



The Eloquent Body

2018 - ISSUE ONE





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Debunking the Myths of Pornography

RICHARD BUDD

Matthew Fradd, *The Porn Myth: Exposing the Reality Behind the Fantasy of Pornography* (Ignatius, 2017).

Earlier this year, the Florida House of Representatives passed a resolution declaring pornography a public health risk. The vote took place in the immediate aftermath of the shooting at Parkland High School. Consequently, most of the media coverage derided the House for focusing on something “harmless” in the face of horrific violence in schools. In a *Time Magazine* article, Florida representative Carlos Guillermo Smith was quoted as asking, “Has anyone ever been killed as a result of the health implications of pornography?” The article goes on to quote Smith declaring, “I’m not aware there’s a base of voters who are losing sleep every night over the epidemic of pornography as a public health crisis.” Because of the salience of the school shooting, the import of this legislative action was largely overlooked, as Florida became not the first state to make such a resolution, but joined Tennessee, Utah, South Dakota, Arkansas, Virginia, and Kansas in making similar declarations. These states undoubtedly passed such resolutions following the lead of the Republican Party, which in 2016 declared pornography a “public health crisis” in its official platform.

Still, pornography is not simply an issue conservative, red state politicians are issuing warnings about. Unlikely though this might seem, some in Hollywood and Washington have made common cause in opposing it. Like their counterparts in the state legislatures mentioned above, more and more well-known celebrities are not merely opposed to pornography, but are actively working against the industry. In a 2015 video, actor and comedian Russell Brand—not exactly known for sexual prudery—released a video on YouTube attacking pornography (and, in particular, the book and movie *Fifty Shades of Grey*) because of the negative effects it has on the lives of those who consume it and also on the culture at large. At one moment, he states, “Our attitudes toward sex have become warped and perverted and have deviated from its true function as an expression of love and a means of procreation.” In a frank exposition of the negative effects of pornography, Brand admits that he identified with the temptation of viewing women as objects as a result of his own use of porn. The video went viral and, as of this writing, stands at almost 4 million views. Other celebrities, too, are speaking out, including Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Terry Crews, Hugh Grant, and even Pamela Anderson who appeared on the cover of *Playboy* several times.

The response to these kinds of objections to pornography is typified by Guillermo Smith’s interpretation: pornography is essentially harmless and can even be beneficial in certain cases. While it should be enjoyed within the privacy of one’s home, and probably shouldn’t be shown to children, it doesn’t *really* hurt anyone. At the end of the day, objections to pornography are merely remnants of a puritanical, misogynistic patriarchy.

Enter Matt Fradd's book, *The Porn Myth* (Ignatius Press, 2017). In the introduction, Fradd, speaker, best-selling author and host of the popular podcast *Pints with Aquinas*, states explicitly that his purpose is "to expose the myth that pornography is good or at least not bad." He sets out to "debunk the most commonly held beliefs about pornography, either explicitly stated or implicitly understood," and to do so using arguments supported by neural, social, psychological, and behavioral scientific data. He states his position clearly: pornography is an extension of prostitution. It is the commodification of women's bodies for the express purpose of the sexual gratification of the client. He asserts, "The producers of pornography intend for the consumer to interact with the material as one interacts with a prostitute—it is a product that serves an erotic function." Once he establishes this, he goes on to claim that porn harms because it misuses the nature of human sexuality, as a physical and psychological reality, and thus has negative consequences, not only for the user, but also the performers. One of the key elements of the book is his explanation of what happens in the brain of a porn user and how it is negatively affected; the brain actually changes as porn use continues. The prefrontal cortex erodes resulting in "hypofrontality, in which the person slowly loses impulse control and mastery of his passions." Additionally, studies have shown that porn causes alterations in the amygdala, hippocampus, hypothalamus, septum and a reduction in gray matter. Fradd then spends the rest of the book supporting this position by systematically addressing twenty-four "myths" which contribute to the proliferation of pornography in the wider culture.

The body of the book is divided into five sections that deal with various dimensions of the issue of pornography. In "Porn Culture," Fradd seeks to dismantle the idea that porn is a cultural non-issue—as benign as cream in your coffee—and deals with such myths as "Porn is just adult entertainment," and "There is no difference between porn and naked art." In "The Porn Industry," he sets his sights on unveiling the true nature of the porn industry and the harm it does to the very individuals who produce pornographic materials. Specifically, he deals with ideas such as that porn is safe for the performers, porn performers are well-rounded individuals, and that viewing so-called free pornography isn't contributing to the industry at large.

Turning to "Porn and Our Sexuality," Fradd unravels the myths that paint porn use as harmless to the viewer. He addresses the belief that women do not struggle with pornography, or that men need to masturbate to be healthy. The most important myth that he addresses in this section, however, is that pornography isn't addictive. He demonstrates that even though pornography is not a substance that is consumed or injected, a porn user becomes dependent on it to maintain a sense of normalcy. (He points to gambling addiction as a similar phenomenon.)

"Porn and Our Relationships," unmask the idea that porn is used in isolation and deals with the damage porn does to the individuals closest to the user; porn isn't merely a fantasy disconnected from real life. Getting married will not relieve a porn obsession, and shared viewing of pornography cannot help a couple grow in their intimacy. Finally, Fradd addresses those who are trying to fight against the influence of pornography in their own life. He gives valuable advice on overcoming porn and protecting one's children from the scourge.

The greatest strength of *The Porn Myth* is Fradd's decision not to rely on religious arguments to make his case. Not only does this enable him to write on a level playing field on which a person of any faith conviction could meet him, but it compels him to meticulously define his terms, not relying on assumptions a religious audience may have about the nature of pornography. Too often, when reading religious sources on the topic, pornography is deemed an offense against the sixth or ninth

commandments and the argument against its use largely ends there. Fradd, however, builds his argument from the philosophical and scientific “ground floor,” if you will. Grace builds on nature, and Fradd focuses on arguments from nature that eventually will strengthen “arguments from grace.” As the patron of his podcast, St. Thomas Aquinas, would do, Fradd presents his opponent’s arguments with philosophical rigor—as well as he can without portraying those arguments poorly and easily. An honest reader of any conviction must respect his argument and method. And his conclusion. Even the way Fradd organizes the book—moving from myths at the level of culture down through the industry proper, and then to pornography’s effects on human sexuality, relationships, and individual integrity—serves to fortify his powerful and persuasive argument that porn is not a benign product, that it warps and corrupts everything it touches at every level of its influence.

On this point, two things must be emphasized. First, the extensive research that went into writing this book is remarkable. Fradd includes a full thirty-three pages of *works cited*—impressive for a text that is less than two hundred pages long. And practically every page includes footnotes citing biological, sociological, psychological, or medical studies to support his arguments. The second point is the style in which Fradd lays out the arguments themselves. He has a particularly delightful way of cutting right to the heart of the matter when it is easy to get lost in the weeds of argumentation. For example, after presenting the arguments of Kendall and D’Amato, claiming that porn actually reduces rape and sexual violence, and after presenting evidence that porn influences sexual violence outside of current legal categories, Fradd dismantles the whole issue when he asks, “Should we congratulate a man who says, ‘Well, I’ve never raped anybody’? Is this the essence of mature manhood—not raping women?” As he goes on to say, even if a man never commits an act of violence, he is at the very least harming himself as he engages in violent sexual fantasies of women being violated on screen. In another myth, claiming that porn work isn’t sex slavery because it is freely chosen, one line completely cuts to the core of the entire rebuttal: “No matter the level of consent, it is a manly thing to treat a woman who has forgotten her dignity with dignity nonetheless.”

While the strengths of this book could be enumerated at length, brevity suggests one last remark. Fradd wrote *The Porn Myth* to take on the culture and practice of pornography head-on—a massive undertaking that required extensive research and careful argument. His first two appendices are key to this endeavor. They are a gold mine of resources for anyone trying to engage in the battle against porn. In appendix one, he lays out the arguments of his book in condensed, bite-sized bullets which get to the heart of each issue. These are immensely valuable, especially in a bumper sticker, slogan-driven age of 140 character sound bites. This appendix is truly the tool box of the anti-porn evangelist. The second appendix includes almost fifty different resources, print and online, for individuals struggling with pornography, spouses of porn addicts, parents, and those seeking more education. A good book inspires a person to continue learning about the topic treated in the text, and Fradd provides a road map.

The Porn Myth is an excellent resource that provides clarity in an age of confusion. It not only provides smart responses to the positive claims for porn use, it demonstrates that religious people can step out into the secular world, on the world’s own turf, and make a rational and philosophical case. Pornography is a devastating disease of Western culture and by directly confronting the lies that accompany it, *The Porn Myth* is part of the answer to healing that disease.

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Episodes can be found at armchaircatholic.com.

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The Advent of the "New" Body

ELLEN RODERICK

Hervé Juvin, *Coming of the Body* (Verso, 2010).

I have to confess that I am enthralled with the recent rise in popularity of the dystopian genre of films and books. The new miniseries based on Margaret Atwood's classic, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Dave Eggers' techno-utopia, *The Circle*, and Louise Erdrich's new novel, *Future Home of the Living God*, are recent examples of our attempt to grapple with the shifting relationship of ourselves—or, more specifically, our bodies—with reality, a relationship that is now mediated more than ever through technology. The delicate line between fact and fiction, between social, political, and technological trends and their projected fictional outcomes, help me to see with fresh eyes the reality in which we live where little is not mediated by technology. My cautious sensitivity to the development of new forms of technology and social media has waned and various forms of technology now inform most dimensions of my life—from communication with my friends, to my work and how I live and plan my leisure time. I've perhaps grown accustomed to technology's omnipresence because "everyone is doing it," or "living it," as the case may be.

In his *Coming of the Body* (*L'avènement du corps*), Hervé Juvin picks up this same thread that is woven through the dystopian fiction genre—the relationship between technology and the body—with one important difference: his is an account of real events and trends of the 21st century. As the title suggests, Juvin claims that our century has inherited a fundamentally "new body," new in its relationship to time and space and to nature as a whole. Drawing on such diverse fields as demographics, economics, sociology, as well as the fashion, beauty and health industries, Juvin paints a comprehensive picture of the breadth and scope of this "advent" of the new body. It reads as a profound cultural analysis as well as a clarion call: is the advent of the new body and the life that sustains it something we truly desire?

What can be "new" of this body that is as old as creation itself? From the start, Juvin admits that "the body has changed less than the gaze brought to bear on it," for after all, a body is a body is a body. But in an age where "representation" is more important than nature itself (to explain this point, Juvin offers the example of the trend of documenting through social media each moment of our lives) is it not one's gaze that determines the value and meaning of a thing? Today, writes Juvin, "every individual is his own producer/director, all eavesdropping on each other, generalizing telereality, with everyone his own star in his own screen." This desire for perfect representation reveals that we now consider the body to be "resistant to need, suffering and the effects of time." In fact, it is precisely this reversal of man's relationship with nature—what was trustworthy enough to give him birth has now become raw material completely under his own control—that signals the arrival of the new body.

Concretely, Juvin cites developments in the health sciences and sanitation which have allowed us to live longer than our grandparents and their parents before them and a relative sense of political peace as the necessary preconditions of the advent of the body. These, combined with a new economy aimed at

the body and its perfection and technology turned towards the well-being of the body, have helped to generate a new “cult of well-being.”

Juvin’s book reads like a dialogue with a patient—as well as cultured and well-read—friend who feels the urgency and responsibility to help you to see what he sees. Upon reflection, this approach seems justified, as the coming of the new body and the scope of its cultural, political, and social significance are not easily perceived. Since we are living within this new gaze on ourselves and reality, it is not easy to take a step back and perceive its significance. Juvin speaks of the coming of the body as a quiet, almost unnoticed shift in our relationship with ourselves, our bodies, with others and with reality as a whole.

What is at stake for Juvin in the coming of the body? It is nothing less than a “new barbarism” that threatens the fate of France and Europe as a whole. The impact of this new gaze on the body leads us to “mistrust the ability to believe, to think and to construct” for the future. The relationship between human beings is also profoundly challenged: we become “incapable of feeling, and unfit for human relationships,” Juvin argues, “so wide has the disjuncture grown between reason and emotion, logic and effect.” In light of these fundamental effects, Juvin prompts us to ask: who will build the future and pass on to our children our cultural and spiritual inheritance? Where will the children and parents of the future be in an age where childhood has become the object of desire and parenthood a project of the will?

These are grave questions, and Juvin probes them with profound concern. Yet, his book is not heavy with moralism. His Socratic style invites reflection rather than provoking reaction. This is especially remarkable given the intimate themes he addresses: sex, procreation, death, family life, and education. I found this approach very refreshing in an age that seems to default into polarization, barring the possibility of dialogue.

The breadth and depth of Juvin’s argument can be seen in his bold claim half-way through the book that the impact on society of the advent of the body will be equal to the advent of the Incarnation. Why is this? So much has our relationship with reality been transformed that, like the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, it has introduced a new era:

The mystery of the Incarnation is as central to Christian society as the technologized production of bodies will be in the new society; the break with the modes of reproduction as they have always been, among the animal, vegetable and human species, will undoubtedly be as determining for men and women born in the twenty-first century as was the appearing of Christianity, with its vision of a distant world of God, foreign to the human world, and different. The periods before and after the production of bodies will be seen as different eras...We are inventing a new way of making bodies. Incarnation will be under a different sign for future generations; the sign of technology ... With birth removed from nature and become a matter of choice, it is not difficult to predict that death too will be removed from nature and become a choice. This is the novelty that will dominate the historical condition of humanity in decades to come.

While the claim is a bold one, Juvin does make a strong case for a monopolizing experience that leaves nothing unscathed.

For example, Juvin’s ability to discern and articulate the point of unity (in the advent of the body) between a diverse set of cultural shifts is one of the most significant contributions of this book. I read with appreciation his analysis of the relationship between many of the culture shifts I deal with each day in my pastoral and educational work in Canada: legalization of euthanasia, the strong push for

gender ideology, divorce, state-funded *in vitro* fertilization, the legalization of prostitution, and the new panoply of so-called “rights.” Each of them is affected by this new way of perceiving the body. It is refreshing to be challenged not to react to each problem as it emerges in the culture, but to take the time to think more deeply about the undercurrent uniting them all.

While Juvin gives prominent place to the role of desire in this new era of the coming of the body—and especially, the insatiability of the desire animating the whole project—Juvin does not speak at any length of the cultural implications of the constant frustration of man’s truest and most profound desires. For example, he does address euthanasia as a desire to end one’s life when it is no longer perceived as pleasurable, but fails to situate this problem adequately, linking the push for euthanasia to the threat of meaninglessness that prompts other kinds of self-destruction. What about all of the youth who live in constant frustration of a promise of fulfillment—through indetermination and self-making—that can never be fulfilled? The rise of teen suicide and self-destructive behavior on the younger generation merits discussion, too. It would complete an otherwise comprehensive vision.

