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# Public Uses of Human Remains and Relics in History

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and Luigi Provero

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# 14 Simulacra of Eternal Life

## Ostensions, Exhibitions and the Concealment of Human Remains

*Maria Teresa Milicia*

### Introduction

*... neither doth corruption inherit incorruption ... the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*  
(1 Corinthians 15, 50–53)

This chapter presents reflections on ongoing changes in the social practice of publicly displaying human remains in Italy, both in the ceremonial form of the ostension of relics of the bodies of saints and in the museum context of exhibiting scientific collections of human remains. This juxtaposition of cases involving religious and scientific practices is aimed at exploring certain emerging trends in attitudes towards death and, specifically, in the relationship with the dead mediated by the material presence of the corpse or remains. The ostension of the body of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina in the sanctuary of San Giovanni Rotondo in Puglia on 23 April 2008, 40 years after his death and almost ten after his canonisation (2 May 1999), is at the centre of the first part of this reflection.<sup>1</sup>

The focal point of the spectacularity of the event was aimed at the incorruptible nature of Saint Pio's body—one of the miraculous signs codified in the Catholic tradition of the cult of saints<sup>2</sup>—despite the fact that the apparently extraordinary state of preservation of the corpse was the product of the aesthetic performativity of a silicone mask. The placing of masks on the face of relics of saints was nothing new: the use of wax masks, obtained from plaster casts of the deceased's face with a significant degree of likeness, emerged gradually, starting at least in the late nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The artifice of waxwork, derived from the Baroque period, reveals the dissimulation in the act of transfiguring the earthly image of a venerable body. But in the case of Saint Pio, which for the moment is unique, the aesthetic force of the perfect imitation obtained through the use of silicone annihilates the presence of the mask and the signs of death that it covers.

Was this a radical break with the Catholic tradition of the cult of relics, famous for the veneration of skeletal and mummified saints that

“shockingly transport you to what feels like a dark and primitive living past”?<sup>4</sup> Is it a confirmation that exemplifies the “denial of death” supposedly widespread in Western societies? The idea that this attitude is pervasive has been a mainstay of the social critique of modernity since the 1950s,<sup>5</sup> but it is undoubtedly controversial and debated due to its excessive reductionism, which has conveyed and perpetuated the widespread idea of a “taboo of death” in Western societies and has been used to explain a disparate number of social phenomena.<sup>6</sup> The by now obsolete picture of the linear logic and temporality of the interdiction of death has given way to a tangle of contrasting tendencies, some of which appear to be radically opposed to the underlying premise. The spectacular centrality of the proliferation of images of corpses in popular entertainment (including even documentaries depicting the various stages of the decomposition of bodies) and in artistic productions forms a picture of cultural production involving subtler *dispositifs* of negating the experience of death.<sup>7</sup>

My intention, within the limits of this chapter, is to interpret the instances of this denial as forces operating within a wider complex of strategies of immortality that “incorporate” the corpse in performative actions (especially but not always visual) that counter the destructive violence of death. In this perspective, I examine the use of masks and their sensorial impact of “incorruptibility” in the ostension ceremonies of Saint Pio and of Saint Leopold Mandić in Rome in 2016, in contrast to the skeletal “nakedness” of the relic of Saint Anthony of Padua, which was exposed to the devotion of the faithful in 2010. I will go on to examine the technological surrogates of incorruptible corpses, from the “real” face of Saint Anthony created from anthropometric measurements of his skull to the digital resurrection of Egyptian mummies and extinct human species through the miraculous art of silicone. At the conclusion of the article, I will pause briefly to consider the controversial question of the exhibition of human remains in museums, which serves as an example of how the places and practices of their ostension or concealment can become a battleground for opposing conceptions of immortality.

### **Vi Divinitatis Adversus Naturae Decreta Pugnante**

Corpses that have been miraculously saved from decomposition have been a recurring theme in hagiographic tradition since the spread of the cult of relics in the medieval period. The model is the glorious body of Christ, *a putrefatione servatu* (saved from corruption), which rose from the dead on the third day. However, it was during the Catholic Counter-Reformation that the notion that bodies preserved from decay were a sign of saintliness returned with new force. The Protestant condemnation of the “superstitious craving for relics,” which culminated in the destruction of human remains exhibited in German churches—“the sacred bones were first mocked and then vandalised”<sup>8</sup>—contributed to

the forming of an enduring alliance between the power of medicine and that of the Catholic Church in setting the boundaries between the natural and supranatural, beyond which miracles break into the world.

