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Aesthetics of the Naked Human Body: From Pornography (Sexualised Lust Object) to Iconography (Aesthetics of Human Nobility and Wisdom) in an Anthropology of Physical Beauty

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Abstract

In many religious circles and philosophies of life, the human body is excluded from the realm of spirituality and meaning. Due to a dualistic approach, nudity is viewed as merely a physical and corporeal category. In social media, there is the real danger that the naked human body is exploited for commercial gain. Advertisements often leave the impression that the body, very specifically the genitals, is designed merely for physical desire and corporeal chemistry. They become easily objects for lust, excluded from the beauty of graceful existence and noble courage. It is argued that the naked human body is not designed for pornographic exploitation and promiscuous sensuality but for compassionate intimacy and nurturing care in order to instil a humane dimension in human and sexual encounters. In this regard, antiquity and the Michelangelesque perspective can contribute to a paradigm shift from abusive exploitation to the beauty of vulnerable sensitivity. In order to foster an integrative approach to theory formation in anthropology, the methodology of stereometric thinking is proposed.

Keywords: nudity, pornography, aesthetics, beautification of the human body, stereometric thinking, compassionate intimacy, promiscuity

1. Introductory remarks

In terms of a pragmatist view of life, our being human is often reduced to merely a mechanistic producer of things: man as *homo faber* (man as a producer of things; the making human being). In terms of an atomistic approach in medicine, the human body is perceived as a skeleton with

muscles, tissue, organs and chemical processes. Due to utilitarian moral theories, the human body is often in bioethics degraded to the status of a functional object. However, more and more a biomedical model, very specifically, an analytical approach to human embodiment with the danger of fragmentation and instrumentalisation, is being replaced by a more humane, spiritual and aesthetic approach. The shift is from an aggressive approach to a more qualitative and holistic approach [1]; i.e., to view the human body as an integral part of life and an ingredient of soulful embodiment (corporeal beautification): *I am my body, I don't merely 'have' a body.*

This shift towards a more aesthetic approach to human life is even detectable in processes of high-tech digitalisation and information technology with its emphasis on 'big data'. Man is also the creator of beauty: man as *homo aestheticus*. For example, Steve Jobs, the digital entrepreneur of Apple, introduced aesthetics to the computer business. He combined his slogan 'Let's make a dent in the universe' [2] with the aesthetics and art of design. While his youth companion Steve Wozniak could see 'a sonnet in a circuit', Jobs, by contrast, could look at a beige box and see beauty [3]. 'He imagined a computer that was graceful and elegant as it was useful, an intersection of technology and art that resulted in something truly special' [3].

Steve Jobs changed a possible bankrupt company, Apple, into a financial miracle. The secret? He stayed true to his original vision for Apple: He believed there was room for beauty and art amid technology and commerce [4].

If one transfers the notion of beauty to human life, very specifically the naked human body, what would be the implication for theory formation in anthropology and the human quest for meaning and significance? Thus, the aesthetic question: For what purpose is the human body designed?

In a more moral approach anthropology, the fundamental question is often an ethical one: What is good and what is bad/evil? In many philosophies of life and religious circles, as influenced by Platonic dualism (the body is merely an inferior prison of the human soul), there is immediately the association that the human body, with its sensual needs, is from a lower order and should be suppressed in a Stoic way. Due to the Stoic principle of *apatheia*, emotions are rendered as obstacles to true knowledge. "So the passions (*pathē*) must be overcome in order that the ideal of 'dispassionateness' (*apatheia*) may be attained" [5].

Scepticism regarding the value of the sensual human body with its passions and sexual needs can be traced back to what one can call the *Platonic dualism in anthropology*. For example, Plato [6] provides us with the idea that a soul can be deprived of its body; that it does not come fully into its own until it has been separated from the body, and that it is immortal. The body is therefore merely clothing for the soul, a kind of prison from which it should escape and be liberated [7].

In general, the human body was in many religious circles and philosophies of life excluded from 'soulfulness' and reduced to the realm of 'flesh' (*sarx*). The genitals were not part of the beauty of the human soul and viewed as irrelevant for maintaining spiritual excellence. Beauty was therefore more an abstract spiritual category than an explicit corporeal and sensual category.



Figure 1. Depiction of human sinfulness and hell in the Last Judgement. Baigio da Cesena, a papal master of ceremonies, criticised Michelangelo's work saying that nude figures had no place in such a sacred place and that the paintings would be more at home in a public tavern. Michelangelo included da Cesena in the Last Judgement as Minos, one of the three judges of the underworld. When Baigio complained to the Pope, the Pontiff explained that he had no jurisdiction over hell and that the portrait would have to remain. In Greek mythology, Minos was the king of Crete and was the son of Zeus and Europa. He became one of the three judges of the underworld after his own death, and Michelangelo has depicted Minos with ass-ears and wrapped in serpent's coils. The coils indicate to what circle of hell the damned are destined. The serpent's bite on the genitals of Minos (da Cesena) illustrates Michelangelo's disdain for the Cardinal and the fact that official ecclesiology always connected human sinfulness to sexuality and the area of the human genitals. Public domain: for research purposes only.