Does Juvin offer a way forward? It is only in the closing paragraph of the book that Juvin’s lays down his cards, so to speak, and here we see a glimmer of hope. This hope relates back to the Incarnation and what it revealed about the paradox of being finite: it is the locus of our relationship with the Infinite. For Juvin, despite the coming of the body, it is the body that will be our guide out of this “new barbarism.” It is one’s own body—human and so very vulnerable—that is the link to something that is “impermeable to the credit card and resistance to any contract.” We are determined creatures. This very determination in the flesh is what makes us who we are. The body, regardless if it is one that has arrived in the 21st century or lived in the Middle Ages, carries a memory of its finitude. This fact is inescapable. “It roots us in our limits, our last frontier, and even if it forgets, the body alone prevents us from being God to ourselves and to the other.” The question remains if we will ruin ourselves in attempting this grand escape. The drama of our fleshly reality is far more intriguing than any of the dystopian tales that might be spun today.

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Losing Animals, Losing Ourselves

LESLEY RICE

Craig Holdrege, *The Flexible Giant: Seeing the Elephant Whole* (The Nature Institute, 2003).

We are losing animals. I do not mean only numerically through the extinction of species. I also mean we are losing them in our understanding.[1]

If you look up the word “**animation**,” you may find something like the following:

Animation is a dynamic medium in which images or objects are manipulated to appear as moving images. In traditional animation, images are drawn or painted by hand on transparent celluloid sheets to be photographed and exhibited on film. Today most animations are made with computer-generated imagery (CGI).

This common usage points to the artistic simulation of a most fascinating dimension of our experience: the coherent change that is movement. But the word has other meanings, related but more essential. An *animated* face, for example, is expressive, responsive—lively. And of course an *animal* is a living creature. “Animation” primarily refers not to the imitation of motion and life but to life itself: the word derives from *anima*, soul, the principle of life. Naturalist Craig Holdrege does not use the word “soul” in his works of observational biology, but when he warns that we are losing animals, he is concerned precisely about our distraction from what unifies the unique self-expression of each of the earth’s profusion of living things. And this is a double misfortune, for losing animals in our understanding, itself a loss, implies a wound in our understanding as such.

What counts as knowledge of living beings is increasingly the specialized domain of analytical and technologized biosciences, which tend to parse organisms according to structures and functions, defining problems and solving them ever more minutely. For Holdrege, by contrast, an animal is not so much an *object* of study, to be broken down and rationalized, as another *subject*, revealing itself to the attentive observer in manifold dimensions rich with meaning that never quite submits to definition. The 2003 monograph *The Flexible Giant: Seeing the Elephant Whole* is one of his numerous studies dedicated to honing the art of observational biology, with subjects ranging from frogs, sloths, and giraffes to skunk cabbages, chicory flowers, and meadows. Based on Holdrege’s study of skeletal morphology as well as his observations of captive and wild elephants, *The Flexible Giant* is at once an exposition of the living body of a familiar, but perhaps not well-known creature, and a valuable meditation on being alive and recognizing life.

Holdrege points out that when we permit ourselves to be fascinated by the elephant or any living being, it makes an impression on us as a whole, as the whole being that it is. We tend to identify what makes a species particularly itself by way of a list of traits that may seem related only inasmuch as they belong

to the same animal: flexible trunk, large ears, sturdy legs, tusks, trumpeting, and so on. But Holdrege suggests that we must take care not to let this wealth of detail divert us from the unity of the being before us:

The desire to see the unity of the elephant more clearly is not fulfilled by an encyclopedic compendium of facts about the elephant. The elephant is not its anatomy, nor its physiology, nor its ecology, nor its behavior; and it is not the sum of them all. The whole is not gained by piecing together parts. It is, rather, the unity of the organism that expresses itself in each one of these facets of its being.

Focusing on the parts of an animal *can* distract us from the distinctive character of the creature. But it *need* not; and Holdrege shows us how to attend to details while skirting the dangers of fragmentation. His method depends upon strict disciplines, including the practice of integration, situating details within a more comprehensive sense of the creature, and the habit of employing memory and imagination to create concrete, highly articulated mental images from prior observations. These exercises lead over time to the recognition of patterns that contextualize and illuminate observations, as disparate details are seen to be saying one thing.

Thus, remarkably, in the case of the elephant, Holdrege shows how the title characteristic *flexibility* emerges as a governing trait of the whole animal, not just of one of its most salient features, the trunk. Holdrege begins his description of the animal with a close look at this organ, which serves both as a nose and as a kind of hand. Physical flexibility—the trunk is composed solely of muscle, no bones or cartilage—is matched by functional flexibility: through the trunk, the elephant is capable of

picking, grabbing, enwrapping, reaching, lifting, and pulling—all the while gathering food and putting it in the mouth; sucking in and spraying water into the mouth to drink; smelling with probing, searching motions; breathing, including use as a snorkel in water; spraying mud, or sand onto the skin (or onto other elephants in play); caressing, slapping, nudging, lifting, shoving, or trumpeting in social interaction.

The versatility of the trunk complements the elephant's ponderousness, or better, discloses the special character of this creature's immensity. Holdrege's title, *The Flexible Giant*, expresses a certain paradox: this giant is huge but not ungainly, thick-skinned but not insensitive. It is, in fact, a terrifically versatile animal metabolically, able to eat a much more diverse diet than other land animals because of its strength and its reach, a unique combination of the elephant's girth, tusks, height, and the extension, tactile and olfactory sensitivity, and fine motor skills of its trunk. For this reason, elephants can flourish in a broad range of environments and have been known to survive droughts far better than other species.

Holdrege recognizes the trope of flexibility not only in anatomical-spatial features but also in the dimension of time—that is, in the elephant's distinctive ongoing physical growth and patterns of social behavior, which in numerous respects remain in flux throughout life. Unlike most animals, elephants continue to grow throughout their lifespans, although growth after twenty-five years slows markedly. Tusks grow throughout life, necessitating concomitant growth of the skull that must support their mass, as much as two hundred pounds. The elephant's unique teeth—all molars—continue to erupt until the animal is forty or fifty years old, in contrast to other mammals, who generally have a static set of permanent teeth shortly after sexual maturity.

The onset of sexual maturity is very late in elephants: at twelve years in females and several years later in males, perhaps a decade later than is common for large mammals. Elephants have a pronounced

matriarchal social system composed of family groups revolving around gestation, birth, and the raising of young; and the delay in sexual maturation plays into the wide variety of social roles that elephants fulfill over time. Holdrege shows this progression to be especially differentiated in the female: from the baby's first tasks of learning, among other things, to master the use of its trunk, to a weaned four-year-old calf's play with the other calves, to an eight-year-old female's assistance with the care of the young, to the first birth, to mentorship of younger mothers. Males, which upon maturation become much more solitary, require mentorship both within the family group and also by mature bulls until they are sexually mature. Holdrege sees a kind of constitutional flexibility or adaptability in elephant social behavior, particularly in females, who revise their roles continually throughout life and sometimes revert to earlier roles at need. He finds it telling that animal trainers in Asia wait to train work elephants until after puberty: elephants are still teachable long after most animals would be set in their ways. The trunk, in some respects an instrumental cause of the animal's physical flexibility, is in other respects just an expression of what is true of the elephant in its wholeness.

But Holdrege moderates his quest for unity: it would be laughable to take the elephant's flexibility in myriad dimensions as an iron rule constraining every observation! Rather, the recurring theme of flexibility is an insight that finds substantiation from numerous directions, inviting further rumination and searching, not a definition implying closure. "As Goethe put it," Holdrege writes, "the human tendency to take 'pleasure in a thing only insofar as we have an idea of it' can become tyrannical as 'thought forcibly strives to unite all external objects.' Ideas then become 'lethal generalities.'" This is an ongoing peril for the biologist, Holdrege admits: "We are never freed from this problem." The proper disposition of the observer thus involves a vigilance or *ascesis*, a gentle, good-humored detachment from the ideas we spin, lest we impose them upon the subject before us instead of permitting understanding to be born and grow in an ongoing conversation with this thing as it presents itself. Knowledge of the living is itself a kind of life, and it bears an ethical as much as an intellectual character.

The key to Holdrege's distinctive approach to living things is the expressive character of the organism. He takes for granted that a living body is an epiphany, a kind of coherent word. It is an insight voiced more than a century ago by the poet [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#):

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:

Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;

Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,

Crying *Whát I dó is me; for that I came.*

This cry must be received and interpreted with patient care, and Holdrege renders this reverent service admirably. Stephen Talbott, a colleague of Holdrege's at the *Nature Institute* founded by Holdrege in 1998, refers to the work of that Institute as cultivating a way of knowing as a way of healing: healing the rifts modern habits of thought have imposed between organism and environment, subject and object, truth and goodness. This restoration exceeds the boundaries of animal studies, bearing resources for the renewal not only of the sciences but of medicine, bioethics, and philosophical anthropology.[2] What we stand to gain from Holdrege's retrieval of animals is a recovery of our relation not only to elephants, giraffes, and sloths but to ourselves, rational animals whose forms are no less epiphanic.

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[1] Craig Holdrege, “[What Does It Mean to Be a Sloth?](#)”

[2] Both Holdrege and Talbott have made many contributions in these directions. See, for example, Holdrege’s edited collection, *The Dynamic Heart and Circulation* (Fair Oaks, California: AWSNA Publications, 2002) and his *The Genetic Manipulation of Life* (Hudson, New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1996). See also Talbott’s “A More Child-Like Science,” *The New Atlantis* (Winter 2004): 23–31; “Getting Over the Code Delusion,” *The New Atlantis* (Summer 2010): 3–27; “[The Embryo’s Eloquent Form](#)” (2008). Talbott’s brief essay, “[A Way of Knowing as a Way of Healing](#)” (1999), offers a synopsis of the *Nature Institute’s* work.

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From Mummies to Michelangelo: Transformation of the Body in Art

LAUREL DUGAN

Elizabeth and José Granados Lev, *A Body for Glory: Theology of the Body in the Papal Collections: the Ancients, Michelangelo and John Paul II* (Musei Vaticani Publications, 2017).

In *A Body for Glory*, Elizabeth Lev and Fr. José Granados explore how humans have created artwork that reveals their self-understanding throughout history, culminating in Michelangelo's painting of the Sistine Chapel ceiling and *The Last Judgment*. The central question under discussion is, "How has the human body been understood and portrayed throughout history?" Through 86 pages of explanation and photo references, Lev and Granados demonstrate how Michelangelo's depictions of the human form reveal the new and deeper understanding man has of his own humanity because of the Incarnation.

The book opens with the statement by Antonio Paolucci, former Director of the Vatican Museums, "There are more naked men and women in the Museums of the Pope than in any other large museum in the world." It is here, in the home of the Catholic Church, that we are given a visual framework with which to understand ourselves—our bodies, our lives, our meaning. Michelangelo, among other great artists whose work is displayed in the Vatican Museums, created a visual definition of what it means to be human.

Lev and Granados guide the reader on a journey from Egypt, circa 1250 BC; to Rome in the 16th century, where we meet Michelangelo; to our present, with the words of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. It is worth noting here that the restoration of the Sistine Chapel took place during Pope John Paul II's pontificate, including the removal of fig leaves added to some of the bodies for "modesty" in the centuries following the original work's completion. The Polish pontiff is also famous for his groundbreaking *Theology of the Body*, which articulates a theological anthropology of the body that draws on Scripture and his own studies in Personalism. John Paul II's successor, Pope Benedict XVI understood that in great works of art, we meet God. He articulated a theory of Beauty as a way to God that has been all-too-neglected in modern life. With examples from the papal collections, Lev and Granados demonstrate how Michelangelo synthesized the work that came before him, built on it, and transformed it with a Catholic understanding of the human person—which, most recently, has been so clearly encapsulated in the writings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

We are all familiar with the image of an Egyptian mummy. Egyptians cared lovingly for the bodies of their dead. However, the body only had beauty and value for them as a house for the spirit. They could not reconcile the paradox that Lev and Granados describe:

The human body presents an enigma. It shows us our frailty, but through the meeting with love also speaks to us about something that is stronger than death. In Egyptian art, the tenderly-preserved body illustrates this question, but in the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo will propose an answer.

The Ancient Greeks discovered a *logos* in the human body. They expressed this through depictions of the body in movement, slavery to instinct, and idealized beauty. They understood the body to be the highest object of contemplation on earth. Art historian Kenneth Clark notes that the Greeks were so successful in their art because they saw the body as a whole. “Nothing that related to the whole man could be isolated or evaded. This view of the human person, as an integrated whole, allowed them to make art that avoided both sensualism and aestheticism.

In Greek sculpture, for instance, we find illustrations of this view of body and spirit as whole. The book gives several good examples, but it is on the Aphrodite of Knidos that I want to focus. The sculpture shows a moment frozen in time: Aphrodite realizes she may be watched at her bath, and she grabs her robe to cover herself—but the motion is incomplete. This depiction shows us the voluptuousness possible in stone. Aphrodite represents a carnal love that can be physically satisfied. However, if this desire for physical union is understood as an impulse toward the eternal, Aphrodite comes to personify the human desire for the divine, which perfects the human person. “In this work, we see a balancing of desire, a way of educating it, in such a way that one doesn’t only focus on sensual satisfaction but integrates it into the love for eternal beauty.”

These concepts crystallize in Michelangelo’s figures of Adam and Eve on the Sistine Chapel ceiling: in perfect complementarity, God’s love protects them from shame in their nakedness. In their bodies they saw the manifestation of the whole person, and “in their desire they experienced a call to communion through the gift of themselves to each other.”

Hellenist art carried the vestiges of Greek art. Its sculptures portray sinuous bodies engaged in their environments. Michelangelo found particular inspiration in *Laocoön and His Sons* and the Belvedere Torso. The sculptural group of *Laocoön and His Sons* is a powerful example of a strong, male body interacting with his environment. A first-century copy of a second-century BC sculpture—known to Renaissance artists by the writings of Pliny before it was unearthed in Rome in 1506 in Michelangelo’s presence—is largely responsible for Michelangelo’s interpretation of the human body: powerfully muscular, but not violent; gestural, and involved in the space it inhabits. Michelangelo based many figures in the Sistine Chapel on the body of Laocoön. He took Classical sculpture and re-presented it in paint in the Sistine Chapel, giving Classicism the fullness of human expression, in the physical place where it “acquires its full and most authentic light” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Speech to the Directors and Employees of the Vatican Museums* on the 23rd of November 2006). In the Belvedere Torso, Michelangelo found inspiration for bodies with great energy. According to Lev and Granados, only Michelangelo was capable of interpreting it in its full richness. Michelangelo used it as inspiration for the body of Jesus in *The Last Judgment*.