In the seventeenth century, thanks to anatomical knowledge acquired through post-mortem examinations of corpses, medical science was able to provide religious authorities with criteria for ascertaining the state of preservation of the remains of the beatified. Instances of “real” incorruptibility of bodies, declared miraculous thanks to the certification of medical examination, were held in high regard. The need to distinguish the true from the false stemmed from the practice of embalming the bodies of saints, widespread during the medieval period, especially in monasteries, which prompted a process of extending the symbols of incorruptibility from bone relics to entire bodies.<sup>9</sup> In particular, “the aromatic quality of the remains” became “one of the more densely metaphorical images of the perfect condition of the beatified”:<sup>10</sup> the odour emanating from the bodies of saints, which contrasted with the fetid smell of putrefaction, was a manifestation of divine power over the laws of nature.<sup>11</sup> To this day signs of miraculous non-decomposition continue to exert extraordinary rhetorical strength in discourses on holiness initiated by the mass media. It is in fact the experts called to carry out the recognition of the bodies of saints—a true secret ritual of a medico-religious kind—who in numerous interviews reveal the miraculous details of the bodies’ state of preservation. The popular expectations of signs of the incorruptibility of the flesh, an anticipation of the resurrection of bodies in eternal life, are given confirmation by the scientific attestation of the miracle.

The Congregation for the Causes of Saints—whose rules require the medical certification of the authenticity of miracles of healing that are essential for advancing the process of beatification and canonisation—and the well-known *Bureau de constatation medical* based in Lourdes both typify this alliance of powers conspiring against death.<sup>12</sup>

During the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy announced by Pope Francis in 2015, the new spectacular ceremony for the ostension of the Saint of Pietrelcina in Rome focused media attention on the phenomenon of the uncorrupted body. This time Padre Pio was placed alongside the ostension of the body of another Capuchin friar, Leopold Mandić, who was canonised in 1983 but did not become the object of mass veneration.<sup>13</sup> Of Croat origin, Saint Leopold is much loved above all in the northeast of Italy and in the city of Padua, where he spent most of his life humbly dedicated to welcoming into the confessional of his convent the crowds of penitents seeking the mercy of forgiveness and hope of eternal life.<sup>14</sup> He loved to repeat that “we should pass over the earth like a shadow that leaves no trace,” and was the interpreter of a spirituality powerfully oriented towards an otherworldly meaning of life.

Random events have a mysterious cosmic potency and it was purely by chance that Saint Leopold shared the honour of the ostension ceremony



with Saint Pio. About a month after the announcement of the Jubilee of Mercy,<sup>15</sup> on 22 April 2015 Father Flaviano Gusella, rector of the Sanctuary of San Leopoldo, took part in a public audience held in Saint Peter's Square. Thanks to a German priest who gave him his place on the front row behind the barriers, Father Flaviano had the privilege of finding himself face to face with the pope: "Holy Father, have you heard of Saint Leopold Mandić?" he asked; there followed a brief exchange of words that was sealed by the pope declaring: "He will be one of the protectors of the next Holy Year of Mercy!"<sup>16</sup> Only a few days later, the Paduan friars received a phone call from the Vatican informing them that, as expressly desired by the pope, Saint Leopold's remains would be translated to Rome to be shown to the public in Saint Peter's Basilica along with those of Saint Pio.

The friars' surprise and joy were followed by hectic preparation for the examination of the relic, which had never been exposed to the public before the forthcoming ceremony. In 1942 Leopold's confrères had planned to bury him in the bare earth, inside a non-galvanised wooden coffin and without any preservation treatments, as is the normal practice among the Capuchins.<sup>17</sup> However, in deference to the friar's reputation for holiness, the Paduan clergy insisted that a galvanised coffin be used, and in that Father Leopold was laid to rest in a recess in the cemetery of Padua. In 1963 the body was translated into the convent's church and placed in a marble sarcophagus. Following the decree of beatification (2 May 1976), a second inspection of the body was carried out by the professor of anatomy of the University of Padua, Virgilio Meneghelli, who certified its state of natural mummification. The bishop decided to remove a relic from the body to be exposed to the veneration of the faithful, and thus the right hand, with which Father Leopold had bestowed blessings, was therefore placed first in a reliquary and, from 2004 onwards, in a shrine shielded by glass coloured to lessen the visual impact of mummification. The idea of a future ostension of the entire relic was at that time very remote.

The pope's impromptu decision highlighted the problem of the inevitable "aesthetic" comparison with the image of incorruptibility of the face of Saint Pio. The friars of San Giovanni Rotondo, whose advice had been sought by the rector of the Paduan sanctuary, recommended sending for the team of artists from London's Madame Tussaud waxwork museum, which had created Saint Pio's mask. But, after a careful evaluation of the significant work involved and the limited time available, the brothers of San Leopoldo decided to fall back on the experience of Lineo Tabarin, who had created the wax mask and reconstruction of the hands of Pope John XXIII.<sup>18</sup> To match as closely as possible the high-quality results of silicone, Tabarin chose to work with compacted elastic polyurethane, a malleable and versatile material widely used in the production of soft toys. The plaster death mask, made by the sculptor Enrico Parnigotto

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in 1966, served as a cast.<sup>19</sup> Like a shadow that left no trace even of her name, a nun of Croat origin who was devoted to the saint took care of suffusing the mask with colour and, with a loving touch, refined the details. The work was also supervised by a theatre makeup artist, Donatella Zancanaro.

