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The After-Life of Joseph Paul

Imagine the inverse of the Panopticon;
the Center's all-seeing eyes, displaced
lining the Periphery

not gazing out at bodies in cells but in
at the cells of bodies.

Why can't I touch him? his brother asks, as the State pumps death through Joseph Paul's veins. The body, still warm, is transferred. *I don't condone execution*, a scientist says, *but don't believe in wasting resources either*. So the valuable resource Joseph Paul became was preserved, frozen in blue gelatin.

What's become of our son? his parents must have wondered. *Starting at the feet* (they were not told), *he was sliced into slides; we shaved his body upwards. It took nine months to plane him away, to conceive him as anatomical Adam. If he had a soul* (they didn't add but might have), *we assure you we never found it*.

Whoever said death is the ultimate release
from belonging, never imagined the after-life
of Joseph Paul.

Interred in virtual reality, all body and no body
he flickers in intimate, endless detail; chilled
in the blues

of cyberspace, the singular Site of all sight.

In 1993 a Texas prison inmate died a new form of death. His body, annihilated in real space, was reconstituted in virtual space. The virtual corpse can be animated and programmed for interactive simulations; users can move around the body using hypermedia links and 'flythroughs.' Like earlier criminals subject to the process of public dissection in the anatomy theatres of early modern Europe, the interior of Joseph Paul Jernigan's body is an object of public culture and public scrutiny. — Catherine Waldby