Lev and Granados compare the athletes represented in the mosaics at the Baths of Caracalla to the powerful bodies of the saints in Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*. While the athletes are strong, they are isolated; they do not use their bodies to open themselves to Love. This is contrasted with the saints, who have striven and suffered bodily for the “incorruptible crown” St. Paul speaks of in Corinthians.

Roman sculpture turns a sharp conceptual corner in the statue of Roman Emperor Claudius, from around 50 AD. We see a marked departure from the Greeks' understanding of the body. Emperor Claudius was "deified," and in being so, the body became an end in itself. The statue shows Claudius with the body of a perfect athlete (far from the truth). This idolization of the body is something that is familiar to us even today.

At the same time that Roman emperors were deifying their bodies, the news of the Incarnation spread. When the Word became Flesh, the invisible became visible for the first time, and the corporeal world took on new significance—as a reflection of Divine beauty. Further, the fact that God gave up his body in death *and then took it back* was entirely novel. This meant that the body was part of the divine plan for man's ultimate destiny. Lev and Granados write:

The goal of the resurrection of the flesh makes art not a passing or fleeting work but one capable of grasping eternity. We can therefore see in the body not only a sheath for the soul, which in the end must be abandoned, but the home of eternity, the only space where it is possible to receive it.

Michelangelo wrote his Sonnet 56 while painting the Sistine ceiling:

Nor hath God deigned to show himself elsewhere

More clearly than in human forms sublime

Which, since they image Him, alone I love.

(Sonnet 56, 12–14)

Along with what we know of Michelangelo's strong Catholic faith, this sonnet gives us an idea of the starting point for his depictions. He took the great representations of the body that came before him and transformed them into energetic forms that commune with the people and world around them. He created a Jesus in *The Last Judgment* with "a body that was called upon to act, to work and transform the world, to communicate its energy to others in a creative way." He created figures that depict the Christian perspective that the body "is the place where communion takes place, the space open to intimacy and participation."

Lev and Granados achieve their goal of showing the culmination and Catholic transformation of art history in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel paintings. One quibble with the book is their superlatives regarding Michelangelo's work. Michelangelo is not the *only* artist to portray the human body in its fullness (think Caravaggio and Rodin), but he certainly did it superbly.

A Body for Glory is a quick read and approximately half of it consists of reproductions of the art being discussed. These are high quality and plentiful. For example, if you haven't visited the Belvedere Torso lately, the book gives you a good photo reference. Lev and Granados also suggest that the book could be used as a guide when one visits the Vatican Museums.

A Body for Glory is a decadent treat for anyone interested in art. Its readability does not undercut its weightiness in depth or articulation, however. Lev and Granados convey profound truth and beauty in

this enjoyable and brief work.

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The Eloquent Body

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY

This year we turn to the Body. There is no question that it is the human body—the “thing” that accompanies us wherever we go—that is behind most of the questions in our collective mind. The body is *just there*. And now, *for that very reason*, we are putting it to the test as we reject, starve, exploit, rebuild—chemically, surgically, digitally, cybernetically—and finally incinerate it. Though we have been at this for centuries, what has become clearer in recent years is that the dominion of nature at large has at last become the dominion of *our* nature, especially there where it puts us in relations we have not chosen. We are born of mother and father. As male or female we face the opposite sex (regardless of our “orientations”). And we are being prepared for motherhood and fatherhood (whether that happens or not). This is precisely why we have turned on the body.

Chesterton said that our time would be marked by the denial of everything, that two and two make four and that leaves are green in summer.[1] The same observation has been made by many others, such as Hannah Arendt, who defined the ideology of our day as “the knowledgeable dismissal of the visible.”[2] Both thought that the counter to ideology would be the “defense of this huge impossible universe which stares us in the face” (Chesterton). But what is becoming increasingly clear, is that the “universe” in question is the small one that stares us in the face every morning when get up to brush our teeth. If only we could see what is right in front of our eyes.

The first issue, as with all first issues, takes up the question at its most basic level. What is the human body? What does it say? And what is at stake in all the manner of transformations to which it is being subjected? To begin to answer this question, we cannot help but call upon the master himself, [John Paul II](#), some of whose key texts on the subject grace our ReSource section.

John Paul II knew, of course, that it is not only that we do not happen to hear the language of the body, but that we do not *want* to hear it. We have silenced the body, not to mention the whole realm of the material universe. And we have done so intentionally, chiefly so that we can try to exempt ourselves from its limitations, (and, failing, obliterate its evidence as [Patricia Snow](#) shows in her feature on the new attitudes about burial and cremation in the post-Christian West).

This is what Hervé Juvin means by the “new body” in his *Coming of the Body*, [reviewed here](#). It is not that the body has changed that much. The body is the body, after all. But our “gaze on the body” has. And in an age where representation means more than nature itself, that is no small thing.

Keeping in mind the fact that having a body is not unique to human beings—that every silencing of the human body is tied to the general silencing of all living bodies—we review *The Flexible Giant: Seeing the Elephant Whole* by the observational biologist Craig Holdrege, who tries to recover the epiphanic, word-like, character of the living body, whether it be that of an elephant or a sloth (about which he has also written a monograph), or, well. . . of a human. Holdrege is an example of someone who is helping us to open our eyes and ears to that “impossible universe.”

We deal here with also with the tragic and pervasive phenomenon of the “pornification” of the body, especially in its newer digital form. The most recent “bible” on this unfortunate topic—[Matt Fradd’s](#)

Porn Myth—is reviewed in this issue. **Our feature** on the transformation of porn under the power of the internet, written by someone whose work is to protect children from it, is sobering. **Another feature** attempts a “metaphysics” of pornography, suggesting that it is the expression of our long-standing choice for the unreal—the virtual—which we take as more “real” than reality itself.

In a way, this is what John Paul II meant when he said that the problem with pornography is not that it shows *too much* of the body but that it shows *too little*. It is this diagnosis that has turned many to the importance of art, especially its rendering of the human body. In his early days at the New York Academy of Art, sculptor and painter Dony Mac Manus witnessed the power of John Paul II’s teaching on the body among his fellow students, who packed his discussion room week after week to learn “the one thing they didn’t know about the body”: its *meaning*. This is why he stresses the importance of the nude. It is an essential ingredient in the “detoxing” of society from its fixation with the non-real, **Mac Manus told us in our interview with him**. Moreover, says Mac Manus, the nude is capable of doing so because the reality it can re-propose to the world has the capacity to *pierce the heart*, being in the form of beauty. He is thinking of the “method” of Christianity itself, since there the Truth (*Logos*) did not remain an object of contemplation and longing, but *manifested* itself by coming in the flesh then in *going to the end*, in search of the heart of man.

All of this means, of course, that what counts for what is “beautiful” changes. See our review of *A Body for Glory* by *Elizabeth Lev and Fr. José Granados* which delves into the distinct Christian contribution to the artistic depiction of the body as a result of the fact that God Himself made himself vulnerable, *giving* Himself to man in the flesh. **Our feature on the Pre-Raphaelites** explores the resilience of that contribution in the cultural ferment of a Victorian age not known for its consistent attitude to the human body, but nonetheless marked by a profound nostalgia for the sacred.

“The capacity of art to pierce the heart—especially by showing the vulnerability of God—is really central to my vision and to the healing of contemporary culture,” says Mac Manus. It is central to ours as well. Happy reading.

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[1] G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (New York: John Lane Company, 1905), 305.

[2] Alain Finkielkraut, *In the Name of Humanity: Reflections on the Twentieth Century*, trans. J. Friedlander (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 60.

Keep reading! Click [here](#) to read our next article, *John Paul II on the Body in Art and Pornography*.

Burning the Body

PATRICIA SNOW

I.

Every year a growing number of American Catholics choose cremation either for themselves after they die, or for a deceased relative. The numbers vary by diocese, but the overall trend is clear. Some of these Catholics choose cremation for financial reasons. Some cite “ecology,” persuaded that the world is better off without human remains. Many, innocent of conscious heresy but influenced by Eastern religion, insist that the body is disposable, a shell, nothing at all. My physical therapist, after burying her father, decided that after her own death she did not want her children burdened with the responsibility of tending her grave. “Why not?” I asked, thinking of the Church’s immemorial emphasis on corporal works of mercy. But whatever rebuttals one offers to whatever reasons these proponents of cremation give, they have a trump card that they play in the end: “Well, the Church approves of cremation.”

Does the Catholic Church “approve” of cremation? The short answer to the question is, no. For more than half a century the Church has *permitted* cremation, but her permission has stopped well short of what is meant by the word approval. Why then, where cremation is concerned, do so many Catholics today take for granted the Church’s approbation?

The confusion can be traced back to *Piam et Constantem*,^[1] the 1963 instruction from the Holy Office that first qualified the Church’s long-standing canonical ban on cremation. This watershed document was strangely ambiguous in its teaching and recommendations. On the one hand, it strongly affirmed the Church’s reverent and unbroken (*piam et constantem*) tradition of burying the faithful dead and insisted that “all necessary measures” be taken to preserve the practice. But, on the other hand, it dispensed what amounted to a universal permission slip to cremate, in part to avoid the bureaucratic nightmare of having to adjudicate individual cases. When speaking generally about cremation, *Piam et Constantem* used language that was guarded and censorious: “The devout attitude of the faithful ... must be kept from being harmed and the Church’s adverse attitude toward cremation must be clearly evident.” But when delineating grounds for exemptions from the norm of burial, the language of the instruction was so vague it might have been used to justify anything. *Piam et Constantem* permitted cremation for reasons of “health” and “economics,” and in situations involving “difficulties arising from contemporary circumstances” or from “other pressures.” Anyone familiar with the way the phrase “the health of the mother” functions in the abortion debate, understands that vague generalizations end in unrestricted access.

Piam et Constantem was also the product of a particular time and place. In its very first paragraph it invoked the specter of Masonic hostility, an enmity that in the recent past had wielded cremation as a weapon in a widespread campaign to undermine belief in the resurrection. Still clearly troubled by this enmity, but also relieved that it seemed to have abated, *Piam et Constantem* ruminated uncertainly about cremation itself; noted that it wasn’t intrinsically evil and didn’t prevent God from restoring the body; observed that there had been a “change for the better” since a time when secret societies waged open war on the Church; and ended by deciding that the Church’s traditional sanctions against people who cremate “no longer have universal, binding force, but only in those cases in which it is clear that

the reason for choosing cremation was either a denial of Christian dogmas, the animosity of a secret society, or hatred of the Catholic religion and the Church.” One particular danger was identified by *Piam et Constantem*, in other words. One enemy—the devil the Church knew—was warned off. Confident in its discernment, the instruction ended by placing no burden whatsoever on the individual Catholic who wished to cremate. His circumstances did not need to be exceptional; they could be perfectly ordinary. So long as he was not an inflammatory atheist, a militant Mason, or a dissenter from Church teaching—and the working assumption was that he was none of these—he could cremate.

In 1983, the revised Code of Canon Law summarized *Piam et Constantem*’s dissonant conclusions in bold type:

The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burial be retained; it does not however forbid cremation, unless it is chosen for reasons which are contrary to Church teaching.[2]

Eleven years later, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* dropped the first half of this uncomfortable formula. Paragraph 2301 of the Catechism says simply, “The Church permits cremation, provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body,” a shift in emphasis that resulted in a gusher of unexceptional, uncontested cremations.

For a time, in the aftermath of *Piam et Constantem*, the Church held the line against allowing cremated remains at a funeral Mass. The body that John Paul II called the primordial sacrament was revered at every funeral. But soon enough, in 1997, the American Church requested and received from Rome an indult similar to the indult that allows American Catholics to receive communion in the hand, permitting the full celebration of the Funeral Mass in the presence of what are called cremains.

From that point, it was a small step to Catholics concluding that scattering their ashes was also acceptable. Individual bishops periodically denied this, but no one was listening. One thing led to another, and in the absence of clear teaching, any prohibition began to seem arbitrary. When John Kennedy Jr. died in 1999 and his ashes were scattered by his family over the waters off Martha’s Vineyard (the same waters out of which his body had been recovered with great difficulty), a Catholic chaplain presided and the Church said nothing. Should we be surprised that a growing number of Catholics began deciding to dispense with a funeral altogether?

Finally, in 2016, on the same weekend that a gentleman in New York City emptied a box of a friend’s ashes in the orchestra pit of the Metropolitan Opera, the Church issued *Ad resurgendum cum Christo*,[3] a new document that explicitly forbade scattering cremains, making them into jewelry, dividing them among family members, and sequestering them in private homes. Closing an important loophole, the instruction asserted that a family’s choice for cremation “must never violate the explicitly-stated or the reasonably inferable wishes of the deceased faithful,” and, stressing the importance of public cemeteries, reminded the faithful of their communal responsibility to remember and pray for the dead. Most fundamentally, *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* re-presented the Church’s faith in the resurrection of the body, and the theological and pastoral reasons she “insistently recommends” the practice of burial over the practice of cremation.

But while the new instruction made clear the connection between bodily burial and faith in the resurrection—“burial is above all the most fitting way to express faith and hope in the resurrection of the body”—it failed to clarify a corresponding connection between the practice of cremation and a loss of faith in the resurrection. The fact that, as cremation has increased, “new ideas contrary to the Church’s faith have also become widespread,” is treated by the instruction as if it might simply be a coincidence rather than a case of cause and effect.

Meanwhile, as every parent knows, catechesis goes forward as effectively by example as by instruction, and the widespread example of cremation has been burning in its lessons for years. Cremation may not be an intrinsically evil act, but where the life of the faithful is concerned, it has proved a dangerously misleading one. Barely a quarter of Americans now believe that they will have a body in heaven. Nearly a quarter of self-identified Christians subscribe to the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation.

In hindsight, knowing what we now know, we can propose that the Holy Office of the Catholic Church at the time of *Piam et Constantem* failed to anticipate the challenges the Church would face in the future. It failed to imagine, for example, the inroads that Eastern spirituality would make in the pews, or the damage that might be done to the faith by the financially prudent decisions of well-meaning Catholics. Specifically, when the Holy Office decided that cremation was permissible so long as it was not chosen for reasons contrary to Church teaching, it failed to foresee that *cremation itself would become a teaching* more powerful than any official document or isolated objection. If Christ's Resurrection is the great countersign to death, cremation is a contemporary countersign to resurrection. Under the influence of this sign, the catechetical power of which the Church continues to underestimate, many Catholics today do in fact hold positions that are contrary to Church teaching on the resurrection of the body, but without realizing it.