### Saint Leopold, Saint Pio and Saint Anthony

*He looks like he's asleep. Untouched by death. The atheists of course will say it's a fake. Some kind of wax dummy. For those who understand, no explanation is necessary. For those who don't, none will suffice. Victory to Pio!*<sup>20</sup>

When news of an upcoming examination of the body of a saint breaks, journalists lay siege to the experts in charge in the hope of receiving first-hand statements about the body's state of preservation. The enormous popularity of Saint Pio aroused equally enormous expectations on the part of the public, which were fuelled by the information released to the press and television in interviews. One of the articles from 2008 bore the title: "He is perfectly preserved." And the bishop present at the examination, referring to the state of the nails, said, "If Padre Pio would allow, it is as if he had had a manicure."<sup>21</sup> Nazzareno Gabrielli, a consultant appointed by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, revealed other details about the corpse's ongoing process of decomposition, saying that "the body was very wet," a disclosure he immediately toned down by mentioning the absence of a "bad smell," which recalled the codified olfactory sign of holiness.<sup>22</sup> The opinion of the expert, a privileged witness to the real conditions of the corpse, that Saint Pio "seemed to be sleeping" summed up the general impression formed before the ostension of the relic.<sup>23</sup>

The media coverage of the examination of the body of Saint Leopold in 2015 (6 October to 30 November), arranged in view of the upcoming ostension of the body in Rome, was limited to the local press in Padua but nevertheless extensive, focusing as it always did on the incorruptibility of the body. As was the case in 1976, pathologists of the University of Padua took charge of the examination, which had "exceptional results" according to Professor Raffaele De Caro, who told of the body's excellent state of preservation. The medical team "did not find before it merely a mummified skeleton": a CT scan of the body revealed "with a certain surprise" the presence of some internal organs that were still intact, including the cerebral hemispheres and part of the heart.<sup>24</sup> The "doctors' surprise" at the results of their examinations admitted the possibility of the phenomenology of miraculous incorruptibility, but this concession was not disclosed to the public. The scientific paper published

by the team was more explicit about the exceptional details: the mummification caused by factors that prevent the “natural processes of decomposition” had occurred spontaneously and in the absence of favourable environmental conditions, “moreover, the preservation of the ossicular chains and larynx cartilages is to be highlighted since in his life Saint Leopold exercised for many hours a day the sacrament of confession and absolution through these anatomical structures.”<sup>25</sup> In the perspective of the medico-religious tradition of ascertaining signs of “real” incorruptibility, the body of Saint Leopold matched them all, while that of Saint Pio did not.

When on 3 February 2016 the two relics found themselves side by side in the Basilica of San Lorenzo, the first stage of the jubilee ostension ceremony, the centre of the power structure that controls the order of the signs of “true” incorruptibility wavered. Accounts of the event focused on Padre Pio, and hundreds of video cameras and mobile phones were trained on his face.<sup>26</sup> One newspaper article, supplemented by photographs, merely put Saint Leopold in parenthesis: “in these days long queues are ‘besieging’ the Vatican Basilica to pray before the mortal remains of Saint Pio (and Saint Leopold),”<sup>27</sup> a disrespectful decision in very poor taste to be considered a lapse symptomatic of the visual seduction exercised by the perfection of Pio’s simulacrum of eternal life. The technology of incorruptibility had produced the miracle of eternal life through the immanence of the simulation that brings “back from the dead [...] his deceased body, incorrupt for nearly half a century now.”<sup>28</sup>

In the case of Saint Anthony of Padua, a cult of ancient devotional tradition managed by the Order of Friars Minor Conventual, the ostension was an exceptional event that gave pilgrims the rare opportunity to see the entire relic. The basilica ordinarily displays the saint’s mandible and the reliquary containing his uncorrupted tongue, while the other remains lie in a monumental marble sarcophagus on which the devoted place their hands, hoping that the tactile contact will communicate with the power of the sacred.

In February 2010, I was among the pilgrims queuing for the ostension of the relic of Saint Anthony.<sup>29</sup> When we came within sight of the transparent case, I heard a soft murmur around me, not one of prayer, but of discomposure. The sight of the saint’s skeleton—an authentic relic of different times—could not fail to arouse perturbation in those familiar with the imagery of the simulacra of the incorrupt body, developed within the newer “aesthetic formations”<sup>30</sup> of the cult of relics.

Yet a few years later, Saint Anthony had also been involved in experimental forms of devotional imagery, thanks to a digital reconstruction of his face “based on the cast of his skull, using the most modern techniques of forensic reconstruction.”<sup>31</sup> The project, coordinated by Nicola Carrara of the Institute of Anthropology of the University of Padua in collaboration with the Saint Anthony Centre of Studies, was carried out by experts

