

ular religion.” But McDougall says that Verne “frankly *romanticized* science and technology as fairy lands liberating his middle-class readers (and himself) from the tedium of modern urban life.”

What accounts for the tone of pessimism that crept into Verne’s work in his later years? Partly, thinks McDougall, it was due to personal misfortune: His wife became an invalid, and his only son, Michel, became a rake. By 1890, Verne was suffering from facial neuralgia, and cataracts destroyed his eyesight in 1900. But experiences also affected his ideas. His

early enchantment with America, which suffuses *Around the World in Eighty Days*, gradually gave way to concern about the technological colossus, and he witnessed firsthand the evils science can bring when Krupp-made cannon smashed Paris in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War. Scientists, once the heroes of his fictions, were now portrayed as evil geniuses. McDougall believes that Verne “saw the dangers of planned science, whether in the hands of governments or corporations,” but he did not fault science; rather, “what he lost was his faith in mankind.”

Naughty but Nice

“Pornographic Art” by Matthew Kieran, in *Philosophy and Literature* (Apr. 2001), The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, Journals Division, 2715 N. Charles St., Baltimore, Md. 21218-4363.

There can be no such thing as pornographic art. That’s the received view, as reported, but not shared, by Kieran, a lecturer in the School of Philosophy at the University of Leeds, who finds none of the supporting arguments convincing.

The first argument is definitional: As a matter of principle, pornography cannot have artistic value. Pornography’s sole aim is sexual arousal. Other kinds of erotic representations, by contrast, have additional aims, including artistic ones.

But why, Kieran asks, should we grant this narrow characterization of pornography? Most representational forms—pictures, novels, films—have little artistic merit, but we do not take this lack as evidence that the respective forms are *incapable* of having artistic merit. Might it not be that the stigma attached to pornography has kept genuine artists from attempting to create it? Besides, it’s far from obvious to Kieran “that there are no artistically valuable pornographic representations.” The onus, he believes, is on others to prove that such things as Nicholson Baker’s novel *Vox*, Georges Bataille’s *Story of the Eye*, Egon Schiele’s portraits, and some of Picasso’s late work are without artistic merit.

A second line of argument against the possibility of pornographic art holds that the very purpose of pornography—sexual arousal—causes pornographic representations to be “artistically indifferent”: “the greater the explicit concentration on the physiological, biological,

and more generally animalistic aspects of sexual behavior,” the more limited the possibilities of representation “in any complex and interesting way.”

Kieran replies that many choices can be made about how the explicitness is to be “treated and conveyed.” Nor is the “inherently formulaic” nature of pornography an automatic argument against artistic expressiveness. “Even where a pornographic representation is formulaic,” he insists, it may realize aspects of originality, as do, for example, many of Rodin’s pornographic nude drawings: “The specifically artistically innovative developments in Rodin’s line drawing enabled him to characterize the lines of action, sexual embraces, and actions in a more athletic, impulsive, vigorous manner which enhances the evocation of sexual arousal.”

Yet another line of argument holds that the aesthetic aspect of a work cannot be appreciated so long as our interest in the work is pornographic. “A pornographic interest,” says Kieran, “is held to be one which involves the objectification of a person’s body, in the service of arousal, by denying or precluding their first-person perspective.”

Kieran counters that many artistic works solicit an interest that precludes the first-person perspective of the represented subject. Among the examples he proposes are Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* and the literature of courtly love, in which the object of desire is idealized as an object to be possessed, and visual art by

Correggio, Rubens, the Pre-Raphaelites, Rodin, Courbet, and Renoir. All of these we appreciate as art. Kieran rejects as well the notion that we cannot take a personal interest in the subject in whom we take a pornographic interest: "In order for sensuous thoughts and arousal to arise, far from being uninterested, we must usually be interested in the subject in some way."

So what's a contemporary example of pornographic art? Nicholson Baker's novel of phone sex, *Vox* (1992), measures up nicely, Kieran says: "The arousal both portrayed and solicited from the reader is symbiotically enhanced by the literary features of the work." The book is a kind of triumphant, unholy grail for Kieran—"a novel which aims to be and is only appreciable as pornographic art."

Traces of Trouble

"Doubting Thomas" by Richard B. Woodward, in *Lingua Franca: The Review of Academic Life* (Oct. 2001), Academic Partners LLC, 135 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

The celebrated American painter Thomas Eakins (1844–1916) had troubles enough, especially of a sexual sort, while he was alive. Now, 85 years after his death, he's in hot water again, but for an entirely different reason. Woodward, an editor at large at *Double Take* magazine, writes that Eakins has been caught in what "even he himself seems to have regarded as a scandalous act." What's worse, "art historians have scientific evidence of guilty behavior."

"For many years," reports Woodward, "the artist celebrated by at least one contemporary critic as 'the greatest draughtsman in America,' and now generally ranked among the towering artists of his age, painted some of his most celebrated canvases from photographs." It's not that the photographs were the raw material by which Eakins was inspired to do hand-drawn work. Rather, the scientific evidence shows that, for some 14 years, from 1872 to 1886, the artist "projected glass-plate negatives or positives onto canvases and paper, using those projected images to dictate the outlines and the details of his painted compositions. . . . He used photographs as stencils. He traced." And because he never acknowledged doing so, it's assumed that Eakins wished to conceal the practice and cover his tracks.

How was the tracing discovered? While preparing an Eakins retrospective for the Philadelphia Museum of Art this past fall, conservators Mark Tucker and Nica Gutman began to clean Eakins's *Shad Fishing at Gloucester on the Delaware River* (1881). They noticed, through the use of infrared reflectography (IRR), penciled outlines of figures and portions of the landscape. "IRR," Woodward

explains, "uses television cameras that are sensitive to near-infrared radiation to detect what's hidden beneath the surface of things. When hooked up to optical scanners . . . IRR can see through layers of pigment and reflect back traces of freehand markings or ruled grids under the surface of the picture." The markings on the Eakins canvas were continuous. That is to say, the artist sketched entire contours without lifting the pencil from the canvas. That prompted the conservators to look at other paintings and watercolors, and led them to conclude that Eakins employed "some kind of projection technique"—a magic lantern, which projects glass transparencies, or a catoptric lamp, which projects photographic prints, or perhaps both. Woodward describes the "painstaking" process the conservators assume Eakins followed: "He projected, traced, painted, checked the results against the projected image, marked the outlines of a hand or an arm with a stylus, painted, checked, and so on across the canvas, building up the surface, always being sure in the end to cover the stylus marks."

Should any of this matter? Art historians will debate whether the findings alter Eakins's high reputation. For some, Woodward notes, the discovery of his use of technology will be of no great consequence; he will seem to have anticipated conceptual art or photorealism, long before their time. But Marc Simpson, an art historian at Williams College, admits to dismay: "We want to believe that a painter like Eakins creates his realistic illusions with skill, hard work, or natural genius, not with any kind of technological trickery." The paintings, of course, remain what they have always been.