II.
When Christians profess that Jesus Christ rose from the dead in his human body, they show themselves the true heirs of the bodily religion of Judaism. Belief in Christ's physical Resurrection is the defining dogma of Christianity, its elementary teaching and essential kerygma, the kernel from which everything else flows. The first Christians, in Madeleine Delbrêl's words, went out into the world of their time:

. . . not to proclaim in the first place and loudest the universal love that Jesus taught them, the justice for the little ones [and] for the weak and the oppressed . . . but to proclaim first and loudest that Jesus Christ, the man who was our friend . . . who was spat upon, mocked, struck, and scourged, who was tortured amidst laughter [and] hung upon a cross, who was bled dry, who let out his last breath with a moan, who froze upon the cross [and] who no one doubted was dead . . . *this Jesus Christ is risen.*[4]

Mystically, the Catholic Church was born from the pierced side of the crucified Christ. Historically, it was nourished by the cross-fertilization of Jewish and Greek thought, the providential encounter between Judaism's emphasis on man's bodily existence and Greek reflections on the immortality of the soul. But in the synthesis that was effected when the whole Christ rose from the dead, it was the supernatural affirmation of the body that was definitively new, and that separated the Judeo-Christian tradition once and for all from the purely spiritual religions of the East. In the aftermath of Christ's Resurrection, the body, so to speak, came into its own. In Romano Guardini's words, "[t]he Resurrection and Transfiguration are necessary to the full understanding of what the human body really is." [5]

To believe in the immortality of the immaterial soul is not so very difficult for man in any age. But to believe that the body, evidently subject to decay, is also destined for immortality, is harder. Yet this is the foundational insight of Christianity: that there is a mysterious but real continuity between the body that dies and the body that is raised, even as the tomb of Jesus was empty and his wounded, recognizable body at large. Taught by Christ's Transfiguration, Resurrection, and bodily Ascension, Christianity insisted from the beginning that man, too, is a unity, a body and a soul that together constitute him as a person and make him eternally who he is. Not only man's spirit but his flesh is destined for eternal communion with God. And as this revolutionary message was spread abroad and believed, what followed was nothing less than Western civilization as we understand it, with its

solicitude for the whole human being, his inviolable integrity, and his human rights.

From the primary gospel of the Resurrection, in other words, the secondary gospel flowed: morality of every kind that touches on the human person. Everything that Jesus taught that Western modernity approves—consideration for the neighbor and the child, the marginal and the oppressed—and everything he taught that modernity resists—the importance of sexual purity, for example, as something inseparable from spiritual health—follows, eventually if not immediately, from the revelation of the Resurrection.

If the whole man is immortal, a comprehensive morality follows. If religion is simply spiritual—if the body is a temporary expedient and only the soul perdures—ultimately, everything may be permitted. In Martha Beck's popular memoir, *Expecting Adam*, in which Beck describes her conversion to a metaphysical view of reality, she offers this critique of people who call themselves pro-life:

I always found the ideas of this far-right group damned peculiar. They were invariably religious folks, with a devout belief in the life of the Spirit. Nothing wrong with that. I myself had suspended my disbelief in a spiritual realm and was stumbling daily over evidence that my world was full of things rationalist science could not explain. But this made me feel better, not worse, about the fate of those who die young . . . Why should people who believe that life exists outside of mortal bounds be the very same people who are so obsessed with a fetus's "right to life" on this messy little planet . . . ?[6]

The answer is that Christians do not believe only in the life of the spirit. Christianity has never been a "spiritual" religion—a category Saint Paul dismisses as philosophy or worldly religion. The heart of Christianity is the God-Man, Jesus Christ, and the experience Christianity holds out and the denouement toward which it tends is a marriage of flesh and spirit, heaven and earth, God and the human race.

For centuries, this unified Christian vision was most fully articulated in the Catholic Church. What God had put together, the Catholic Church did not separate. From top to bottom—in ecclesial practice as much as in doctrine—Catholicism was a religion of incarnation, holding together in her sacramental economy the worlds of matter and spirit, and underscoring, in her uninterrupted conversation with the dead, the unity of all creation. When Franz Rosenzweig, the Jewish theologian, argued that without the historical persistence of Judaism, Christianity would drift into Gnosticism ("Whether Christ is more than an idea—no Christian can know it"[7]), he undersold the physical vitality of the Church that followed firmly in the bodily footprint of Judaism. Indeed, for a Protestant coming into the Church as a convert, there was nothing so immediately challenging as the confident physicality of the Church's life, her comfort with the body, and her domestication of death.

In traditional Catholic cultures, the dead body was everywhere. There was Jesus' body, crucified on the cross. There were the bodies of the saints, literally entombed in the local churches. And there were the bodies of ordinary Catholics, laid out in open caskets at wakes and funerals. At every Catholic funeral, there was a corpse in front of the altar, a corpse that was incensed and commended to God, accompanied to the cemetery and buried in consecrated ground, in real estate that had been set aside, in perpetuity, for God's purposes alone. In this milieu, no Catholic would have dreamed of disposing of the body according to his own ideas. Far less would he have prematurely destroyed it, or cast it away. The body was God's, and was given back to God, to do with what he promised. How he would do what he promised—how the seed would bear fruit and the perishable be raised imperishable—was a mystery also left in God's hands. Like the farmer in Mark's parable who sows a seed without understanding how it will grow (4:26–27), the Church buried the body and waited on God. Mindful of what Sofia Cavalletti called the fundamental law of life, revealed in nature—the truth that in every

death there is the seed of a resurrection[8]—Catholics stood before the mystery of death in an attitude of docility and obedience, patience and faithful hope.

As it happened, some of the dead that the Church laid to rest in this patient confidence did not decay. Fragrant and inexplicably intact, the incorrupt body of the saint vindicated and perpetuated the Church's original attitude to the body. Moreover, the incorrupt body testified to the core Christian conviction that for the believer, in a mysterious but real sense, eternity has already begun. Even here, even now, the Kingdom is already in force, and not even death can entirely undo the effects of the underlying synthesis of body and soul, not even when that synthesis is temporarily suspended. Far from being something fearsome and abhorred, the dead body in the life of the Church became a source of comfort and blessing; a compelling object of pilgrimage; an occasion of healings and miracles. Even as Christ himself took death up into his divine life and broke its power, so the Church, by absorbing death into her ongoing life, removed its sting.

In this way, Catholicism achieved a true synthesis, as opposed to the kind of internally incoherent syncretism that follows when Christianity and Eastern religion merge. This is true inclusiveness: the corpse at the party, the sharing of the earth with the dead. In this way dualism was overcome, along with the convert's initial uneasiness, and mankind's most debilitating, deeply rooted fear. If the author of the Letter to the Hebrews is correct that it is not death itself so much as the fear of death that is the key to man's bondage (2:15), then the Church's tranquil equanimity in the presence of the dead body was a proof of her claims, and evidence of her divine issue. By throwing nothing away, the Church showed herself to be the Bride of the one who vowed he would lose *nothing* of all that the Father had given him, but raise it up on the last day.

Now this synthesis is in danger of breaking up, and Catholicism's achievement is under siege, as the spirit of the antichrist—the spirit that denies that God has come in the flesh—gains ground. If God has not come in the flesh, then the flesh can be thrown away. If the flesh can be thrown away, then God has not come in the flesh. The attack can come from either direction, but the goal is the same: uncreation. If the crown of the Creator's work is the breathing of his own spirit into dust, then the goal of God's enemies will always be the pulling apart of these two. This is the very definition of death, a work of unfastening and separating that only the Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and physical Ascension of Jesus Christ finally overcome.

Hostility to Christian claims is not new. What is new is the growing rejection of the dead body by members of the Catholic Church, and an impulse to destroy the dead body at warp speed. Multiculturalism alone cannot account for this shift. Exposure to Eastern traditions may be a *precondition* for what has happened, but it is not an adequate explanation. Where faith and formation are sound, even a minority religion should be able to hold its own in the current cultural situation, even as Judaism and early Christianity established their bodily traditions in a pagan milieu. Nor can financial considerations, by themselves, account for the change. There have always been individuals who object to the cost of a coffin or a funeral, beginning with Judas, who begrudged Jesus the price of the vial of nard. But the idea that the dead body and money need have nothing to do with each other is a *symptom* of a gnostic outlook, rather than an explanation of gnosticism's appeal. Certainly the Church should do everything in its power to make traditional burial affordable, by waking bodies in churches, for example, and building nonprofit, cooperative mortuaries. But meanwhile people pay for what they value—witness the soaring cost of an American wedding—and the dead body has been drastically discounted in the West. Cremation is not only acceptable but attractive to many of our contemporaries. Increasing numbers of Catholics not only cremate, they cannot wait to cremate, not even until after the funeral.

Ultimately, cremation has to be understood as expressive of modernity itself. In the past, development and decay were organic, natural processes, and ordinary time was the medium of both. Obedience was not simply an evangelical counsel with a specific meaning for professed religious; it was a general disposition held in esteem by the faithful laity, who submitted themselves, not to a religious superior, but to God's Providence unfolding in the events of their lives. If the devil is said to be in a hurry, the Church has traditionally taken the long view, showing herself patient not only with death but with life itself—with its difficulties and disappointments, its endless vicissitudes and general messiness—the sum total of which the Church has regarded as indispensable to man's spiritual growth, as the path, scenery, and script of his sanctification.

But as man has grown steadily more adept at altering his circumstances, Catholicism's patient, cruciform attitude to life has fallen out of favor. The more successful man's initiatives have been, the less patient he has become, not only with ordinary challenges like preparing a meal or getting from place to place, but with the slow, painful, unpredictable rhythms of birth and death. Increasingly, man has shown himself unable to wait: for labor to begin, or the body to die. The temptation is then to bypass nature altogether, with pitocin, elective caesareans, euthanasia. What begins as a materialist enterprise moves in an increasingly disembodied direction. The more our technology advances, the more it tends toward abstraction, stripping away not only nature, in whose perennial cycles the resurrection is inscribed, but man's embodied, natural life. In the world that ever-advancing technology ushers in, man is no longer a body and a soul, grounded in a physical creation, but a divided, projected, and manipulated image in cyberspace, which is to say, in no space. Seduced by illusions of control, man begins to prefer "virtual" reality to reality itself, an orchestrated image to dense, intractable human beings. The indignities of life can be glossed over on the internet, its messiness hidden away, at least until death in a single stroke exposes the whole enterprise as an illusion.

The terrifying, implacable truth of man's condition—that his only hope is in God—is revealed in death. For people accustomed to editing their appearances and managing their public relations, the revelation is unbearable, and the idea of their stricken, mortified body on public view at a wake or funeral is insupportable. Cremation, in this view, asserts a kind of negative control precisely where control has been lost. If death reveals man's defeat, cremation destroys the evidence. It eliminates the alarming dead weight of the body; it bypasses the tedious, unsettling process of decay. What is left is a small, portable box or jar: a symbol, or Urbody, rather than the body itself.

Thus does cremation proceed not only from the East but from the West: from England, for example, where in 1857 two brothers named Siemens invented a furnace that maximized the use of heat in industry.[9] The East with its spiritual bias and the West with its material bias end in the same place. Cremation is not only imported but homegrown, an end-product of Western industrialism and materialism.

III.

And after the body has been cremated and the ashes dispersed, what then? If you ask this of ordinary Catholics who favor cremation, their belated, faintly ironic response is, "Well, God can put the body back together!" For the person of faith, God's omnipotence is not in dispute. What is in doubt is man's response, whether he chooses to align himself with God or test God's power. In the Gospel of Luke, when Satan tempts Jesus a third time, he carries him to the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem and says, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge over you,' and 'on their hands they will bear you up.'" To which Jesus responds, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (4:9–11).

Tempting, or testing, God is the sin of the Israelites in the desert, where, in their furious terror that they have been led into the desert to die, they demand proofs of God, “though they had seen [His] works” (Ps 95:9). In the deserts of modern life, it is man’s indifference that tests God. Whereas Israel, in a frenzy to preserve its physical life, engaged in open battle with God, the temperature of modern man’s relationship to God is decidedly cooler. He cremates with a shrug, offering a rationalization only when pressed. He is not so much challenging God as shrugging off what is at stake, not so much defiant as passive-aggressive. The final, iconic atrocity of the Holocaust, in which the people chosen by God to give bodily life to his Son were not only murdered but reduced *en masse* to ash, this final repudiation of the body is now commonplace in the West. Conditioned by his culture, man takes the path of least resistance. Almost without thinking, he aligns himself with destruction, because the alternative is too much trouble. Too much trouble! To bear witness to the Resurrection by waking, carrying, and burying the body, and afterwards, tending its grave.

In the hierarchy of sin, sloth is an antecedent of despair, but sloth understood in a particular sense, as man’s aversion or antipathy to the responsibilities that accompany his high destiny. Whereas magnanimity, or greatness of soul, is the virtue that enables man to respond to God’s call, sloth, or *acedia*, is the sin that prevents him. In his spiritual inertia, man does not *want* to be chosen. He would prefer that God leave him in peace.

As time goes on, man’s sense of himself and his destiny falls further. As far back as 1986, in a series of talks that were collected in a book originally titled *To Look on Christ*, Pope Benedict XVI observed:

Today there is a remarkable hatred among people for their own real greatness. Man sees himself as the enemy of life, of the balance of creation, as the great disturber of the peace of nature . . . as the creature that went wrong. His salvation and the salvation of the world would on this view consist of his disappearing.[10]

When man today cites “ecology” as his reason for choosing cremation, what sounds at first almost absurd in fact cuts to the heart of his present situation. After decades of relentless propaganda, man now agrees with his accuser that he is the scourge of creation, rather than its crown, and it would be better if he ceased to exist. Not even cremation, in his view, is environmentally acceptable. Accordingly, to broaden cremation’s appeal to the environmentally concerned, a company called Matthews International is now marketing a “gentler,” “biocremation” process that dissolves the dead body with chemicals.[11]

In the early days of creation, when God called fallen man to Himself, man, in his chagrin, tried to blend back into nature, by hiding under the skins of animals and the shade of trees. Now, in these last days, he aims to disappear altogether. His goal is the perfect crime: to destroy without a trace the body that is the seed of his resurrected body. What began in the Garden as a desire to be quit of God, ends in self-hatred and self-negation. What God created, man scatters, *like chaff that the wind blows away*.

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[1] AAS 56 (1964), 822–23.

[2] *Code of Canon Law*, no. 1176.

[3] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Ad resurgendum cum Christo*, August 15, 2016.

[4] Madeleine Delbrêl, *We, the Ordinary People of the Streets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000),

186–87. Emphasis original.

[5] Romano Guardini, *The Lord* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954), 411.

[6] Martha Beck, *Expecting Adam: A True Story of Birth, Rebirth, and Everyday Magic* (New York: Random House, 2011), 250.

[7] Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 415.

[8] Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, trans. Patricia M. and Julie M. Coulter (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992), 176.