of the Arc-Team (3D imaging and forensic art) and by the Renato Archer Information Technology Centre (with its multicolour 3D printers).<sup>32</sup> To prevent any iconographic imagery of the Saint prejudicing the objectivity of the result, the forensic artist Cicero Moraes was asked to work on the basis of “essential” anthropometric data—“male, 36 years old and Caucasian”—without knowing the identity of the subject.<sup>33</sup> The operation of bringing back to life the real image of the saint did not, however, receive the unanimous approval of the devoted since the objectivity of the forensic technology was called into question when its results were compared to the iconographic tradition of the saint.<sup>34</sup> Their misgivings might appear to have been a reflection of the usual resistance of believers who are wary of science, but the matter was actually more subtle. The reductionist view of the objectivity of representation based on anthropometric data—the “blindness” to previous images imposed on Moraes is paradigmatic of this—produced a somewhat commonplace object devoid of the expressive force of the “true face” of a saint. After a temporary exhibition at the Museum of Popular Devotion (12–22 June 2014) and in the exhibition “Faces: the thousand faces of humanity,” alongside reconstructions of the “real faces” of other famous people,<sup>35</sup> the “living” simulacrum of Saint Anthony discreetly left the scene.

### Sacred Material

Silicone is a resistant and malleable compound that is extremely versatile and suited to the most disparate of uses. In addition to it being used to make the prostheses used in reconstructive and aesthetic surgery, the recent advance of 3D printers that can reproduce objects from digital models has made possible other sophisticated, innovative applications, such as the creation of anatomical models for use in neurovascular surgical simulation.<sup>36</sup> A material used in the “malleable anatomies” of the digital era, silicone restores the dream that waxwork could create perfect and lasting anatomical reproductions, which became obsolete when techniques of preserving corpses enabled the emergence of new ways to represent the human body.<sup>37</sup>

The potential of the use of silicone is evidenced by the success of renewed collaboration between artistic disciplines and scientific technologies that bring back to life the likenesses of mummified bodies and even remains of fossil “samples” from millions of years ago. In the Altamura Man Museum we are welcomed by the good-natured model of Ciccillo, a Neanderthal who lived in Puglia (as did Saint Pio) 30,000 years ago, while in the archaeological museum of South Tyrol we meet Ötzi, fixed in concentration on his everyday concerns of 3,000 years ago, unaware that his “real” mummified body rests nearby, barely visible behind the thick porthole of a refrigerated chamber. By visiting the online gallery of paleo-sculptures by the artists Adrie and Alfons Kennis and Elisabeth Daynès,<sup>38</sup>

we step into the “miraculous” dimension of hyperreality. “Artistic imitation is, as it happens, a paradoxical notion: it disappears at the very moment that it achieves perfection,”<sup>39</sup> for by achieving perfection, the principle of imitation gives way to that of simulation, which in turn removes the original referent from the image and makes it “dangerously” open to new meanings.<sup>40</sup>

Simulation acts as a cosmic force for creating new worlds that challenge the clear-cut separation between appearance and reality, between the natural and the artificial, between the authentic and the false, and between the living body and the dead body. Only apparently questioning the principles of “Western rationality.” The demiurgical power of technological rationalism is able to act directly on the code-matrix of all meanings. The creation of a synthetic DNA with an eight-letter code and the facility of genetic manipulation using the CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) technique constitute the (hyper)rational product of controlling the potential of life simulation.<sup>41</sup> As Foltyn has written, “as modern biotechnical societies continue to decode the secret of life and birth, it could be that one day those who have access to this death-taming technology will view the corpse as an anachronism, a relic of an era when people die.”<sup>42</sup>

This prospect—the exploration of the new symbolic forms created by the artists of hyperrealism—has been evoked by Patricia Piccinini and Sam Jinks among others. By utilising the techniques of digital reproduction of the models and the incorruptible malleability of silicone, their sculptures reintroduce the shadow of death that the simulation of life erases.<sup>43</sup> In this context, the treatment of the relic of Padre Pio sets the standard. The mask-simulacrum—the immortal mask of immortality<sup>44</sup>—obliterates the signs of death when it absorbs the saint’s dead body into the appearance of a single sacred material. The innovative choice of the silicone mask does not differ from the entrepreneurial tradition of the cult of relics that has always exploited “the omnipotence of the simulacrum”<sup>45</sup> to make immortality strategies effective and to successfully mediate the symbolic exchange between the living and the dead. Especially for the living who will continue to die.

### **Conclusions: *Detestandae Spectaculis de Mortuis?***

At the same time that the spectacular display of simulacra of eternal life continues to pervade the global imagination,<sup>46</sup> there has emerged with force the need for a cross-cultural ethic that opposes the public exhibition of human remains in museums, from anatomical and anthropological collections to the ancient mummies that visitors nevertheless enjoy seeing. Exhibited in the context of the “naked truth” of scientific artefacts, skulls, pieces of anatomy and mummified remains can become upsetting and disturbing signs, being of the same substance as the corpse

and therefore revealing the triumph of death over life. The treatment of anatomical samples arrests the decomposition of the corpse, preserving them like relics, but in contrast to relics (except in certain rare significant exceptions),<sup>47</sup> which are made to celebrate the exemplary lives of the saints to whom they belonged, their treatment renders irrelevant the biographical uniqueness of the deceased. The reduction of human beings to inert substances is a reminder of the corpse, without face and without mask: only a strong symbolic order can tame the uncontrolled proliferation of its power of signification and limit its “improper” use.