What is most needed is a paradigm shift: From the body as object exposed to abusive exploitation, to the body as subject: corporeality and physicality as icons of embodied soulfulness and compassionate caring (**Figure 1**).^{1, 2}

2. Basic assumptions and core questions

Instead of a dualistic approach in anthropology, what is meant by an integral approach to corporeal beauty? Is it also possible to see in the naked human body *more* than merely physical well being and biological chemistry? Are the human body and genitals merely objects for sexual exploitation, to be used for power abuse and rape, or is it possible to use the body for the beautification of life and the fostering of human dignity and meaningful hope—the human body as spiritual entity, soulful embodiment—embodied soulfulness?

¹My contribution is based on research over a period of 20 years and seminanted in the publication on icons [8].
²Online: <http://www.italian-renaissance-art.com/Last-Judgement.html>. Accessed: 23/05/2014. Public domain.

In the social media, film, many magazines and public advertisements, the naked human body is often projected as a commodity and portrayed as object for lust and sexual gratification (**Figure 2**).

Therefore, in many conservative Christian circles, nakedness and explicit sensual corporeality are bad and essentially 'sinful'. But: 'The sexual itself is not sinful. Real ignorance of the sexual, when nonetheless it is present, is reserved for the beast, which is enthralled in the blindness of instinct and acts blindly' [9]. On the contrary, I want to posit that human sexuality is an intrinsic component of soulful embodiment and embodied soulfulness. The naked human body is not designed for 'blind instinct' (the beast), but for 'compassionate intimacy' (the beauty)—the physical ordinary, becomes the representation of the spiritual extraordinary.

Beautifying the human body implies the following: the ordinary (human flesh) should be viewed as extraordinary, as a piece of art (expression of worth, value, dignity and identity). In 1992, Ellen Dissanyake wrote a book entitled *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art comes from and Why* [10]. Her basic assumption is that art can be regarded as a natural general proclivity that manifests itself in culturally learned specifics and bodily expressions such as dances, songs,

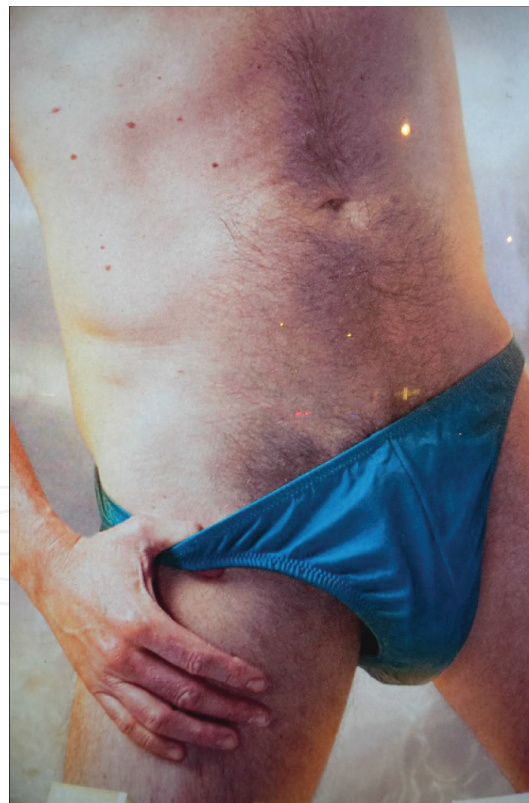


Figure 2. In order to change the paradigm of the human body image and meaning of the genitals, the proposed shift should be from a hedonistic male functionalism and the commercialised exploitation of the sexual organ (the penis as a tool), to the aesthetics and beauty of the genitals within the whole of male embodiment (the penis as an integral part of an ensouled body). The image suggests a 'more' that can seduce. The posture of the body is suggestive and open for a kind of commercialised exploitation, rather than merely an advertisement of male underwear. Public advertisement on pavement Copenhagen. Photo: D.J. Louw.

performances, visual display and poetic speech. Art makes life special, because making art involves taking something out of its everyday and ordinary use context and making it somehow special—the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

If the naked human body is indeed about the aesthetics of the extraordinary, the art of embodied corporeality, what is the implication for an anthropology of beauty in theory formation? Thus, the intriguing aesthetic and anthropological question: to what extent can the human body, nakedness and physicality, be viewed as vital elements and means of beauty in order to contribute to the beautification of life rather than the exploitation of life? How can nakedness make life extraordinary rather than a nightmare to be survived? How can physicality become a means to express humane encounters that contribute to peaceful coexistence rather than violent destruction and inhumane exploitation?

2.1. Antiquity: the nobility of human embodiment—the nude body as subject and representation of wisdom

The basic assumption for founding a theory of aesthetics in anthropological thinking, namely that the human anatomy plays a fundamental role in the understanding of harmony and beauty, as well as the expression of spiritual wholeness and beauty, is illustrated in many pieces of art in antiquity and classic Greek sculpturing.

In antiquity, the human body was a gendered subject and not an externalised object. It was only in contemporary societies that the body began to be regarded exclusively as a passive object of desire. According to Erez [11], this is evident in the censorship efforts ancient sculpture has been subject to. Modern man's refusal to view naked human bodies is closely related to the fear that too long a gaze will suggest a homoerotic interest and thus a homosexual identity [12]. In contemporary society, the tendency is that the body is viewed rather as an exclusively passive, sexualised object robbed from subjectivity and nobility than an icon of vital spirituality (**Figure 3**).