[9] Simone Ameskamp recounts the role played by the Siemens brothers in the development of modern cremation in “Fanning the Flames: Cremation in Late Imperial and Weimar Germany,” in *Between Mass Death and Individual Loss: The Place of the Dead in Twentieth-Century Germany*, eds. Alon Confino, Paul Betts, and Dirk Schumann (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008).

[10] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Yes of Jesus Christ: Spiritual Exercises in Faith, Hope, and Love* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991), 74.

[11] Kevin Sack, “In Tough Times, a Boom in Cremations as a Way to Save Money,” *New York Times*, 8 Dec 2011.

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Pornography's Technological Handmaiden

KARL MACMILLAN

Pornography, it seems, is now socially acceptable. It's no longer generally taboo or frowned upon. **One survey** shows that 79% of men aged 18–30 watch porn at least once a month and the same holds for 76% of women in the same age group. Porn is openly discussed in a range of media and casually mentioned in workplace conversations. Needless to say, this is a huge shift in our cultural attitudes towards pornography.

While there are many reasons for this cultural shift, it is worth noting that it has, in large part, been enabled and driven by technology. VCRs and cable TV, in their way, made access to pornography easier and more private, but it was the Internet and mobile devices that finally pushed pornography to its current level of acceptance. Just to give a sense of the size of this phenomenon, one popular pornographic video website had 28.5 billion visitors in 2017. That's **an average of 81 million visitors per day**, with the majority of those visitors accessing the site on mobile devices. Over the course of that year, they streamed “enough data to fill the storage of all of the world's iPhones currently in use.”

It's hard to underestimate the impact this is having and will have on society. Many children first learn about sex from watching pornography, unconsciously allowing it to shape not just how they view sexual acts but confusing their understanding of the role of love and true intimacy in sex. Saint John Paul II clearly saw and spoke out about this:

There is no dignity when the human dimension is eliminated from the person. In short, the problem with pornography is not that it shows too much of the person, but that it shows far too little.[1]

What's more, the risks posed by Internet pornography go beyond the traditional risks of pornography. It's easy to imagine that Internet pornography is just the world's largest stack of dirty magazines and videos accessible to everyone. But pornography is changing to leverage the possibilities offered by the Internet. It's becoming more diverse, personalized, and more accurate in its simulation of intimacy. It's mixing with social media to give viewers the sense that they know and are connected to the performers, allowing pornography to more easily substitute for true relationships. Live streaming blurs the line between pornography and prostitution while letting both performers and viewers never leave their homes. User forums allow individuals to post pornographic images of themselves or their partners for the world to see. The result is something that impacts those who watch it frequently more deeply, often causing addiction and impacting their ability to have real relationships.

Internet Pornography Addiction

Before delving into its many forms, it's worth discussing whether Internet pornography really is addictive. Historically, the term “addiction” has been reserved to describe the abuse of alcohol, drugs, and other substances. While it is now common to jokingly describe eating, watching TV and the like as addictive, these casual uses of the term make it harder to consider seriously that non-substance abuse uses of the term refer to “real” addiction. Modern research, however, suggests that addictive behaviors—such as watching Internet pornography—can exhibit the same symptoms and even exercise the same neurological pathways as addiction to substances. These are not just bad habits that require ordinary willpower to break; they are powerful forces that many people struggle to control.

A 2015 literature review notes that “many [researchers] recognize that several behaviors potentially affecting the reward circuitry in human brains lead to a loss of control and other symptoms of addiction in at least some individuals.” Further, the literature review “leads to the conclusion that Internet pornography addiction fits into the addiction framework and shares similar basic mechanisms with substance addiction.” These basic mechanisms include structural changes to the brain that result in the numbing of response to normal pleasures, a heightened reaction to the addictive activity, and the erosion of willpower. These changes are self-reinforcing and make it difficult to engage with everyday life and to break out of the addictive cycle.

True addiction of this type can have a devastating impact on people’s lives. It can lead addicts to ignore their work, responsibilities, and relationships. These ill effects can continue even when the user understands the harm that the addiction causing. It can be extremely difficult to stop, as the addiction impacts users’ ability feel pleasure from normal, everyday activities. It also typically requires the user to engage in the addictive activity more and more and constantly seek out novel and more extreme versions to generate the same level of pleasure. In the case of pornography, it can lead users to view extreme or even violent pornography to satisfy their addiction, leading to shame, self-loathing, and withdrawal from relationships.

Terry Crews, an actor and former NFL star, has publicly described his struggles with pornography addiction and described its impact on his relationships in the following way:

Pornography really really messed up my life . . . It changes the way you think about people. People become objects, people become body parts, people become things to be used rather than people to be loved. Pornography is the intimacy killer. It kills all intimacy. Every time I watched it I was walled off, it’s like another brick that came between me and my wife.

The Physical Impact of Porn Addiction

Gary Wilson, a researcher, writer, and founder of an anti-pornography website, gave an influential TEDx talk in 2012 wherein he described the increased incidence of erectile dysfunction (ED) and its link to Internet pornography. While scientific literature attests to this sharp and surprising rise in erectile dysfunction for otherwise healthy men under 40, the causality of this phenomenon is harder to discern. Wilson suggests that a growing group of men who have voluntarily given up Internet pornography[2]—whom Wilson has tracked in anti-pornography online forums—and consequently recovered from ED show the link.

Online anti-pornography movements are fascinating because they are typically not linked to moral or religious objections to pornography. Instead, members seem to be motivated by the harm which pornography has effected in their lives, whether from the repercussions of addiction or ED. Men in these forums regularly cite a reversal of their ED and an overall improvement in their lives after giving up Internet pornography and masturbation. It’s common to see men say that unrelated conditions—including depression, ADHD, procrastination, and trouble concentrating—disappear when they stop using pornography.

Wilson suggests that the rise in ED coincides with the widespread accessibility of high-speed Internet, which has changed the availability of pornography from a small selection of images or video tapes to an endless stream of high-definition video. Moreover, the large selection of pornographic materials fuels the addiction cycle by allowing the user to continually search for novelty. He notes that heavy users of Internet pornography constantly search for new materials, will have a large number of browser windows open at once, and will click and fast-forward through videos looking for novel, surprising, or shocking material.

These same men, when faced with a real-life sexual situation, often have trouble maintaining interest and arousal. Many find that they need to replay pornographic images in their minds in order to perform sexually with a real partner. They feel overwhelmed by the physical reality or frustrated at their inability to fully control the situation. Many say that they find pornography more exciting than contact with a real person.

So far, it appears that giving up Internet pornography can reverse these negative effects. Reports in various forums suggest it can take anywhere from a few weeks to several months to recover. Alarmingly, though, it often takes younger men, who had access to high-speed Internet while they were teenagers and while their brains were more plastic, longer to recover, suggesting that the use of Internet pornography had a larger impact on their brain development.

Selling Intimacy

It's not uncommon for prominent porn stars to have a very active presence on the social network Instagram, despite the fact that Instagram does not permit the posting of explicit images and video. Certainly, these performers will often post provocative images at the edge of what is allowed, but just as often they post images of themselves in seemingly normal situations. With friends and pets, eating meals, or pursuing their hobbies. Thus these performers offer glimpses into what they say is, and very well may be, their real lives.

In many ways, this approach is the same as that used by celebrities of all sorts. It's a switch from promoting their work to promoting themselves. By allowing their fans to feel close to them, they encourage an emotional connection. That emotional connection creates more loyal fans that will seek out their work over that of their competitors. In many ways, this is an effort to counteract the constant quest for novelty that the Internet enables, by offering something deeper and more compelling: a feeling of intimacy.

For many porn stars, this approach is working. They have active fan bases on different social media platforms. They can offer their videos on websites that they control, giving them a larger portion of the profits. They can sell merchandise and endorse products (some performers actually sell lingerie that they have worn while performing in videos to dedicated fans). Some even sell access to more intimate social media settings, like private Snapchat accounts, where they have limited interaction with fans and post images and videos that only paying users can see. These performers are leveraging the full interactive potential of the Internet as it exists today to promote themselves.

In some ways, the fact that these approaches work is heartening. Better than any other medium, Internet pornography succeeds in stripping porn stars of their humanity. Many sites allow users to perform detailed searches for performers on the basis of physical traits and the acts performed, encouraging users to fully objectify the performers. In contrast, the more personal and interactive approach of establishing "relationships" via Instagram and Snapchat is a testament to users' desire for intimacy. This desire for a human connection—for love—is one that should be encouraged, just not in this distorted form, because, ultimately, these approaches are only a simulation of intimacy. Carefully curated glimpses into performers' lives may make the fans feel close to the performers, but there can be no real connection. This feeling of closeness requires no risk on the part of the fan. There is no demand for reciprocal vulnerability and, therefore, no possibility of rejection. A performer can control his or her image assiduously, taking care to present him or herself carefully, avoiding showing any human weaknesses that might disappoint. Authentic relationships require both people seeing, knowing, and fully accepting each other.

The very real risk is that these simulated relationships may offer enough of a feeling of connection to

enable a user to avoid the need for real relationships. Thus, individuals who might have trouble forming relationships could lead an ultimately isolated existence propped up by the pretense of intimacy. Many forms of social media featuring celebrities pose this risk to some degree, but pornography combined with social media can seemingly fulfill both emotional and sexual desires, making them a more compelling and harmful lure.

Live Streaming

At first, the Internet served as a distribution mechanism for images and pre-recorded videos. But as technology has matured it has become possible to easily stream live video to a large number of viewers with nothing more sophisticated than a webcam, laptop, and high-speed Internet connection. As is seemingly always the case with new technology, pornography is one of its first applications.

Many sites offer live video feeds of women, men, and couples. One common format is that of a show presented to a large number of viewers. These video streams are linked to a chat room where viewers can make comments visible to the performers, who will often respond in turn. These sites also offer a way for users to give monetary tips. Various schemes are used to encourage tipping, such as the performer engaging in a specific act if enough tips are received or controlling the intensity of Internet-connected sex toys the performer is using based on the number of tips received.

Another format is a private video chat session. In this format, a single user video chats directly with a performer. They can talk with the performer and, if they desire, enable their video as well so that the performer can see them. Here, the user typically pays per-minute for the video chat.

These live video chats are blending pornography with what is typically offered at strip clubs and, in many ways, by prostitution. It is the logical conclusion for the interactivity enabled by the current Internet technology.

Future Technology and Emerging Trends

The next wave of technology is coming. Virtual reality, which uses goggles to create an immersive, 3d environment, and augmented reality, which uses semi-transparent glasses to insert 3d graphics into the real world, have received billions of dollars in funding[3] and appear to be on the verge of mainstream acceptance. It's inevitable that these technologies will be used for pornography, and there are likely other successive technologies which will further change pornography. Pornography and technology have had a symbiotic relationship for decades, with each pushing the other to evolve, change, and gain widespread acceptance. As technology continues to push to virtually connect people and create more convincing simulations of reality, the danger from pornography is going to continue to grow.

There is some hope, however, from the small but growing numbers of groups that are rejecting pornography and the larger groups starting to confront the more general problems of technology distraction and addiction. For example, the next versions of both Android and iOS, the two leading mobile operating systems, will include features to help users limit and control their use of apps, including filtering and restricting access to explicit content. Even if these efforts fail to reverse the general acceptance of pornography, perhaps there will at least be support for those most vulnerable and trapped.

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[1] John Paul II speaks to the dignity of the human body in general and the problem of pornography in specific in his groundbreaking *Theology of the Body*. This issue of *Humanum* features an excerpt from his appendix on “The Ethos of the Body in Art and Media.”

[2] One prominent example is the [Reddit group NoFap](#), which has over 300,000 members.

[3] [Magic Leap](#)—an augmented reality company which has yet to announce a product—has received 2.3 billion dollars in funding.

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Pornography: More "Real" Than Reality Itself

MATTHEW TAN

ROSIE: BODIES UNVEILED AND HIDDEN

One cold night, a Seattle teenager named Rosie Larsen is found murdered, her body stuffed into the boot of a car pulled from the bottom of a lake. So begins the investigation that takes up the first two seasons of the American crime drama, *The Killing*.

What makes this more than standard crime drama fare is the exploration of the ways in which the killing of this one teenager figuratively ricochets out to kill others, both people and institutions. Each episode highlights the slow disintegration of bonds in the wake of Rosie's death, the first of these being Rosie's parents and siblings. Her death also consumes the lives of the investigators, Sarah Linden and Steven Holder. Sarah's prospect of creating a new family dissolves in her drive to solve the case, while the body of Steven is literally broken by those he investigates as the case progresses. Rosie's death also engulfs a mayoral election campaign, unveiling a web of corruption, maiming and death dealing, which permanently marks one of the candidates both physically and politically.

Meanwhile Rosie herself, though murdered, maintains a constant presence throughout the two seasons. Rosie's presence is maintained, not through her body as such, but through the digitised copies of her body—saved in video footage and audio files uncovered during the investigation. Indeed, what struck me most was how the virtual presence of the victim made Rosie *even more* present to her family and investigators, revealing more of her life than her embodied life kept secret. We see in the video and audio files a Rosie that associates with gangs, works in casinos and (at least apparently) gets raped by classmates. While the digitised Rosie at the end of a camera or microphone seemed more real than the Rosie of real life, her now lifeless body has become the avatar of the one in the camera lens, DVD, and smartphone.

I bring up *The Killing* in the context of an essay on pornography because at the heart of the onslaught on the dignity of the human person is the onslaught on the glorious heft of the body. It is an onslaught defined by an abstraction of the body that follows the growing availability of digital communications. This is a process of abstraction in which the phenomenon of pornography is merely the sharp end. I argue that, important though the issue of pornography might be, focusing on that alone is to ignore a vast and pervasive technological, psychological, and metaphysical infrastructure that is orienting a whole culture towards the pornographic even before the word "porn" is mentioned. This infrastructure is certainly operating in the background of the first two seasons of *The Killing* and is laid bare to a careful viewer. This infrastructure's central dogma is the negation of flesh via its abstraction into digital code, where flesh is made word. What *The Killing* also highlights is the way in which the death of the tissues in one body reaches out to deaden other bodies as well, the bodies familial, social, and political.

I will establish the above case in two moves. The first would be to look at the metaphysics behind pornography, an aspect of pornography that often gets ignored in the apparent physicality of the

phenomenon, with all the concerns of sexual activity or malfunction, brain re-wiring and sexual performance anxiety that accrue with porn consumption. The second move would show how this metaphysics is culturally woven, not just into pornography, but also the social and cultural practices and institutions of our contemporary milieu. This cultural architecture would manifest a logic of “hyper-reality,” where the virtual is rendered more real than reality itself. This logic of hyper-reality does not simply “pervade the culture” like some odourless gas, but directly correlates to the rendering of bodies, literal and allegorical into abstract, digitised playthings.