In recent decades the successful activism of movements aimed at repatriating the human remains of indigenous people,<sup>48</sup> strengthened by the passing of Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in the United States, has liberated the dead from the control of the symbolic order of the bio-anthropological and biomedical sciences established on the ethics of pursuing the wellbeing of humanity. Consequently, not only museum exhibitions, but also the very existence of scientific collections of human remains, display the genealogy of the “contemporary form of subjugation of life to the power of death,” the “necropolitics” that characterises the expansion of Western civilisation and on which its global hegemony is founded.<sup>49</sup> In these terms, the promise of delaying death is only a mask that hides the historical connivance with the sovereign power of the biosciences, in particular racial science. The space of the museum loses the authority of representation, quickly becoming the signifier of the presentification of colonial thanatopolitics, an experiment that leads to the extermination camp.<sup>50</sup>

The struggle for the return of the dead to their original communities takes on the value of a reversibility of the past, the possibility of re-appropriating the symbolic exchange with the dead, guarantors of the continuity of the death-regeneration cycle of life. This is not about a change of attitudes or sensibilities in the face of the ostensive signs of the corpse,<sup>51</sup> but rather of the conflict for the reaffirmation of the sovereignty of symbolic control over strategies of immortality.

The use of corpses in the history of biomedical sciences, the many different preservation methods aimed at understanding the human body up to the point of dismembering it into spare parts for transplant surgery also refers back to the same symbolic death-regeneration relationship of life. On reflection, the obscenity of exhibition concerns the unsustainable awareness of the incessant work of the “sacrificial machine,” the “necropower” of the technologies governing life and death from which no living society manages to escape.

## Notes

1. See Maria Teresa Milicia “Tecnologie della carne incorruttibile: maschera di santità e maschera di bellezza,” in *RelativaMente. Nuovi territori scientifici e proposte antropologiche*, Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani (Rome: Armando editore, 2010), 248–53.

2. Please note that in the current official provisions (2017) on the treatment of the bodies of the beatified and of saints during the process of canonisation there is no mention of the “miracle” of incorruptibility, see “Relics in the Church: Authenticity and Preservation,” [www.causesanti.va/content/causadeisanti/it/documenti/le-reliquie-nella-chiesa\\_en.html](http://www.causesanti.va/content/causadeisanti/it/documenti/le-reliquie-nella-chiesa_en.html).
3. In the Christian era, the use of funeral casts is attested starting from the fourteenth century, see Philippe Ariès, *L'Homme devant la mort* (Paris: éd. du Seuil, 1977), 255–57. The use of metal or wax masks to cover the face of saints is not subject to official regulations.
4. This was the comment by the art critic Jonathan Jones in his column for the Guardian newspaper: “From St Peter’s bones to severed heads: Christian relics on display,” *The Guardian*, 18 November 2013, [www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2013/nov/18/st-peters-bones-christian-relics](http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2013/nov/18/st-peters-bones-christian-relics).
5. Starting with Geoffrey Gorer, “The Pornography of Death,” *Encounter* (October 1955): 49–52, which made explicit references to the obscenity of corpses and the horror aroused by decomposition in the Anglo-Saxon context, and followed by the pamphlet by the journalist Jessica Mitford, *The American Ways of Death* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963) against the funeral-home sector and the use of theatre makeup on bodies, the American model became paradigmatic (and paradoxical) of the Western denial. Essential references include Ariès, *L'Homme devant la mort*, who followed across the centuries the changes of attitudes towards death, from “domesticated death” to “wild death,” culminating in the new model of medicalised death and the expulsion of the dead from the domestic space; Michel Vovelle, *La mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), who was more cautious, did not share the reductive idea of the taboo, and invited readers to consider discourses of death as a metaphor that revealed a general social malaise; Louis-Vincent Thomas, *Anthropologie de la mort* (Paris: Payot, 1975), contrasts the “good death” of African societies to the “beautiful death” of the West, with an implicit analogy between the civilisations of the past and “primitive” societies; Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) relativise the *American Deathways* in a broad-ranging comparison; Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani and Mariano Meligrana, *Il ponte di San Giacomo. L'ideologia della morte nella società contadina del Sud* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1982); Alfonso M. Di Nola, *La nera signora: antropologia della morte e del lutto* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1996) also tackle the subject of the “negation of death.” The most incisive critique of the use of the opposition “us-others” in the primitivist construction of “our” past comes from Johannes Fabian, “How Others Die—Reflections on the Anthropology of Death,” *Social Research* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 1972): 543–67; see also Adriano Favole, *Resti di umanità. Vita sociale del corpo dopo la morte* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2003), 18–21.
6. Recent sociological investigations also criticise generic reductionism, see Marzio Barbagli, *Alla fine della vita. Morire in Italia e in altri paesi occidentali* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018).
7. Jacque Lynn Foltyn, “Dead Famous and Dead Sexy: Popular Culture, Forensics, and the Rise of the Corpse,” *Mortality* 13 (2008): 153–73 and 164.
8. Paul Koudonaris, *Heavenly Bodies: Cult Treasures & Spectacular Saints form the Catacombs* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013), 23 and 150–77. On “Protestantism and the new iconoclasm,” see Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust. How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 228–46; Alexandra Walshman,