Within Greek art, the naked human body and its perfect symmetry equal beauty and should be assessed as a piece of art. Spivey [13] refers to the canonisation of human embodiment in art by Polycleitus (**Figure 4**).

For Polycleitus, the human body is from an aesthetic point of view perfect due to the tension between symmetry, balance and harmony. This principle of harmony and balance is basic to the classic depiction of the human being as an expression of beauty and therefore as human grace and nobility. Every part of the body is 'beautiful'. Even the sexual organs played a decisive role in the depiction of human embodiment as 'divine' and expression of spiritual values such as nobility, courage, grace and wisdom.

Already in *The Republic*, Plato wrote about the qualities that can heal and beautify life. It all starts with gentleness, the characteristics of a philosophical disposition [14]. Grace and seemliness of form and movement should complete gentleness. They are qualities of poetry, rhythm and harmony. And the content of poetry depends on moral character. 'So, if our young men are to do their proper work in life, they must follow after these qualities wherever they may be found. And they are to be found in any sort of workmanship, such as

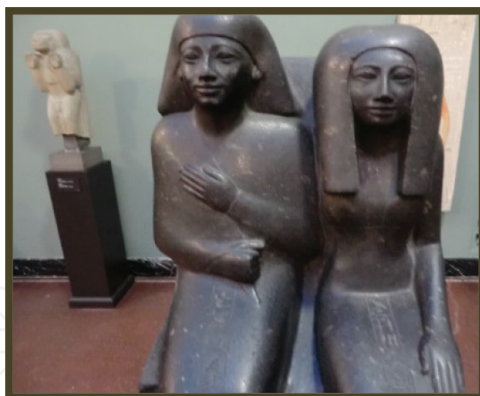


Figure 3. The statue of the priest Ahmose and his mother, 18th Dynasty 1490–1499 BC, is quite remarkable. In Egyptian anthropology, the soul was viewed as an intrinsic part of human embodiment. Often in Egyptian sculptures, it seems as if the face was emotionless. This is not the case here. The figures represent complacent intimacy and projects soulfulness. It could be described as an excellent example of embodied aesthetics. One can even ‘see’ on their faces what they are thinking: contentment and fulfilment. Permission: National Museum, Copenhagen; photo: D.J. Louw.

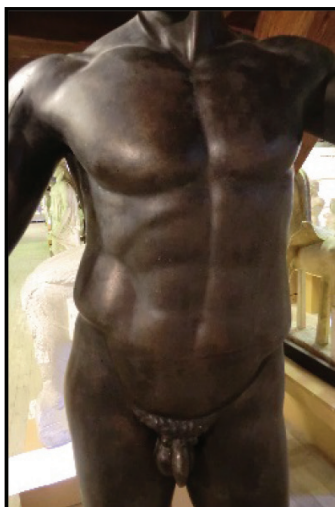


Figure 4. The image from an ancient Greek statue in the classical Polycleitus-style (around 450 BC) suggests grace, harmony, control, inherent integrity and dignified courage. Within the whole of embodiment, male sexual identity becomes ‘whole’. Permission: Royal Cast Museum, Copenhagen; photo: D.J. Louw.

painting, weaving, embroidery, architecture, the making of furniture; and also in the human frame and in all the works of nature: in all these grace and seemliness may be present or absent’ [15].

With reference to the interplay between grace, the naked human body and aesthetics, the so-called *Three Graces* in ancient art has become a classic indeed (**Figure 5**).

The following remark by Plato, underlines the fact that in Hellenistic art, nudity was removed from the idea of promiscuity. Greek art and sculptures rather were attempts to combine nudity with nobility, grace and profound wisdom. ‘Rather we must seek those craftsmen whose instinct guides them to whatsoever is lovely and gracious’ [16] (**Figure 6**).

The naked human body represents gracious movement and courageous self-affirmation. The human body should therefore be rendered not as 'ugly' and from a lower order, wherein merely sensuality is playing a role in the establishment of meaning. The human body establishes and represents the spiritual striving towards wholeness, healing, integration and harmony, despite the existential reality of disintegration and external factors that rob our human existence from dignity and a sense of well-being—the existential reality of ugliness.

2.2. Aesthetics in theory formation: the paradoxical but significant interplay between beauty and ugliness

Ugliness should be viewed as an important ingredient of aesthetics. In the *Republic*, Plato maintained that ugliness (understood as a lack of harmony) was the opposite of the goodness



Figure 5. The Graces and Cupido by Thorvaldsen. Permission: Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen, In Greco-Roman mythology, the three graces belong to the inner circle of Venus, the goddess of Love. As the classical artists pose—standing close together and embracing—they were supposed to express giving, receiving and returning; but they could also be understood to symbolise the seasons. B. Jørnæs Undated: 87. Denmark. Photos: D.J. Louw.