SIMULATION: PORNOGRAPHIC METAPHYSICS

In focusing on the harmful effects of online pornography, it is understandable that we situate it in a phenomenon only as old as the internet. However, in his *Beyond Secular Order*, John Milbank suggests a starting point much earlier in history, in the twelfth century: the departure from the metaphysics of analogy and choice for a more flattened metaphysics of “univocity.” This would also lay out a metaphysical foundation for the very culture on which the infrastructure of pornography will be built eight hundred years later. That genealogy is long, complicated, and peppered with jargon, and space allows me to treat only the aspect that most immediately concerns the topic of pornography: the metaphysics of simulation. Put simply, this metaphysics builds on a puzzle about how to speak of God and creature “without confusion,” when both God and creature can be thought of within the same plane of being—existing “univocally”—and yet still be distinct from one another. At the risk of oversimplification, in Milbank’s genealogy, the medieval scholastics who first tackled this problem sought to prevent this confusion by taking up the medieval notion of defining creatures in terms of their *not* being divine. What sets this univocal notion of “not divine” from its previous analogical counterpart was that, whilst the analogical “not divine” still had a zone of mediation between the creature and creator, such that one was able to participate in the other, the univocal “not divine” now was completely shorn of any contact between one and the other.

In this univocal schema creaturely existence—and by extension our existence—was the upshot of *not being something else*. What is *not* therefore became more fundamental in defining creaturely being than what *is*. In Milbank’s words, once you have established univocity, there is a “priority of the *not*” that underpins our being in this world. This priority of the *not* is then given more credibility with the arrival of nominalism, where that which transcends particular things in this world are, as the name suggests, mere names generated by human will. This is an important development in our story of simulation because it then becomes possible to name anything—even nothing at all—and give it existential weight.

The net result of univocity, nominalism, and the “priority of the *not*” is not just that we are more fundamentally defined by what is *not*. What is significant for our consideration of simulation is that both being and nothingness are put on the same level of existence. *Not* existing is itself given existential weight. Giving anything that does *not* exist the same metaphysical heft as what *does* exist undoes the metaphysical anchor for our existence that was established in medieval thought, namely, the priority of the actual over the possible, or in scholastic terms, the priority of act (actuality) over potency (possibility). In Milbank’s estimation, possibility in a univocal schema is not only given equivalence to actuality, but is actually given *priority* over actuality.

To put it in terms more immediate to this inquiry, we now have the metaphysical infrastructure through which we can entertain the idea that what *may be* now has priority over what *actually is*. This is because when God and creature are framed in the same metaphysical voice, it becomes possible to anchor this “possibilism” in nothing more than human thought. For in Milbank’s estimation, we have not so much brought God down to our level of thought, as we have elevated our thought to that of

God's. Put another way, while the Scriptures posit God as the anchor of our creaturely existence, a metaphysics of possibilism makes our thought an equally effective guarantor for the existential heft of anything that *may be*. Metaphysically, *virtual* reality can now be given the same substance as actual reality: because we think it.

HYPER-REALITY: PORNOGRAPHIC CULTURE

The metaphysics of “possibilism” outlined above is what undergirds a culture whereby the simulated eclipses the real. Our devices therefore are purveyors of this metaphysics, facilitating a culture where machine-made representations of reality, rather than reality itself, have become increasingly mainstreamed. In the closing half of the twentieth century and only two decades into the twenty first, a tsunami of digitally generated imagery has so drenched the culture that representations have now become a cultural ecosystem, the backdrop against which cultures grow and operate. Now, more than in any age before, cultures are becoming ordered by these representations of reality—the logos, the videos, the tweets and memes. We move our bodies—physical, social and cultural—towards these. We sometimes wear them on our bodies: in the form of clothing, accessories, tattoos, prosthetics, chants, political slogans, and riots. Furthermore, these representations do not even need to reflect the real thing in order to stir, organise, and mobilise us to buy and sell things we may not have formerly desired, vote for folk we have never known, or ogle at people we have never met.

How it all came to this raises a question quite different from the one raised in Milbank's enquiry. While Milbank's genealogy focused on *how* reality is conceived, we must now turn to the question of *where* reality is conceived, and for this we must turn to the literature on hyper-reality, a term popularised by the work of the French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard, though the substantive work goes back as early as the late 1960's with the work of Guy Debord.

Writing in 1967, Debord wrote in his *The Society of the Spectacle* that we are not so much awash with images of reality, which interrupt our normal relations with people in the real world. Rather, these images have come to situate themselves as nodes of social relations, such that the social norm is a “relationship between people that is mediated by images.” That mediation is now the norm makes the copy of reality, rather than reality itself, a person's primary interface with the world. As such, the abstraction of a relationship between embodied persons is now the social norm. In Debord's words the abstraction, rather than the thing being abstracted, becomes the “means of unification [...] the focal point of all vision and consciousness.”[1]

The impact of Debord's observation on the normalisation of mediation really comes to a sharp point when we get to Baudrillard's work. In his 1981 work *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argued that in a cultural scene saturated with images, a shift takes place whereby images or simulations are no longer mere *reflections* of reality. Images, copies of reality, have become free-standing commodities in their own right, to be bought and sold. Over time, late capitalism's commodification of the image has turned the copy into something more than a mere abstraction. While Debord's mention of mediation suggests an ongoing link between the reality and its copy, Baudrillard claims that we have given so much cultural investment to copies that we are now living in an “order of the simulacra,” where free standing simulations no longer need anchors in the real world, and copies of reality can compete with reality itself. Saturated by ontologically independent simulations, the distinction between the “real” world and the “imaginary” simulation starts to blur and break down. Furthermore, fantasies tickled by images somehow seem less fantastical, and having an abstraction of a commodity is now as good as having the commodity itself. It must also be said that, in late capitalism, bodies have become one of those commodities which must compete with its copy. When one is unable to gain access to an actual body, the image-driven fantasy does just as well.

For Baudrillard, however, the competition between copy and original is over. When the mediating copy is no longer a place-holder for reality, but its replacement, the copy, in Baudrillard's words, becomes "more real than nature."^[2] Simulations are now "models of a real without origin or reality: a hyper-real."^[3] In the order of the simulacra, "the real that never was"^[4] has overtaken the real that is. The simulation is now the standard of reality to which the real world must conform. Simulations have become idolised. Put another way, the physical, social, and political bodies that make up the "world that is" must reorganise to realign themselves to the parameters of the "world that might be."

Civic bodies in South Africa must reconstruct themselves to plug into the global economy, signified by rows of flashing numbers on Wall Street. The bodies of both mothers and fathers are recruited into the workforce, away from their children, in the name of increasing productivity, signified by statistics on a spreadsheet in a finance department and manifested by unstable employment, flatlining wages, and ever-rising costs of living. Children, meanwhile, are fed a steady diet of propaganda about how their bodies are meant to look and move, thanks to the never-ending stream of ads, shows, movies, games, and music pouring out of a slew of devices, now more prosthetics to bodies than independent objects. When the work day is done, the adults are on the couch, beholding the same stream with those very children on those same prosthetics. In the world of the hyper-real, what is real is to be found in virtual reality, rather than reality itself. In this context, it is the copy of the body—the hyper-real body—that has become the true body.

Little wonder, then, that in *The Killing*, the digitised video and audio files of Rosie are not only regarded as reliable evidence for the investigation. Indeed, the digitised files of Rosie are deemed a more reliable record of her life than her organic body could ever be. Only, those digitised files turn out to be *not* as reliable as initially thought. At one point of the investigation, Holder comes across a den—more like a torture chamber with a mattress at the centre—underneath Rosie's school, dubbed "the cage." There they find a video file of what appears to be Rosie being forced upon by two schoolmates, with her face hidden from view. Further investigation reveals that the scene is a simulation created to make the victim appear to be Rosie. In another situation, a photograph allegedly placing a mayoral candidate near a crime scene turns out to be a complete fabrication, created by a rival to smear his suitability for public office. These two episodes of overreliance on unreliable simulations, however, do not deter the ongoing faith of the investigation in digital copies of bodies over the organic originals. Meanwhile, the organic bodies of Rosie and a growing network of family members, friends and politicians, continue to obscure the truth of their lives, and obfuscate what is real, whether by not telling the full truth, or by physically hiding from view, only to have a contradiction revealed in a digitised audio or video file. We thereby witness a two-pronged erasure of the real, and by extension a two-pronged erasure of the body, where the organic original is no longer trusted, and its digital copy no longer has any inherent fidelity.

While far from pornographic in and of itself, the series gradually uncovers an infrastructure of hyper-reality that is deeply salient to the consumption of pornography. For pornography's sole trade is in simulacra, the generation of profit via the distribution of digital portrayals of escalating sexual possibility, and training viewers to desire greater possibilities from simulations detached from the limits of the organic body. Pornography is not really about sex but the possibilities of sex that do not wait for bodies to catch up. This explains the proliferation of body image issues, sexual dissatisfaction among copulating couples, and the pressure on those couples to themselves simulate what is seen in pornography. Note the suggestion that the actual body in hyper-reality has now become the simulation.

When the simulation becomes "more real than the real," Baudrillard says, "that is how the real is abolished."^[5] In the same way that the vortex of Rosie's dead body engulfs the social bodies of families and cities, the vortex of simulation does not stop at the bodies being exploited for pornographic use.

The same vampiric infrastructure that deadens the body is also deadening the sites of community, and the institutions meant to foster solidarity have now become reformatted to dissolve it. Cities become more focused on providing Wi-Fi than habitable public squares; family homes resemble dormitories for online gamers just to sleep in. The joke about holidays being occasions for family members to come together to check their phones is increasingly becoming less of a joke. In hyper-reality, a stable community is turned into what Baudrillard calls “a homogeneous human and mental flux. An immense to-and-fro movement similar to that of suburban commuters, absorbed and ejected at fixed times...” flitting from one simulation after another in a pornified cultural ecosystem.[6]

CONCLUSION: EMBODIMENT

There is a fascinating matrix when one considers two different biblical translations dealing with idolatry. In the Latin Vulgate, idols are called *simulacra*. In the Greek Septuagint, a word used for idolatry is *porneia*. I suggest that tracing the rise of pornography does not make sense in isolation of tracing the rise of hyper-reality, the metaphysical and later cultural replacement of actual bodies by simulated ones. With reference to Rosie Larsen, I also suggest that the idolisation of the abstracted bodies of porn is closely interfaced with the necrosis of communal bodies. Rosie, however, is not a dead body or a useful explanatory tool. Rosie is an (albeit fictional) embodied person, and this is the reality that Rosie’s family holds on to, as they sit on their couch pondering her life, while watching a home video of her, at the end of season 2. It is a bittersweet moment, since they long for a body that is no longer on the couch with them. The question that is put before us is whether we are able to retrain ourselves to turn away from the simulation that has lingered with us for the last eight hundred years, and to long instead for the original we have marginalised. Indeed, since the metaphysics that made hyper-reality possible began as a theological problem, we also face the question of whether the heart of a response to our *porneia* should be the longing not only for *a* body, but *the* body of the Word that became flesh, precisely in order to give unfathomable worth to flesh.

**This article builds on another piece written for Truth and Love by Courage International.*

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[1] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (London: AK, 2006), 7.

[2] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 28.

[3] *Ibid.*, 1.

[4] *Ibid.*, 28.

[5] *Ibid.*, 81.

[6] *Ibid.*, 67.

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Through a Glass Darkly: Musings on Pre-Raphaelite Bodies

LÉONIE CALDECOTT

In 1850, Charles Dickens attended the annual exhibition of contemporary artists at the Royal Academy of Art. There he saw a painting that incensed him so much that in his magazine *Household Words*, he went into critical overkill. The painting, *Christ in the House of His Parents*, was by a twenty-one-year-old painter named John Everett Millais, who had entered the Academy at the precocious age of eleven. It showed the child Jesus in his father's workshop, having sustained a wound in his left hand, being tended to by his mother and St Joseph. Dickens described it in the most scathing terms:

You behold the interior of a carpenter's shop. In the foreground of that carpenter's shop is a hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-headed boy, in a bed-gown, who appears to have received a poke in the hand, from the stick of another boy with whom he has been playing in an adjacent gutter, and to be holding it up for the contemplation of a kneeling woman, so horrible in her ugliness, that (supposing it were possible for any human creature to exist for a moment with that dislocated throat) she would stand out from the rest of the company as a Monster, in the vilest cabaret in France, or the lowest gin shop in England...Wherever it is possible to express ugliness of feature, limb, or attitude, you have it expressed.

The Times of London also attacked the setting used by Millais, insisting that his "attempt to associate the Holy Family with the meanest details of a carpenter's shop, with no conceivable omission of misery, of dirt, of even disease, all finished with loathsome minuteness, is disgusting." The painting proved to be so controversial that Queen Victoria asked that it be removed from the exhibition and brought to her so she could examine it. History does not record her personal reaction to the painting, unfortunately.

Ground-breaking artists are not always well received. The British art historian [Richard Dormant](#) describes Millais' early paintings as being "to visual art what the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins are to literature." This is an interesting connection to make, for Hopkins represents a crucial moment in British culture, when the language of Catholic faith surged into full cultural expression after centuries of muffling. Not as pastiche or a revival of ancient poetic forms: but in a startlingly modern, even experimental voice. Which is not to say that Catholic Christianity had no expression at all between the Reformation and the nineteenth century revival. Yet in a culture that from the sixteenth century onwards turned towards the material and the mercantile, the fully sacramental spirituality of Catholic culture inevitably struggled to find expression. In the 18th century, the poetic voice of Milton received its visual counterpart in the strange and unique mystical art of William Blake. But it took the Pre-Raphaelite revolution in the revolution-rocked middle of the following century, before religious symbolism in the visual arts integrated itself fully with the biological realism for which that century is

also known. Arguably, it was the Pre-Raphaelites who enabled English humanism to catch up with English devotion: to catch up, belatedly, with what the Catholic world experienced during the Renaissance. In order to do this, they turned for inspiration to the period just before the Counter-Reformation. The period before Britain was sundered from Rome.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood came into being around 1848, when a group of young artists rebelled against the teaching methods and aesthetic norms prevalent in the Academy. At a time when the late medieval and early Renaissance period was not widely known in England, the group took inspiration from the discoveries of the art critic John Ruskin during his Italian travels; Ruskin was in fact to become one of their main critical champions. They were particularly fascinated by drawings from the Campo Santo in Pisa. Millais was one of the original group of seven, along with the evangelically influenced William Holman Hunt (whose most famous painting is *The Light of the World*), and the passionate polymath Dante Gabriel Rossetti (brother of the Anglican poet Christina Rossetti). Rossetti's younger brother William Michael, in his family memoir published in 1895, remembered the first "bond of union among the members" of the PRB thus:

One—to have genuine ideas to express. Two—to study Nature attentively, so as to know how to express them. Three—to sympathise with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote. Four—and most indispensable of all, to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues.