- “Skeletons in the Cupboard: Relics After the English Reformation,” *Past and Present*, Supplement 5 (2010): 121–43.
9. Katharine Park, “The Criminal and the Saintly Body: Autopsy and Dissection in Renaissance Italy,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1994): 1–33; Park, “Holy Autopsies. Saintly Bodies and Medical Expertise, 1300–1600,” in *The Body in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Julia Hairston and Walter Stephens (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 61–73; Ezio Fulcheri, “Mummies of Saints: A Particular Category of Italian Mummies,” in *Human Mummies: A Global Survey of Their Status and the Techniques of Conservation*, ed. Konrad Spindler et al. (Vienna: Springer-Verlag, 1996), 219–30; Giorgio Di Gangi et al., “La tanatometamorfosi in età medievale: un problema da definire,” in *Morte e trasformazione dei corpi. Interventi di tanatometamorfosi*, ed. Francesco Remotti (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2006), 115–36.
  10. Marino Niola, *Sui palchi delle stelle. Napoli, il sacro, la scena* (Rome: Melt-emi, 1995), 134.
  11. Paolo Zacchia, a doctor from Rome, in *Quaestionum Medico-Legalium*, 4th ed. (Avignon: Ex Typographia Ioannis Piot, 1654), in the chapter “De Miraculis,” tackles the question *De cadaverum incorruptibilitate* (235–40): “At vera cadaveris incorruptibilitas est inter miracula magnae considerationis” (239§30)—“corpora Sanctorum, cum coetera foeteant, bene olere ob id creditum est, vi Divinitatis adversus naturae decreta pugnante.” (240§38). Regarding Zacchia’s treatise, see Ariès, *L’Homme devant la mort*, 347 and 353. Bishop Caroli Felici De Matta Cremonensis entrusted himself to the medical criteria proposed by Zacchia for discerning the miracle of incorruptibility compared to the preservation of corpses by natural or artificial causes in his *Novissimus de sanctorum canonizatione tractatus in quinque partus diversus...*, “De In corruptione,” caput XIV, 187–91 (Rome: Typis & Sump-tibus Nicolai Angeli Tinaffij, 1678). The same was done by Prospero Lambertini, *De servorum Dei beatificazione et beatorum canonizatione*, 1840 ed., synopsis book IV (Bologna: Longhi, 1734–38), 270–76. In *Synopsis redacta ab Emm. De Azevedo S. J. Sacrorum rituum consultore* (Brussels: Typis societatis belgicae de propagandis bonis libris administratore C.J. de Mat, 1840) see Lucia Dacome, *Malleable Anatomies: Models, Makers, and Material Culture in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 24–55.
  12. See Clara Gallini, *Il miracolo e la sua prova: un etnologo a Lourdes* (Naples: Liguori, 1998).
  13. A visit to the respective websites of the two pilgrimage cults illustrates their different levels of popularity: [www.leopoldomandic.it/index.php](http://www.leopoldomandic.it/index.php) and [www.conventosantuariopadrepio.it/it/home/](http://www.conventosantuariopadrepio.it/it/home/) (showing the famous church designed by the star architect Renzo Piano).
  14. “La vita del santo,” [www.leopoldomandic.it/index.php/san-leopoldo/ la-vita-del-santo](http://www.leopoldomandic.it/index.php/san-leopoldo/la-vita-del-santo).
  15. Holy See Press Office, “Information provided to the Media on the occasion of the announcement of the ‘Jubilee of Mercy,’” 13 March 2015, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2015/03/13/0187/00419.html>.
  16. For the full story, see Flaviano G. Gusella, “Sarà uno dei protettori del prosimo Anno Santo della Misericordia,” *Portavoce di San Leopoldo Mandić* 7 (September–October 2015): 7–9.
  17. The practices of mummification used by the Capuchins in Palermo (see chapter by Natale Spineto in this volume) are an exception. The practice of desiccating corpses in putridaria (strainer rooms) in order to turn them into skeletons was widespread in many monastic orders in the post-classical