Figure 6. The interplay between womanhood and the creation of the beauty of life. Grace and seemliness of form and movement should complete gentleness. Sculpture in fountain, inner courtyard. Permission: NY Carlsberg Glyptotek founded by Carl Jacobsen. Copenhagen, Denmark; photo: D.J. Louw.

of the soul [17]. He described ugliness as an aesthetic quality in its capacity to instil feelings of intense emotion, ultimately creating a pleasurable experience.

Ugly is not necessarily the opposite of beauty or merely the absence of form, asymmetry, disharmony, disfigurement and deformation or even the various forms of the repugnant (the ungainly, death and the void, the horrendous, the vacuous, the sickening, the felonious, the spectral, the demoniac, the witchlike and the satanic) [18].³ Ugliness rather frames beauty within the context of the shadow side of life. As such ugliness is an aesthetic category and a kind of perception that wrestles with the danger of corruption that can destroy a sense of dignity and justice. Instead of wholeness and integrity, ugliness as a spiritual category points in the direction of disintegration and disorientation rather than merely formlessness. According to Umberto Eco, all the synonyms for 'ugly' contain a reaction of disgust if not violent repulsion, horror or fear [18]: 'In truth, in the course of our history, we ought to distinguish between manifestations of ugliness in itself (excrement, decomposing carrion, or someone covered with the sores who gives off a nauseating stench) from those of formal ugliness, understood as lack of equilibrium in the organic relationship between the parts of a whole' [19]. Ugliness thus helps to demarcate beauty within the interplay between what is significant for the healing of life and what is not.

Aesthetics⁴ implies more than the 'beautiful'; it indicates an intensified awareness that stirs imaginative imaging and poetic creativity. Aesthetics⁵ interpenetrates reality and goes beyond or beneath the surface of things by means of creative imagination. As a hermeneutical event, aesthetics interprets reality from the perspective of creative reshaping and illuminative imaging. The fact that a work of art has some aesthetic intent or effect does not mean that the image is necessarily attractive to the eye of every viewer. 'Remember that *aesthetic* refers to heightened sensory awareness. It is the opposite of *anaesthetic*—that is, a dulling or loss of consciousness—not the opposite of ugly' [22].

The concept of aesthetics is slippery for the human mind; it evades any attempt to capture or define its meaning in rational categories. However, one can say that aesthetic experiences operate within the tension between sensual encounters/subjective attraction (being struck by....) and creative imaging; it coincides with the human attempt to make a qualitative assessment regarding the value, meaning and significance of phenomena observed. It refers to a kind of qualitative scrutiny within the act of evaluative decoding.

Schulte-Susse [23] links aesthetics with the theory of perspective (perspectivism). The theory of perspective addresses the question of how to represent a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional surface, or how to represent a three-dimensional object via a material form or sculpture, so that the representation and image of the object, the idea within the object, corresponds with the proportions of the immediacy with the act of seeing, feeling and experienc-

³'Too much to allow us to carry on saying that ugliness is merely the opposite of beauty understood as harmony, proportion, or integrity' [18].

⁴Campbell and Cilliers [20] points out that aesthetics is a multidimensional concept which at least includes concepts such as judgement of beauty, experiences of sensibility, evaluative observation, and imagination (anticipation and transformation). The concept has become attenuated in most discourses.

⁵Grözinger [21] describes aesthetic experience as the practical theological endeavour which is in search of those corresponding experiences (*Entsprechung*) between the content and form of the Christian faith. Aesthetics describes a dialectical movement between presentation and withdrawal/concealment, between the *form* of the revelation and the *Being* of God.

ing. Aesthetics can thus be associated with the intention and value assessment of the subject in relationship with the viewed or observed object.

Reiner Matzker [24] relates aesthetics to the act of mediation within the tension between subject (impression and interpretation) and object or the implicit idea as related to an object or something perceived and observed. To mediate always implies an act of signifying, some *thing* is signified [25]. Mediation operates within the connections between form (*eidōs*; essence, meaning) and matter (*hylē*; ontic dimension). In the act of mediation and representation, the projection of what is observed and seen implies virtuosity: skill, competence and know-how, i.e. artistic proficiency.

The mediatory function of a medium is to communicate, to inform, to disclose and to make something knowable. Aesthetics becomes an instrument (medium), an image (means) about something (content). It transcends its own limitations in the direction of signification. In this regard, aesthetics implies acts of symbolisation (to symbolise, from the Greek *symbálein* = to link to halves) and processes of meaning making [25]. Aesthetics then expands the horizon of interpretation of human beings; it creates a grammar of mediation.

In aesthetics, there is a constant interplay between reality, image and significance, and particularly in the sense that through mediation aesthetics become the attempt to represent 'something'. This representation presupposes a kind of competence or skill that one can call 'art'. Through aesthetics, a value is attached to the product which invites the viewer to linger and to ponder, to grasp the 'something'. This moment of significant articulation implies an act of evaluation that one can call 'mediation as an act of beautification'; the mediation signifies the product as a 'piece of art' [26]. In the act of mediation, the viewer assigns artistic significance to the object. As a piece of art, the object invites the viewer to attribute 'meaning'; to imitate (Plato: art as *mimesis*) the image; to reveal and to make apparent (Aristotle: art as hermeneutics).