The art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn has written that for the Pre-Raphaelites, "religious painting was a more significant practice than it has been in virtually any other movement in modern art." [1] This has far-reaching historical significance, for after Henry VIII put into motion the long, drawn-out sundering of England from Rome, we became a culture that prioritised word over image. From Raphael to Michelangelo, continental Europe saw a great outpouring of visual art, whereby the human body became a vehicle for the contemplation of divine purpose. In England, religious sensibility poured instead from the pen: that instrument whereby a forbidden religious culture could play itself out in the safety of verbal ambiguity. Catholic images became embedded in aural code. Italy had Leonardo. England had Shakespeare.

To be or not to be: devotion denied was driven into the deniability of word-play, as Clare Asquith's work has so compellingly proposed. *The Merchant of Venice* ends with a symbolic re-enactment of the suppressed Easter Vigil, repeating the words *in this night* eight times: but the symbolism of the forbidden liturgical content has had to be re-cast, disguised, as a declaration of love by a man for a woman. Meanwhile the soul of an entire nation began to slip passively down-stream, like the pale Ophelia of Millais' famous painting. If *Hamlet* is, as Asquith avers, the play which most characterises a certain aspect of England's gradual passing from the universal Church—as exemplified by the indecisive Sir Philip Sidney, who met with the future martyr Edmund Campion in Prague and was convinced, though not enough to take a stand—then the *Ophelia* which has so obsessed lovers of Pre-Raphaelite art represents a woman associated "not simply with chastity, but with sterility and childlessness." [2] That woman is the English nation, embodied by the "Virgin Queen," Elizabeth I, who in order to keep everyone happy could marry no-one. Ophelia is her pale reflection, a nation drifting away, going with the flow, having lost its spiritual moorings.

This is why Pre-Raphaelite art is exciting for the archaeologist of faith and culture. Not because it was

made by Catholics: it wasn't. Nor even because it was consistently Christian in its remit. While the Pre-Raphaelites received, through their "older brother" Ford Maddox Brown, a little influence from the work of the earlier German Nazarenes, their focus on religious subjects was intertwined with a Romantic fascination with what we would consider today as depth psychology. Its fascination lies in the fact that they had their fingers on the pulse of the fundamental human questions that inevitably reared their heads again, three centuries after the iconoclasm of the English Reformation put paid to religious image-making.

Various PRB artists (and the term itself is a loose definition) were touched by either Evangelicalism or Anglo-Catholicism. Both William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones (who came on board a decade later than Millais and his co-conspirators) were affected by the Oxford Movement during their early years at Exeter College, Oxford, and toyed with ideas about celibacy and monasticism. But they were also swept up in the Romantic revival of all things medieval, notably the Arthurian vision of William Tennyson, just as Rossetti had been enraptured with—and painted extensively from—the vision of his namesake Dante.

And that is, in a sense, why this disparate movement of early bohemians, irrespective of the chaos in some of their private lives, acts as the spiritual canary in the cage at the beginning of the modern era. They epitomise the desire to rediscover the cultural roots which informed an age before the Great Divorce: the strong pure lines of early Renaissance painting, the transcendent made immanent in the human form, not to mention the illuminated manuscripts produced by monastic hands (Morris would pore over these in the nearby Bodleian library and they influenced his later decorative style). They were swept up in the myths and legends of a Christian Europe which had once shared a vision of faith, political vicissitudes notwithstanding. The story-book ethos associated with late medieval and early renaissance culture swept the Pre-Raphaelites irresistibly into its embrace, whether they connected all the theological dots or not. It is possible to see their "pre-Raphael" artistic sensibility as a search for the authentically human experience which the dominant culture around them, cut off from its sacramental roots, had failed to offer.

For this reason the Pre-Raphaelite movement (if such a disparate phenomenon can be classified so neatly) had a profound social dimension. If we read what William Morris wrote at the end of the century about the Arts and Crafts movement that took shape in him partly as a response to PRB ideas, we get a sense of this vision, which has echoes of Blake's earlier railing against the "dark satanic mills" of the Industrial Revolution:

Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization... What shall I say concerning its mastery of and its waste of mechanical power, its commonwealth so poor, its enemies of the commonwealth so rich, its stupendous organisation—of the misery of life! Its eyeless vulgarity which has destroyed art, the one certain solace of labour? ... The hope of the past times was gone, the struggles of mankind for many ages had produced nothing but this sordid, aimless, ugly confusion... This was a bad lookout, especially so to a man of my disposition, careless of metaphysics and religion, as well as of scientific analysis, but with a deep love of the earth and life on it, and a passion for the history of the past mankind. [3]

Even for those artists who were not “careless of metaphysics and religion,” this attention to social reality played a central role. Let me try and illustrate this by going back to that “scandalous” painting by Millais, which coincidentally hit establishment walls just as the Catholic hierarchy itself was being re-established in 1850 (a number of critics have linked the hostile reaction to it with reaction to this formalisation of the Roman Catholic revival). There is nothing backward-looking in *Christ in the House of His Parents*: it doesn’t ape early Renaissance painting. Yet in its physical precision and its forceful colouring, it stands in stark contrast to the highly mannered output of the academicians. It breaks every rule in the book, contextualising the Christian ethos in what are highly contemporary terms. The workshop of the Holy Family is just that: *a place where work is going on*. The wood shavings on the floor are rendered in acute and realistic detail. The characters in the workshop look like 19th century working-class people—just what Dickens found abhorrent. Our Lord looks undernourished. His mother is gawky. In short, Millais has picked his sacred subjects up and dropped them into the midst of his own era. That’s the “realism” side.

But then there is the symbolic element: and here, the closer we look, the more we see. Beginning with the “accidental” wound in the Christ-child’s hand: a stigmatic blooming of real human blood which prefigures the Passion. This is the vulnerable Christ, the Christ who suffers anguish and pain the way a child does: *given over to the challenge of it*. The very awkward tension in the figure of Mary expresses her maternal participation in the spiritual crisis to come. Joseph leans in directly from his place at the work-bench to offer protection. John the Baptist approaches with a basin of water (a possible reference to the High Anglican emphasis on the necessity of infant baptism). It is at once a realistic rendition of an imagined New Testament scene (also referencing Zechariah 8:6), and a deeply symbolic reminder of what really is at stake in this scene. Looked at through the eyes of faith, the table becomes an altar, the back wall a rood screen. The sheep congregating outside are the faithful, waiting for their shepherd, who is to be wounded and given over for them. There is a dream-like quality to the painting, precisely because like a dream, it clothes itself in the physical reality which is the human lot, whilst pointing to the spiritual realities which for sacramental Christianity infuse that physical world. It is at once mystical and incarnational. It brings the English genius back into the service of religious art. No wonder it offended the protestant sensibilities of its day, every bit as much as John Henry Newman’s abandonment of the Anglican communion to go into what he called the “one fold of the Redeemer,” did a few years before.

In the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford there is a truly strange Pre-Raphaelite artefact: a wardrobe which was commissioned and decorated by Edward Burne-Jones as a wedding present for William and Jane Morris. It uses a story from Chaucer’s *A Nun’s Tale*, about the Blessed Virgin resurrecting a boy who has been martyred for singing the *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, by placing a grain of wheat on his tongue. Apart from the figure of the young man rising up out of the earth in a pose which recalls a devout soul receiving Holy Communion, the other notable figure is the Blessed Virgin herself. The model Burne-Jones used for the Virgin was the bride herself, Jane Morris, née Burden, originally introduced to Morris not as a suitable candidate for matrimony, but as one of the many “stunners” that Dante Gabriel Rossetti was so adept at recruiting as artist’s models. She came from an impoverished family living in cramped quarters off Oxford’s Holywell Street, and was transformed into a princess through the power of the paintbrush. Her face alone launched a thousand ships that in normal circumstances would never have seen the light of day.

The story of Jane’s marriage to Morris and her continuing entanglement with Rossetti is too long to tell here, but the visual power of the idealised female as a physical “carrier” for PRB ideas was captured tellingly in an account that Henry James sent to his sister after spending an evening at the Morris home.

“Oh, ma chère, such a wife! Je n’en reviens pas—she haunts me still. A figure cut out of a missal—out of one of Rossetti’s or Hunt’s pictures—to say this gives but a faint idea of her, because when such an image puts on flesh and blood, it is an apparition of fearful and wonderful intensity. It’s hard to say whether she’s a grand synthesis of all the pre-Raphaelite pictures ever made—or they a ‘keen analysis’ of her—whether she’s an original or a copy. In either case she is a wonder.” After dinner, he continued later, “Morris read us one of his unpublished poems, from the second series of an ‘Earthly Paradise’, and his wife, having a bad toothache, lay on the sofa, with her handkerchief to her face. There was something very quaint and remote from our actual life, it seemed to me, in the whole scene: Morris reading... around us all the picturesque bric-à-brac of the apartment (every item of furniture literally a ‘specimen’ of something or other), and in the corner this dark silent medieval woman with her medieval toothache.”[4]

Last year the National Gallery staged an exhibition entitled *Reflections*, which sought to explore the connection between Jan Van Eyck’s famous *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434, acquired by the National Gallery in 1842) and the work of the Pre-Raphaelites. In spite of the obvious fact that the techniques experimented with by the PRB are connected to those used by the Netherlandish master (using a white ground to give colours and physical detail greater vibrancy, for instance) the show did not receive great critical approbation. For the symbologically inclined, however, it made for a happy hunting ground. The couple in the Van Eyck painting express far more than a simple domestic reality. They are surrounded by symbols which point beyond exterior appearances: the foremost of which is a convex mirror on the wall behind them, in which two witnesses to their marriage are reflected. This kind of mirror is an object which reappears multiple times in Pre-Raphaelite paintings and homes such as Kelmscott Manor. Rossetti supposedly owned nine of them (among dozens of other mirrors). Mirrors feature in paintings ranging from Holman Hunt’s *The Awakening Conscience* (1854), to his much later rendition of the Tennyson poem *The Lady of Shalott* (1886–1905), with its overwhelming psychological symbolism of broken looms, floating threads of wool and hair, all unmoored from the gravity of a realised life. For the Lady of Shalott was under a curse: she must not leave her weaving under any circumstances. She could view the world only through a glass darkly, and not in reality. Falling in love with Sir Lancelot as he rode by, and following him to Camelot, brought her only tragedy.

The unborn child hidden under the delicate hand of the Arnolfini bride, far less the fecundity of the Mother of God, appears in fact in stark contrast with the sinuous Pre-Raphaelite women such as this legendary lady, or Millais’ *Mariana*, frozen in their moments of romantic yearning. Indeed, if the idealised PRB women move from their stasis as “image” they often find themselves cursed, like Ophelia, or her model Lizzie Siddal, with a half-life. Or like Elizabeth I, who was dis-abled by her very inheritance—her religiously and politically divided kingdom—from the possibility of joining herself to a spouse or transmitting life. This is the woman as symbol, as the object of fervid imagination: not a creature of flesh and blood, capable of realising her creatureliness in the fullness of nuptial union and fertile unfolding to new life. The human body, for the Pre-Raphaelites, thus stands at a slight remove from both the fullness of physical life and the fullness of sacramental life: frozen at the ambiguous crossing point between Redemption and Fall.

Behind all these bodies there lies another Body suggested by the Eucharistic/Marian juxtaposition on the wardrobe given to the Morrisises by Burne-Jones, even if its maker was not fully conscious of it. The figure of Mary on the wardrobe doors is offering a *grain of wheat* as the means of bringing the fervent young man back to life: her manner of placing it on his tongue, and his manner of receiving it, are redolent of nothing so much as the eucharistic mystery. This is woman as Sophia: the vessel, or transmitter, of Christ's wisdom in giving his own body for us—under the form of bread. I cannot attest for Burne-Jones' intentions in using this image, but it seems as though he is intuitively feeling his way towards the link between the matrimony he is celebrating with this wedding gift, and the paschal mystery which his high Anglican explorations will have put him in touch with. Not all explorers will reach the promised land, at least not within sight of this world. There comes a time when the quest requires not just the opening of the wardrobe doors, but passing within its contents to a new kind of landscape. The medieval nostalgia of the nineteenth century tells us that the quest for the missing Grail is initiated; but Lancelot will not be the one to fulfill it. Like the accursed knight, the Pre-Raphaelite brothers were looking through a glass darkly, unable to fully assimilate the reality which their hearts yearned after. But at least they were looking: really looking.

Léonie Caldecott is the UK editor of both [Humanum](#) and [Magnificat](#). With her late husband Stratford she founded the Center for Faith and Culture in Oxford, its summer school and its journal [Second Spring](#). Her eldest daughter Teresa, along with other colleagues, now work with her to take Strat's contribution forward into the future.

[1] Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Tate Publications, 2000), 243.

[2] Clare Asquith, *Shadowplay, The Hidden Beliefs and Coded Politics of William Shakespeare* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 155. Asquith says that in *Hamlet*, Ophelia symbolises “the still new establishment religion into whose embrace those in power were attempting to draw Sidney's generation.”

[3] In the journal *Social Justice* (1894).

[4] Quoted in Fiona MacCarthy's biography, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (Faber and Faber, 2010), 229.

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Taking Beauty Seriously: An Interview with a Painter, Sculptor and Teacher

DONAL MAC MANUS

Donal Mac Manus was born in Dublin in 1971. He earned his Bachelor of Design (1995) and Higher Diploma in Art and Design Teaching (1998) at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin and then a Masters in Fine Art (2001) at the New York Academy of Art. Later, he earned a Masters in Architecture, Art and Liturgy (2010) at the Università degli Studi Europea in Rome. In addition to producing his own artwork in studios in Rome, Florence, and Dublin, Mac Manus has founded several academic institutions: the Irish Academy of Figurative Art in Dublin (2004); the Sacred Art Studio in Florence at the Monastery of San Marco (2007); and the diocesan Sacred Art School in Florence (2011). A recently filmed documentary on Mac Manus' work—Taking Beauty Seriously—will be released soon.

Humanum sat down with Mac Manus near the National Gallery in Washington DC, where he was spending some time copying the Masters.

A New Approach

Humanum: You have set up various schools and studios (in Rome, Florence, and Dublin). Do you have a distinctive approach to art?

Mac Manus: Essentially, I try to start with the “music” (the “gesture”) then impose a bit of “architecture” (the “triangle”). It’s a play on the relationship between order and chaos. I find it most effective because it keeps the dance alive. It becomes a real relationship with the work, the model. When the head, chest and pelvis are correctly relating to each other, I then work the rhythm of the muscles between these structural forms, and on through the rest of the body. The important thing is not to get stuck in either extremes of gesture or anatomy, but to keep the work alive and really present.

