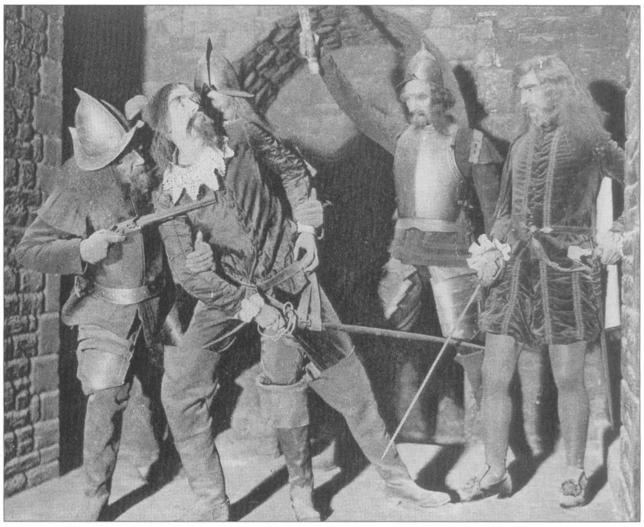


Fig. 10: Anon., 'The Coronation of his Majesty George IV', frontispiece engraving Ex.-Cat. *Madame Tussaud's*, Duffield 1830, National Art Library, London.

Fig. 11: John T. Tussaud et. al., 'Arrest of Guy Fawkes', waxwork tableau in *Madame Tussaud's Souvenir*, London 1928, National Art Library, London.

suggested. Where the catalogue was consulted, providing 'biographical knowledge – a branch of education universally allowed to be of the highest importance'[46], information was given in the most dramatic and bloodthirsty fashion.[47] The visitor's senses were fed with a strongly impressive interpretation of the figure, which, in order to evoke a recognisable emotion, has to be unambiguous. The interpretation thus becomes unavoidable. Simplification rather than reasoning is at work, and the danger of over-simplification and unnoticed manipulation of the viewer is inherent. Yet, original items belonging to the person represented seem to guarantee the genuineness of the portrait. This works hand in hand with the illusionism of the wax figure itself, reassuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the impression. Secure historical facts, original artefacts, wax representations and emotional responses suddenly 'mingle in a continuum that the visitor is not invited to decipher'.[48] Nor does he or she need to, for the perfection of the illusion means that the whys and wherefores of the presentation do not come into question.

The necessary simplicity of its content means that Madame Tussaud's has to restrict itself to the most generally accepted 'cast' of personalities, it cannot, in the manner of the National Portrait Gallery, introduce characters whose importance needs to be clarified by immediate textual explication. Since the display is able to make a strong impression with a limited set of characters, it can only affirm and intensify the image of society already present in the visitor's minds, regurgitating known information rather than generating new knowledge or perspectives. At the National Portrait Gallery, on the other hand, there is a kind of inbuilt barrier between object and beholder, provided by the accompanying labels and catalogue entries, as well as by the painter's 'artistic interpretation', which requires closer examination from the viewer. The mode of viewing, then, due to the nature of the object and the presentation, is reflective, compared to the gaze of the visitor at Madame Tussaud's, configured by speedy recognition and illusionistic wonder. The response of the visitor to the Portrait Gallery, it is hoped, will be intellectual engagement with the subject, rather than the purely sensual experience of ticking-off figures from a mental set, as at Madame Tussaud's.

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[46] Ex.-Cat. *Madame Tussaud's*, Cambridge 1819 and following, p. 2.

[47] For example: Ex.-Cat. *Madame Tussaud's*, Cambridge 1819, no. 26, Louis XVI: 'This ill-fated monarch, was born on the 23rd of August, 1754 [...] no splendour marked his birth, and the courier who was commissioned to bear the news to the Court, fell and died on the spot [...] His marriage with Marie Antoinette was attended with very distressing circumstances; for in the festival given by the city of Paris on the occasion, more than 4000 persons were trampled to death of suffocation in the Palace de Louis XV through want of precaution. [...] The conduct of the Americans lighted up the torch of liberty in France, and Louis the XVI perished in the flames which his own breath had so imprudently fanned. [...]' Or: Ex.-Cat. *Madame Tussaud's*, Penrith 1828, no. 51, Ferdinand VII: '[...] But to paint him as he deserves, we need say no more of Ferdinand than this – he restored to Spain that most abhorred of all tribunals – THE INQUISITION.'

[48] Eco, Umberto, *Travels in Hyperreality*, in: Travels in Hyperreality. Essays, trans. by William Weaver, London 1987, pp. 3–58, p. 9. Eco discusses small-scale dioramas in the Museum of the City of New York but makes a similar point. In a way, these forms of presentation function like a movie: as the film utilises highly referential visual signs, the beholders are usually so drawn into the illusion that they do not notice the subtle ways in which they are being manipulated by the technical side of the medium, such as camera perspective or montage.

Conclusion

The point of departure for this brief comparison was the apparent incongruity of two institutions of national standing, ranked at opposite ends of the cultural scale, but similarly described as repositories of 'the famous and the infamous'. As we have seen, the development of both establishments was determined by the nature of the traditions within which they began to operate and the people behind the scenes. But they were equally defined by their particular selection criteria and patterns of display. Madame Tussaud's, as a private, commercial enterprise, was always prepared to react to opportunities as they arose, and presented a well-crafted exhibition utilising what might be described as cutting-edge technology. Its visitors were led to believe that they were actually participating in what they saw. As a consequence, the limited content and dazzle of display avoided stirring any potential for questioning through a guarantee of quick and easy entertainment. At the National Portrait Gallery, a public foundation, visitors were urged to reflect on the meaning of the collection, but not to be critical of the parameters for collecting as dictated by the Trustees and – ultimately – the government. The cool and open presentation of the portraits left the visitors with a certain degree of freedom as to which pictures they chose to view and to what extent they pursued biographical detail, but with no alternative to the sober propriety of the exhibits. Furthermore, the notion of permanence of display at the National Portrait Gallery, compared to its fickleness at Madame Tussaud's, as well as the ideological unambiguity of the Gallery as opposed to Tussaud's evasiveness, contributed to the respective placements of the two institutions within society.

That the intellectual stimulus of the National Portrait Gallery was greater and more evident than that of Madame Tussaud's was largely correct in the 19th century, and remains true today.[49] The description in magazines such as 'Time Out' which see themselves as arbiters of contemporary culture, however, underlines the fact that both institutions not only share a remarkable number of interests, but also work in an implicit parallel, delivering equally relevant and complementary perspectives on British society. What seems remarkable is that, although the National Portrait Gallery holds a chalk drawing representing Marie Tussaud, and its director, Lionel Cust, was invited to Tussaud's centenary dinner in 1903,[50] the two establishments and their respective audiences do not appear to have registered each other's existence as a whole.

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[49] It must not be forgotten, though, that Madame Tussaud's historic stock was nearly completely destroyed by fire in March 1925 and that the exhibition has subsequently undergone a drastic change in orientation.

[50] The drawing (NPG 2031) is attributed to Marie's son Francis Tussaud and was given to the NPG by the sitter's great-grandson, John Theodore Tussaud, in 1924. The plan of table and other documents on the centenary dinner of 17 December 1903 are in Madame Tussaud's Archive, London.

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