The point in my argument thus far is that the naked human body is not per se ugly. Ugliness is a qualitative category within the interplay between beauty and the struggle to 'save' life from corruption and abusive exploitation. Even bodily deformation should not be enough reason to degrade the body to a lower degree of repulsiveness. The body entails more than sensuality and should not be viewed as merely a lust object to be exploited for sexual gratification. The body should indeed be reframed as an icon of compassionate intimacy.

2.3. The human figure in a stereometric approach to anthropology: corporeal expression of wholeness and the quest for beautification

In an integrative approach to our being human, the body is an essential element of what one can call 'human wholeness'. In fact, the body is about embodiment; i.e. the notion that soul is an embodied entity. I don't have a body; *I am my body*. Within the existential, daily orientation in life, corporeality plays a fundamental role in the establishment of inter-subjectivity and meaningful social interaction and communication.

In Hebrew and Semitic thinking, even the bodily organs have been viewed as representations of the whole of our being. In anthropology, this approach is called stereometric thinking. Stereometric thinking 'pegs out the sphere of man's existence by enumerating his characteristic organs, thus circumscribing man as a whole' [27]. Concepts like heart, soul and spirit are

often used alternately in Hebrew poetry to reveal certain aspects of the human being. One component of our being human, for example the 'heart' or 'mind', represents the whole of life.

A stereometric approach firmly opposes any disregard of the embodied dimension of man's special status. 'Wherever any specific aspect of human existence is considered, whether it is *nēphēsh* (soul), *ruach* (spirit), *lev* (heart), or *basar* (flesh), it is always intrinsically linked with the whole of man: Man does not *have* a soul; in a very specific way man *is* soul, desire, finitude, etc.' [28]. Stereometrics does not view a person in terms of isolated, different parts, but as a functional unit (whole) within a network of relationships.

Dunn [29] suggests that a better word in English for *soma* (body) is the alternative term 'embodiment'. In this sense, *sōma* is a relational concept. It is integrated with *psyche*. According to Dunn [30], both terms (*psyche/nephesh* and *pneuma/ruach*) express an original identification of 'breath' as life force which cannot be separated from embodiment. Together with *sarx* (which refers to our vulnerability/weakness and belonging to the world) and *sōma* (which denotes a concrete being in the world), *psyche* denotes the spiritual totality of our being human within the dynamics of relationships.

In an African approach to anthropology, the body is part of the rhythm of life. Therefore, the notion of *homo aestheticus* (the human being as the enjoyer of life) is more fundamental than the aggressive approach of *homo faber* (the human being as the maker of things). What is envisaged in an African spirituality is harmony (the beautification of life) within interpersonal relationships: *Umntu ungununtu ngabantu/motho ke motho ka batho*—approximately translated as 'A person is a person through other people' [31].

One can conclude and say that beauty as an aesthetic category in anthropology refers to the notion of 'wholeness': every part of the human anatomy, the physiological, biological, neurological, hormonal components, constitutes together with the affective, the conative and cognitive, a sense of identity and integrative functionality—a harmonious whole. Whole is therefore not a static category of perfection and completeness. Wholeness is in fact a 'spiritual category' referring to a sense of integrity, identity and purposefulness. In this sense, wholeness should be rendered as an aesthetic category.

Beauty as an anthropological category encompasses the following aesthetics dimensions in an existential approach to daily human orientation and our striving to instil a sense of human dignity and meaning (significance) in life.

Beautification implies:

- *Vocation and meaning*: a sense of purposefulness, belongingness and significance.
- *Virtue and value*: a sense of moral integrity, responsibility (*respondeo ergo sum*) and sensitivity.
- *Vision and hope*: a sense of expectation, anticipation of something new and constructive change by means of imaginary creativity.
- *Volition and courage/boldness/nobility*: a sense of devotion, commitment and outreach despite resistance.
- *Vitality and embodiment*: a sense of aliveness (*L'Energie spirituelle*) [32].

- *Spirituality and zeal*: a sense of transcendence within a framework of a philosophy of life and belief system that contributes to significant future orientation and bold decision-making.

Within reference to the previous outline of the place of aesthetics in a qualitative approach to theory formation in anthropology, the human body should thus be rendered as 'icon' of soulfulness, nobility and grace. In an inclusive approach, the body includes all aspects of our being human and symbolises wholeness. It represents attitude and aptitude; it reveals or hides the inclinations of the human heart and should therefore be rendered as a sanctuary of spiritual and divine energy.

2.4. From object of exploiting desire (fig leaf) to saintly body (icon): the Michelangelesque perspective

It was the contention of George of Cyprus [33] that the word *eikōn* signifies inter alia the 'saintly body': bodily images as representations of spiritual and divine elements in life. And this is more or less what is meant by a Michelangelesque perspective.

In my view, it was Michelangelo who made a kind of 'breakthrough' in the sense that he viewed the perfect human figure as a representation of human dignity and eternal divinity. The naked human figure is portrayed as a 'perfect' and classic reflection of nobility and dignity.