Humanum: What do you think is going on in contemporary art?

Mac Manus: Modernism is a reaction to the calcification of artistic ideas in the academic mode. But in fact, both stem from a legalistic approach: they are both defined by rules. The academic style sticks to them at all costs. Modernism rejects them altogether. “There are the rules and I’m going to break them.”

The Christian, though, is not defined by rules. The Law enters the mind and penetrates the heart, so that you work from the heart. I approach my art the same way as I approach my faith. I am not Islamic. I am not Hebrew. I’m Christian: and Christianity is not a “religion of the book.” It’s not a religion of Law. It is a religion of the Person—it’s about an encounter with a Person. The Person penetrates your whole being and transforms your heart. And you work from your heart.

Humanum: So, the rules don’t matter?

Mac Manus: No! Rules matter more than ever, in that they matter in your heart. It’s rather that the Law—the “rules”—have penetrated your mind and transformed your heart.

Christianity and the Visual Arts

Humanum: Would you say that Christianity brings to the visual arts a distinct understanding of the body with respect to those who came before? If so, what is it?

Mac Manus: As I see it, the emphasis of the Greeks in the 5th century B.C. is on the profound penetration of truth—I am thinking here of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. The visual manifestation of this reveals itself in ideal beauty. And that ideal beauty is very much an exterior beauty. It comes out in sculpture, where the ideal features of the human being are expressed in the exterior beauty of the body. In architecture, the pillars of the temple carry the emphasis, for example. It's very elevated.

The emphasis of the Romans in the 2nd century B.C. to the 2nd century A.D. is more on interiority. You see this in their portraiture where they offer a deeply psychological, individual account of the person, in contrast to the ideal one. You can see that in Roman architecture where the interior is emphasized. (Think, for example of the Roman Basilicas, where all the beauty is on the inside).

With Christianity the exterior and interior are brought together. This is evident in the Florentine Renaissance, where the ideas of both of these great cultures are reborn—which is the meaning of “renaissance.” This happens in the Medici court, where the great historians, theologians, and philosophers discuss the ideas of the Greeks and Romans as they share meals together. And who is welcomed to that table, but Michelangelo? That's where things *really* take off with the visual arts. His artistic and manual virtuosity is exposed to these ideas. He starts to communicate them through visual form, through sculpture in particular, and later through painting. This has a profound effect on the culture. It creates the concept of the “genius artist” who thinks with his hands, his *manuality* (as opposed to the artisan who just repeats, who doesn't think). He has an extraordinary manual ability, as well as an extraordinary mind. He is very sensitive, extremely versatile and eloquent: he penetrates deep into his subject. Michelangelo is, of course, building on the shoulders of Masaccio and Giotto. But Michelangelo breaks the mold.

But all of this really starts with St. Francis. He is the ground-zero of Western Christian culture, because up to him the East and the West were pretty much in line, with the stress on the Divinity of Christ. It was St. Francis who brought the *humanity* of Christ to the fore, so much so that he actually received the stigmata. He embodied the idea. (Putting it in today's terminology, he had a psycho-somatic experience.) Obviously, it is a divine intervention too. The greatest followers of St. Francis were Giotto and Dante. They transformed Western culture. And everyone after them was profoundly transformed by them. The *suffering Christ* is basically the source of our entire culture.

With respect to the ancients, what comes forth is not so much heroic or ideal—as with the Greeks, nor psychological—as with the Romans. The ideal is not so much about power. Or rather, there's a *different* power in play: the power of love. And Christ manifests that in his vulnerability. The whole Crucifixion is a crazy image—it's like putting somebody up there in an electric chair!

In my crucifix, “*Corpus Christi*,” I bring together this fact that God is God and *becomes man*. There I am contemplating God in human form: in my art, my primary grammar is form. I am asking myself: “Do I *really* believe that God was a body?”

Theology of the Body

Humanum: During your time at *New York Academy of Art* you came upon John Paul II's “theology of the body.” And you started reading groups with fellow students. How did that come about?

Mac Manus: Art students learn everything about the human body except about what it means. So, there

was a vacuum to be filled. We would meet on Friday evenings at 8:00 P.M. The room was packed and the discussions dynamic. Sometimes it would go till midnight and beyond. Many came close to the faith.

Humanum: In a nutshell, what was the meaning that the students discovered in the Theology of the Body?

Mac Manus: The basic message they got was that the body was a *gift*.

The two most deconstructed areas in Western civilization today are sexuality and art. The high-priests of this deconstruction are Derrida and Foucault with their idea that every relation is power-driven. At the heart of this program is the contraceptive culture. Everyone today is the child of a contraceptive culture. The Irish referendum on abortion in May would not have been thinkable were it not for the contraceptive culture. Essentially the contraception culture has taken the lynchpin out of culture—what holds culture together—the truth and meaning of human sexuality. Without it the whole thing collapses. You deconstruct that, you deconstruct marriage. You deconstruct marriage, you deconstruct family. You deconstruct family, you deconstruct society. Really everything stems from that core.

What is needed now is a “reconstruction” of the truth and meaning of sexuality. That has been achieved by John Paul II. There’s a blue print there that is perfectly appropriate. It has been extremely effective, both in my personal experience and in the lives of people that I’ve helped. All kinds of people have been healed by this and brought back into the faith. That’s really a core point.

The idea that the basic meaning of the body is gift reverses the message of power that has so permeated our idea of sexuality. It shows the deeply positive “message” carried by the body.

And I approach visual deconstruction in a similar way.

Love is more important than beauty. Both of them are totally in union with each other. They complement each other. And they are often seen as one and the same. But both of them are under attack. So, my approach is to try and heal both at the same time.

When I contemplate my culture, I see these as the greatest wounds. But first and foremost, there is the wound of the contraceptive mentality, which is the destruction of the truth and meaning of sexuality—in essence, the icon of love. That is the most important thing that needs to be addressed. I address it primarily through visual art. That’s my grammar. That’s how I see the world, and that’s how I contribute to the healing of the world as best I can.

The Nude

Humanum: You have much to say about the importance of the nude in art: that it is essential for “detoxing” society from its saturation in pornography, among other things. Is there a way of contemplating the human body as an expression of the image of God, rather than as the object of lust? Can the artist lead the way in this?

Mac Manus: The human body is the *most fundamental* form of beauty. Think about it. It is the *primary* mode of communication. Right now, we are speaking through gestures. Throughout history, we have always been fascinated by the human body. That means taking into account the muscles, the skin, the hair, gesture, drapery—everything.

The problem with pornography, Saint John Paul II said, was not that it shows *too much* of the body, but that it shows *too little of the person*. Pornography represses true beauty. Art, on the other hand, is a

penetration of the truth. And the more you penetrate it, the more beautiful it gets. Desire needs to be channeled, so that it can reach its proper destiny. Drawing or sculpting the nude, or looking at it, can do this.

A Slow Art Movement

Humanum: Are we not perhaps in a new situation where the addictions of the age (pornography, social media) have made it difficult even to *look up*? What is needed in order for the audience to *see* the beauty (and truth) you are proposing as an artist? You may have something very striking to look at: but what if *no one is looking*?

Mac Manus: Drawing should be fundamental to education as such, not just for budding artists. Even life drawing. I think we need a “slow art” movement, just as we have a “slow food” movement. Art has the ability to slow us down and heal us of our distractedness. But *artists* too need to slow down. *They* aren’t looking either. They are not trained to look at or contemplate the Great Masters—or even nature itself.

Humanum: Does it matter *where* we look at paintings? Does the context have something to do with our availability to *look*?

Mac Manus: In my view, when we go to a museum, we are often visiting orphans in a hospital! Take for example, the *Deposition of Christ* by Caravaggio, which hangs in the Vatican *Pinacoteca*. There is the limp hand of Christ falling down towards the center of the painting, for that painting was meant to be hanging above the Altar—in the Chiesa Nuova—so that the hand would literally be *pointing* to the Body of Christ when the Priest elevated the Host!

Humanum: Do you see yourself as a “Christian Artist”?

Mac Manus: I don’t believe in being a “Christian Artist” in the sense that art should not be used to preach or indoctrinate. It’s not a means to an end. That’s what illustration does. Illustration is the projection of ideas through a medium. It has a role. And it’s perfectly valid. But that’s not what art is, not in the *high* sense anyway. Art is the natural overflow of the interior life of the artist. The point is that there is no need to dictate. In a talk at the [Rimini Meeting](#), Cardinal Ratzinger said that beauty has the power to pierce the heart. That’s really central to my vision, and to the healing of contemporary culture. Because contemporary culture is so relativistic, you’re always confronted with assertions like: “That’s your truth....my truth’s different.” But Beauty is something that can bring people together. And if you’re smart enough, and you live the good life, then it will overflow in your work. That will catechize. It will bring people to the faith. But the reason is because you live, not because you want to change the world. People change because you love them. The important thing is to love and then, paraphrasing St. Augustine, “do as you please.” If you’re an artist, and you do that, then it overflows into your work. It is a perfectly natural thing. And it’s more effective because people don’t feel preached at.

Donal Mac Manus is a sculptor, painter and founder of the Sacred Art School. A sampling of his work can be found on his [website](#).

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On the Body in Art and Pornography

POPE SAINT JOHN PAUL II

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Behind the need for shame, that is, for the intimacy of one's own body (about which the biblical sources inform us with such precision in Genesis 3), a deeper norm lies hidden: that of the gift oriented toward the very depths of the personal subject or toward the other person, especially in the man-woman relation according to the perennial order of reciprocal self-giving. Thus, in the processes of human culture understood in the broad sense, we observe—even in the state of man's hereditary sinfulness—a rather explicit *continuity of the spousal meaning of the body* in its masculinity and femininity. Original shame, known already from the first chapters of the Bible, is a permanent element of culture and morality. It belongs to the very origins of the ethos of the human body.

A person of developed sensibility crosses the limit of that shame only with difficulty and inner resistance. This is clear even in situations that otherwise justify the necessity of undressing the body, for example, in the case of medical examinations or operations.

In a group by themselves, one should also recall other circumstances, e.g., those of concentration camps or places of extermination where the violation of the bodily shame is a method used consciously to destroy personal sensibility and the sense of human dignity. Everywhere—though in different ways—the same line of order is reconfirmed. Following his personal sensibility, man *does not want to become an object* for others through his own anonymous nakedness, *nor does he want the other to become an object for him* in a similar way. It is evident that he “does not want to” to the degree in which he lets himself be guided by the sense of the dignity of the human body. There are, in fact, various reasons that can induce, incite, and even press man to act contrary to what the dignity of the human body, connected with personal sensibility, demands. One cannot forget that the fundamental inner “situation” or “historical” man is the state of the threefold concupiscence (see 1 Jn 2:16). This state—and in particular the concupiscence of the flesh—makes itself felt in various ways, in the inner impulses of the human heart as well as in the whole climate of relationships between human beings, and in social morality.

We cannot forget at this point, not even when we consider the issue of the wide sphere of art, above all when it has the character of a visual image or show, and likewise when one is dealing with “*mass*” *culture*, which is so significant in our times because it is connected with the broadcasting technology of audiovisual communication. The question arises when and in what case this sphere of man's activity—from the point of view of the ethos of the body—should be accused of “*pornovision*” just as some writing has been and is being accused of “*pornography*” (that second term is older). The one as well as the other happens when one oversteps the limit of shame or of personal sensibility with regard to what is connected with the human body, with its nakedness, when in a work of art or by audiovisual media *one violates the body's right to intimacy in its masculinity and femininity* and—in the final analysis—when one violates that deep *order of the gift and of reciprocal self-giving*, which is inscribed in femininity and masculinity across the whole structure of being human. This deep inscription—or

rather incision—is decisive for the spousal meaning of the human body, that is, for the fundamental call it receives, that of forming the “communion of persons” and of participating in it.

...

It is not possible to agree...with the representatives of so-called naturalism who appeal to the right to “everything that is human” in works of art and in the products of artistic reproduction, and who claim that in this way they act in the name of the realistic truth about man. It is precisely this truth about man—the *whole* truth about man—that requires us to consider the sense of the intimacy of the body and the consistency of the gift connected with the masculinity and femininity of the body itself, which reflects the mystery of man proper to the inner structure of the person. We must consider this truth about man also in the artistic order, if we want to speak of a full realism.

One notices here that the order proper to the “communion of persons” agrees profoundly with the vast and differentiated area of “communication.” As we said already in our earlier analyses (where we turned to Genesis 2:25 [see TOB 13□19]), the human in its nakedness—understood as a manifestation of the person and as the person’s gift or sign of trust in, and of giving to, another person, who is aware of the gift, who has chosen and decided to respond to it in an equally personal way—becomes the source of a particular interpersonal “communication.” As we said already, this is a particular communication in humanity itself. This interpersonal communication penetrates deeply into the system of communion (*communio personarum*) and at the same time grows from it and develops correctly in its context. Precisely *because of the great value of the body in this system of interpersonal “communion,” making the body* in its nakedness—which expresses precisely “the element” of the gift—the object or subject of a work of art or an audiovisual reproduction is a problem that is by nature not aesthetic, but also ethical. In fact, that “element of the gift” is, so to speak, suspended in the dimension of an unknown reception and of an unforeseen response, and thereby it is in some way “threatened” in the intentional order in the sense that it can become an anonymous object of “appropriation,” an object of abuse. This is why the integral truth about man constitutes in this matter the basis of the norm according to which the good or evil of determinate actions of behavior, of morality, and situations is formed. Precisely because of his body and his sex (femininity/masculinity), the truth about man, the truth about what is particularly personal and interior in him, creates precise limits that one must not overstep.

These limits must be recognized and observed by the artist who makes the human body the model or subject of a work of art or audiovisual reproduction. Neither he nor others who carry responsibility in this field have the right to demand, propose, or allow other human beings whom they invite, exhort, or admit to seeing and looking at the image to violate these limits together with them or because of them. What in itself constitutes the content and deep personal value of the order of gift and of the mutual self-giving of the person in the image is, as a subject, uprooted from its own authentic substratum in order to become an object and, what is more, in some way an anonymous object by means of “social communication.” The whole problem of “pornovision” and of “pornography,” as it appears on the basis of what was said above, *is not the effect of a puritanical mentality* or of a *narrow moralism*, nor is it the product of a way of thinking burdened by Manichaeism. What is at issue is rather an *extremely important* and fundamental *sphere of values* to which man cannot remain indifferent because of the dignity of humanity, because of the personal character and eloquence of the human body. Through works of art and the activity of audiovisual media, this whole content and these values can be formed and deepened, but they can also be deformed and destroyed “*in man’s heart.*” We can see that we find ourselves continually within the orbit of the words Christ spoke in the Sermon on the Mount.

John Paul II served as Pope from 1978 to 2005. He was canonized in 2014.

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