One can say that it was Michelangelo who made the first authoritative statement in art that the naked human body—that body which, in Gothic times, had been the subject of shame and concealment—could be made the means of expressing noble sentiments, life-giving energy and God-like perfection [34]. The Sistine ceiling therefore passionately asserts the unity of the human body, mind and spirit. In his depiction of the creation of Adam, when Adam stretches out his hand so that it almost touches the hand of God, it is as if 'an electric charge seems to pass between the fingers. Out of this glorious physical specimen, God has created a human soul' [35]. The body becomes a soul, and the soul embodied physicality.

For Leonardo da Vinci, beauty was the moment of mystical encounter (*der Augenblick des Mysteriums*), and for Michelangelo, it was the interrelatedness of the parts within the harmonious whole of embodiment; embodiment as determined by the principle of torment and moral suffering [36]. For Michelangelo, aesthetics thrives within the tension and conflict between Hellenism (the classical ideals) and Christian thinking (the eternal idea).

From Socrates, Michelangelo learned that the purpose of painting was to present the human soul, the life of human souls, as an expression of the very internal being of humans. According to Néret [37], Michelangelo was interested only in the people he painted because perfect bodies were the carriers and containers of the idea of eternity and sacred soulfulness. Real art is actually only possible in sculpture when the artist reveals the essence (the soul) which is already embodied in the marble.

An example of the sexualised beautification of male nudity is the statue of David by Michelangelo. Western society often used a fig leaf to protect the male genitals. 'In an effort to hide *David's* nudity, the fig leaf draws attention to its relevance as an object of sexual desire. Furthermore, it casts nudity primarily as a matter of sexual desire, ignoring a whole spectrum

of cultural, social and political ideas associated with the body' [38]. The fig leaf makes it seem as though David's body is only relevant as an object of desire. 'To the contrary, Michelangelo depicts David in a context completely unrelated to sexual desire, in the moment before he encounters the giant Goliath, right when he is focused on the awaiting battle' (**Figure 7**) [38].

Michelangelo's portrayal of David had both a spiritual and political meaning. David's nudity reflects an inner tension and spirited resourcefulness in his pose and musculature so that the good of spiritual courage can conquer the bad of unfaithful blasphemy. It represents divine faithfulness rather than violent destruction and folly (Goliath). The statue draws attention to the inner qualities of courage, resolve, and faith necessarily presupposed by David's victory. On a second level, the nude pose presents political freedom for the authorities of Florence.

The tragedy, however, was that the clergy and contemporaries of Michelangelo responded with the ugliness of moralism and skewed images of promiscuity. See in this regard, the response of the papal master of ceremonies, Biago da Cesena, when he saw the fresco of the *Last Judgement*. He declared it to be 'most disgraceful that in such a sacred place those nude figures should have been depicted all exposing themselves so shamefully' [39].

The point is that with the fig leaf, David's aesthetic beauty is changed into the ugliness of commercialised sexuality and the promiscuity of sexual desires without courageous fidelity. Nudity becomes politicised and is associated with reckless power, the vice of domination and the promiscuity of sexual exploitation. Under strict censorship, sexuality is deployed for aims of social and political powerful control.

During Pius V's pontificate, the Congregation of the Council of Trent decided, on 11th January 1564, to have the private parts covered. This was the most pornographically oriented decision in the history of Christian spirituality! Pope Paul IV therefore summoned the House of Carafa Daniele da Volterra to cover the genitals. The artist who did the covering up was given



Figure 7. David facing Goliath projecting noble courage (aesthetics of the human soul expressed in the beauty of male nudity) over against brutal violence (the ugliness violence and destruction). Michelangelo, copy in front of Royal Plaster Museum, Copenhagen; photo: D.J. Louw.

the name 'Braghettone', meaning 'trouser painter' [40]. The 'trouser painter' transformed the beauty of physical beauty into the ugliness of promiscuity. The fig leaf reduced the beauty of the genitals into pornographic phallicism.

2.5. Pornography (promiscuous reduction): instrumentalisation and commodification of the human body

One can call the obsession with the body and health, through the processes of commercialisation and exploitation (marketing), 'bodyism' and 'healthism'. The naked body and the surface of the body become a social text with *religio*-mythical meaning, i.e. it refers to who we are as gendered human beings and how we understand meaning. Through the impact of the media, the body as a social text becomes a symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialisation is enacted, and bodily adornment becomes the language through which the social self is expressed in its search for meaning [41]. In this regard, nudity becomes commercialised: gratuitous nudity [42].⁶ Nudity has become naturalised to such an extent that advertisements of half-transparent underwear revealing the genitals have become normal; they have become cultural products. This tendency leads to the phenomena of gender titillation,⁷ sexual exploitation and the objectification of human embodiment (gratuitous nudity).

For example, in contemporary society, the female body tends to become an object of lust and seduction. In the social media, the female body was high jacked by business, companies, the advertisement enterprise and the social media to sell products. The commodification of the female body contributes to the fact that femininity is constantly being robbed of soulful beauty and portrayed as an idol of glamour, fame and flirting sensuality (**Figure 8**).

In ancient Greek culture, womanhood was associated with wisdom and portrayed as the object of pure love.⁸ In Hellenistic mythology, wisdom was presented by the clothed figure of Minerva, draped with soft linen to protect wisdom against folly. Together with the owl, femininity presented the wisdom of human dignity and the intellectuality of democratic leadership. Femininity was a kind of symbol of serene intellectuality to be needed most by courageous men (**Figure 9**).

In antiquity, it was not necessary and even not the fashion to put up statues of nude females because a draped female body was the epitome of wisdom and dignity. The draped figure distinguishes itself from male identity. When it came to heroic aesthetics, nudity was more

⁶*Gratuitous nudity* refers to the utilisation of the naked body for conveying information about a product across the range of the public languages of magazines and advertising. It is about nudity "on appro" without being requested. For example, in fashion advertising the relationship of the partly clothed male icon or female icon to the product is often obscure. The partly nude body confronts the viewer with something numinous.

⁷'Titillate' is derived from the Latin for tickling, or to excite another pleasurably, superficially or erotically [43]. Titillation is about portraying the body in order to arouse and to create sensuously felt emotions that stimulate human beings sexually and eventually lead to action in order to get satisfaction.

⁸Clark [44] points out that the stabilising, comprehensive religions of the world, the religions which penetrate every part of our being human – in Egypt, India or China – gave the female principle of creation at least as much importance as the male (societies of obedience). The aggressive, nomadic societies – Israel, Islam, the Protestant North (societies of will), conceived their gods as male. "It's a curious fact that the all-male religions have produced no religious imagery – in most cases has forbidden it. The great religious art of the world is deeply involved with the female principle" [44].

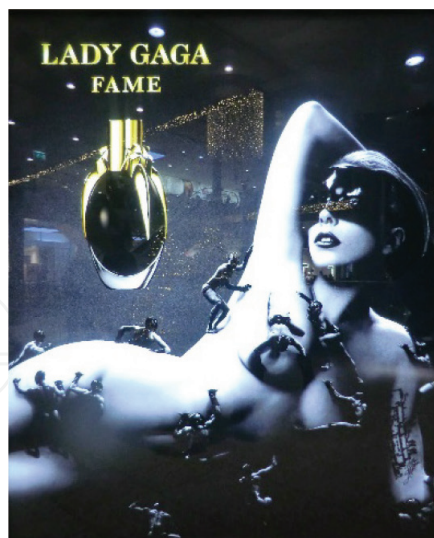


Figure 8. The female body is projected as a commodity to be possessed by male monsters and sexual driven animals. Sexuality is degraded to the level of primitive instinct and violent libido. Photo was taken in a shopping mall (Sony Centre) Berlin a week before Christmas 2012 (D.J. Louw).



Figure 9. Statue of Minerva with owl as symbol of wisdom. The goddess is clothed because her identity resides in her capacity to lead and to guide into wisdom as the drapery for meaningful life. Copenhagen. Photo: D.J. Louw.

preserved for the young athletic male body. Strength was associated with masculinity and should be used by athletes and the military to protect society. Nudity as heroic, divine athletic was something to be avoided for women [45]. Full nudity connoted more the vigour of the male body than the serenity of the female. The female figure was associated with vulnerability and should be protected in order to safeguard civilised education and wisdom. While female nudity should be protected, male nudity was associated risking one's life and should

therefore be exposed fully. The shape of the male genitals contributed to the youthful beauty of male identity, not to pornographic exploitation.

Pornography is derived from two Greek words, *pornay* and *graphay* [46]. *Pornay* is derived from *peraymi*, which means 'to sell', usually in reference to a slave or prostitute for hire. *Graphay* refers to that which is written, inscribed or pictured. 'Pornography' then literally means to picture or describe prostitutes, with the connotation of an unequal slave/master relationship in which sexuality becomes a commodity deprived of the beauty of true love (commercialised sex).

Pornography is therefore not nakedness as such (see the statute of David by Michelangelo and the paintings in the Sistine Chapel) or explicit sexual pictures or portrayals of sexual acts, or erotic material, stimulating sexual excitement. The criterion cannot be sexual excitement or fantasy, because then any stimulation or visual impression related to sexual connotations and to sex will fall into the category of pornography. The criterion for judging a work to be pornographic is sexual exploitation within the schism between ensoulment and embodiment, between aesthetics and sensuality and between *eros* and *agape*. A dualistic anthropology easily feeds promiscuity and pornography. The written (pictured/portrayed/depicted) language of the human body is then not compassionate love and faithful intimacy, but abused *eros* and carnal exploitation.

Pornography refers very specifically to *sexual exploitation and the dehumanisation of sex* so that human beings are treated as things or commodities [47]. Pornography points in the direction of the depiction or the description of the abuse of sex as power. The naked human body is then detached from virtue and hijacked for merely violent sexuality (physical and psychological violence against others and oneself). Nakedness thus then promotes promiscuity.

In this sense, pornography is the description or depiction of obscenity with the effect of violating the dignity and rights of the human person through the exploitation and commercialisation of sexuality and sex. Explicit descriptions or depictions of males, females or children in dehumanised, mutilated, animalistic, submissive, distorted, sadistic and/or masochistic positions which place and keep them in undignified, subordinate roles and positions, all constitute pornography. Pornography reduces sex to the level of animal copulation and tends to rob sex of intimacy and tenderness.

The central issue at stake in pornography is the promiscuous intention of the viewer and reader as well as hedonistic setting of lust with the intention of illegal exploitation; lust and sensuality have become detached from compassionate love and intimate faithfulness.

With promiscuity is then meant an *immoral functionalism (obscene and obscure)* in which the human genitals and body are separated from the spiritual realm of soul, meaning normativity (ethics) and aesthetics. Promiscuity makes sexuality ugly because it can destroy human dignity. By promiscuity is then meant *sexual immorality and infidelity*, i.e. the abuse of sexuality for immoral purposes (*porneuo*) [48] including illegitimate intercourse, adultery, prostitution, fornication and absence of chastity.

Immoral functionalism is about obscene reductionism, wherein the human body is isolated from its humane framework and aesthetic design, namely compassionate intimacy and soulful integration.

2.6. The spiritual beauty of the human body: sanctuary of compassionate soulfulness and icon of intimate aesthetics

It was Socrates who described the body and its movements as spiritual indications of the 'workings of the soul' [49]. The idealisation of the beauty of the human body was in Greek art closely related to the interplay between the way feelings affect the body in action and represent the 'workings of the soul'. Due to the fame of Pheidias, the sculptor who Pericles entrusted to supervise the decoration of temples (480 BC), the classic approach to represent the human body in any position or movement reflected 'the inner life of the figures' [50].

The human body is not an idol of lust but an icon of soulful aesthetics and compassionate intimacy. The human body is thus designed to create intimate spaces of human encounter, wherein the 'other' is exposed to unconditional love, compassionate caring—caring that seeks to overcome the fear for rejection and loss.

Compassionate intimacy should enhance humane authenticity, as well as sustainable friendship and an ethos of non-discriminatory equality and unconditional acceptance. The notion of compassionate intimacy is an attempt to emphasise and introduce images of companionship, trustful partner, faithful colleague and caring nurturer (**Figure 10**).

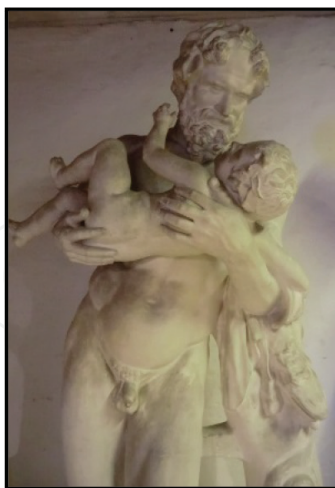


Figure 10. Plaster copy in of the Royal Cast Collection, Copenhagen. Permission from museum; photo D.J. Louw. The child Dionysus in the arms of a Sicilian found in 1594 in Greece, fourth century BC. I was totally overwhelmed by the combination between male vigour and strength combined with sensitivity and caring embracement. The genitals are an inherent part of the intimate space of care created by the 'patriarchal figure'. One can say that the sculpture portrays 'sacred phallicism' healed by compassionate intimacy. The penis nurtures and cannot destroy; the penis as an icon of intimacy and faithful commitment. The macho male can become indeed an idol of a caring and compassionate human being beyond the boundaries of merely gender differentiation (either male or female).

3. Conclusion

Embodied intimacy and sensual spirituality imply the following paradigm shifts in an anthropology of human nakedness (noble nudity).

- From the soul-body dualism to integrative and compassionate intimacy.

Embodiment then represents qualitative intimacy as the realm for creating a space for human dignity through the enfleshment of unconditional love. One should accept one's body as home: A living space meant for communication and relationships.

- From gender performance to human beautification. The body is no longer viewed and handled as a machine but is holistically enjoyed as a living organism. Embodiment represents processes of personal sensitivity and caring other empowerment.

Beauty implies more than physicality. It refers to the representation of meaning and the body as the evidence of grace and humane nobility. The proportions of the body and the harmony of body wholeness project beauty. The anatomy of the body reveals 'inner beauty'.⁹ The human body partakes in the divine beauty of creation; every part of the body contains an element of divinity and hence of beauty [52].

The notion that the beauty of human corporality embodies the aesthetics of the human soul ([53], p. 16); the human body as the anatomy of the human soul should be rendered as a deconstruction of the pagan thinking and metaphysical dualism in anthropology. The advantage of the Michelangelesque perspective on nudity is the paradigm shift from the hedonistic perspective of promiscuity to the aesthetic perspective of beauty: from the performance of sexuality to the enjoyment of sexuality. Why? It is because the human body and the genitals are not designed to destroy and to ruin, but to heal and to beautify. Beautification then means instilling human dignity and guaranteeing trust and faithfulness. The paradigm shift is from violent sex (the abuse of power) to intimate sex (compassionate caring)); from carnal promiscuity (destruction and exploitation) to spiritual aesthetics (healing and intimacy).

It is my contention that *compassionate intimacy* can help to shift paradigms regarding the meaning of the naked human body from threat power and abusive exploitation to the beauty of vulnerable sensitivity. In this regard, the human genitals become sacred instruments for the maintenance of a significant life. They are not designed for promiscuity and rape. A penis and vagina should be reframed; they should be viewed and beautified as icons of compassionate intimacy, vulnerable care and graceful harmony.

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⁹According to Greek culture, the body is evidence of divine and inner meaning [51].

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