- age to the modern age in Italy and Europe: see Roberta Fusco, "Putridaria (strainer rooms) and Draining Practices of the Bodies: Anthropology of Death in the Modern Age," in *The Archaeology of Death*, ed. Edward Her-ring and Eóin O'Donoghue (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2018), 532–41.
18. The wax presented a problem: during the ostension of the relic of Pope John XXIII in 2018, the hands began to melt after the plexiglass display case was exposed to the sun: [www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/05/25/papa-giovanni-xxiii-la-salma-nella-sua-bergamo-le-mani-di-cera-deformate-dal-caldo-durante-il-viaggio/4380931/](http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/05/25/papa-giovanni-xxiii-la-salma-nella-sua-bergamo-le-mani-di-cera-deformate-dal-caldo-durante-il-viaggio/4380931/).
  19. At the time of the first recognition of the body and not at the time of death, as usually occurs.
  20. Comment on the video "Arrivo di San Pio alla Basilica di San Lorenzo," published 3 February 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATHjqoMLpU0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATHjqoMLpU0). Unfortunately, the video is no longer available.
  21. "Esumato il corpo di Padre Pio. 'E' conservato perfettamente,'" *La Repubblica*, 3 March 2008, [www.repubblica.it/2008/01/sezioni/cronaca/padre-pio-riesumato/condizioni-corpo/condizioni-corpo.html](http://www.repubblica.it/2008/01/sezioni/cronaca/padre-pio-riesumato/condizioni-corpo/condizioni-corpo.html). Commemorative video: "10 anni fa l'esumazione del corpo di Padre Pio," *PadrePio tv* YouTube channel, published 28 February 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUS1qo76s9E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUS1qo76s9E).
  22. Saverio Gaeta, "Padre Pio. 'Sembrava addormentato'. Intervista a Nazza-reno Gabrielli," *Famiglia Cristiana online* (27 April 2008), [www.stpauls.it/fc08/0817fc/0817fc94.htm](http://www.stpauls.it/fc08/0817fc/0817fc94.htm).
  23. *Ibid*; see also the interview: "Nazzareno Gabrielli, perito biochimico Tribu-nale Cause dei Santi, racconta l'ispezione al corpo incorrotto di Padre Pio," *Tv2000it* YouTube channel, published 8 March 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3uS1eGcmEI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3uS1eGcmEI).
  24. Felice Paduano, "San Leopoldo Mandic, intatte parti del cuore e del cervello," *Il Mattino di Padova*, 11 December 2015, <https://mattinopadova.gelocal.it/padova/cronaca/2015/12/11/news/san-leopoldo-mandic-intatti-parti-del-cuore-e-del-cervello-1.12601325#gallery-slider=undefined%20http://>.
  25. Veronica Macchi et al., "Friar Leopold Mandić (1866–1942): The Com-puted Tomography of the Body of a Saint," *Surgical and Radiologic Anat-omy* 40 (2018): 967–75, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29948041](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29948041).
  26. As already mentioned, and perhaps not by coincidence, the most signifi-cant videos, none of which were professional but filmed by the faithful participating in the event, have been removed. Those remaining are: "San Pio e San Leopoldo—Basilica di S. Lorenzo fuori le mura, Roma," *Stefano Mattii* YouTube channel, published 3 February 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEXUUaBcD3Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEXUUaBcD3Q); "Spoglie di San Pio e San Leopoldo—Basilica San Lorenzo fuori le mura," *Scatenate La Gioia* YouTube channel, published 6 February 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xMIWruySIQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xMIWruySIQ).
  27. Particularly the photo gallery: "Corpo quasi integro Sul volto una Maschera," *Il Tempo*, 8 February 2016, [www.iltempo.it/cronache/2016/02/08/gallery/corpo-quasi-integro-sul-volto-una-maschera-1001144/](http://www.iltempo.it/cronache/2016/02/08/gallery/corpo-quasi-integro-sul-volto-una-maschera-1001144/).
  28. Ricardo Saludo, "Padre Pio, God and the devil," *The Manila Times*, 25 Sep-tember 2016, [www.manilatimes.net/padre-pio-god-and-the-devil/287761/](http://www.manilatimes.net/padre-pio-god-and-the-devil/287761/).
  29. "Ostensione del Corpo di Sant' Antonio 2010," *Patrick Robles* YouTube chan-nel, published 12 May 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYGiHmbWYQY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYGiHmbWYQY).
  30. Instead of "aesthetic community," opposed to "ethic community" in the definition of Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), I welcome the proposal of Birgit Meyer, "Introduction. From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Forma-tions: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding," in

- Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, ed. Birgit Meyer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1–30 and 5–7. In the background is the fundamental role of new media: see for example the images shared in various Facebook groups linked to Saint Pio with millions of followers: [www.facebook.com/DevotidiPadrePio/photos/a.134826989870590/2467183186634947/?type=3&theater](http://www.facebook.com/DevotidiPadrePio/photos/a.134826989870590/2467183186634947/?type=3&theater), *Devoti di Padre Pio* Facebook group, posted 24 May 2019.
31. “Ricostruzione del volto di Sant’Antonio,” *Mostra FACCE* YouTube channel, published 12 June 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcgx9HQicMs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcgx9HQicMs).
  32. The complete technical documentation is available on the blog: <http://arc-team-open-research.blogspot.com/2016/06/>.
  33. The racial lexicon of the forensic identification of the corpse makes the analogy with crime fiction compelling, as highlighted by the press. “Svelato il volto del Santo: ecco Antonio in 3D,” *Il Mattino di Padova*, 11 June 2014, <https://mattinopadova.gelocal.it/padova/foto-e-video/2014/06/11/fotogalleria/svelato-il-volto-del-santo-ecco-antonio-in-3d-1.9402960#1>.
  34. The only video (in English) with comments that have not been disabled is: “What Did St. Anthony of Padua Look Like? 3D Technology Gives Us a Glimpse,” *Rometv* YouTube channel, published 11 June 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaR88gApdVI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaR88gApdVI).
  35. From Petrarch, who welcomed visitors reciting his verses, to the face taken from a mummy of an Egyptian priest assassinated 2,300 years ago: “Facce. I molti volti della storia umana” (Padua, Botanical Garden, 15 November 2014–13 December 2015), see: Alessandro Bezzi et al., “FACCE. I molti volti della storia umana. Una mostra Open Source,” *Archeologia e Calcolatori* 8 (2016): 271–79.
  36. Justin Ryan, Kaith Almefty, Peter Nakaj and David H. Frakes, “Cerebral Aneurysm Clipping Surgery Simulation Using Patient-Specific 3D Printing and Silicone Casting,” *World Neurosurgery* 88 (April 2016): 175–81.
  37. Dacome, *Malleable Anatomies*, 254–59; Fabio Zampieri, Francesco Comacchio and Alberto Zanatta, “Ophthalmologic Wax Models as an Educational Tool for 18th-Century Vision Scientists,” *Acta Ophthalmologica* 95, no. 8 (December 2017): 852–57; Erich Brenner, “Human Body Preservation—Old and New Techniques,” *Journal of Anatomy* 224, no. 3 (2014): 316–44.
  38. See [www.kenniskennis.com/site/sculptures/](http://www.kenniskennis.com/site/sculptures/); [www.daynes.com/en/hominids-reconstructions.html](http://www.daynes.com/en/hominids-reconstructions.html); an interview with Daynès is available at [www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/bringing-human-evolution-life-180951155/?no-ist](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/bringing-human-evolution-life-180951155/?no-ist).
  39. Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of Symbol* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 112. For Todorov the imitation of nature is always the imitation of an ideal model, simulation is the creation of a model.
  40. I am inspired by the theories on simulation and logics of simulacrum discussed by Jean Baudrillard in several of his works, in particular *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) and *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: SAGE, 2017 revised edition). For further critical analysis: Mike Gane and Nicholas Gane, “Introduction: Symbolic Exchange and Death Today,” in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard, 1–4; Enrico Schirò, “Simulacri e immanenza. Speculare Baudrillard,” *Lo Sguardo—Rivista di Filosofia* 23 (2017): 113–25; Marina Christodoulou, “‘To Be Dead Is an Unthinkable Anomaly’: Reversed Necropolitics and the Death Imaginary,” *Lo Sguardo—Rivista di Filosofia* 23 (2017): 127–37; Gerry Coulter, “Baudrillard in the Future,” *Lo Sguardo—Rivista di Filosofia* 23 (2017): 17–28; Zygmunt Bauman, “The Sweet Scent of Decomposition,” in *Forget Baudrillard?* ed. Chris Rojek and Bryan Turner (London: Routledge, 1993).

41. Matthew Warren, "Four New DNA Letters Double Life's Alphabet," *Nature* 566, no. 436 (2019), [www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-00650-8](http://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-00650-8); Sara Reardon, "CRISPR Gene-Editing Creates Wave of Exotic Model Organisms," *Nature* 568 (2019): 441–42, [www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01300-9](http://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01300-9).
42. Jacque Lynn Foltyn, "The Corpse in the Contemporary Culture: Identifying, Transacting, and Recoding the Dead Body," *Mortality* 13, no. 2 (2008): 99–104 and 103–4. See also: William Bogard, "Empire of Living Dead," *ibid.*: 187–200.
43. See Adam Geczy, *The Artificial Body in Fashion and Art. Marionettes, Models, and Mannequins* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).
44. Niola, *Sui palchi delle stelle*, 134, on the subject of the incorrupt body of the saints as a "mortal mask of immortality."
45. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 4. According to Baudrillard iconoclasm has always feared the inherent risk in the images "of effacing God," that is, the sole referent, and becoming "perfect simulacra, forever radiant with their own fascination."
46. I cannot develop a discussion on plastic surgery, which belongs to the same category as the simulacra of eternal life, the "cosmic surgery" of Michael Taussig, *Beauty and the Beast* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
47. See chapter by Montaldo in this volume.
48. Kathleen Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice. The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); Paul Turnbull and Michael Pickering, eds., *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation* (Oxford-New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); Maria Teresa Milicia, ed., *The Great Laboratory of Humanity: Collection, Patrimony and the Repatriation of Human Remains* (Padua: CLEUP, 2019).
49. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40 and 39.
50. Roberto Beneduce, "Introduzione. Etnografie della violenza," *Antropologia* 9, no. 10 (2008): 5–47, 8 and 18–19; Adriano Favole, "Le tanatopolitiche coloniali e il dibattito sulla restituzione dei resti umani in Oceania," in *Morte e trasformazione dei corpi*, ed. Remotti, 151–63 and 161.
51. Tiffany Jenkins, "Making an Exhibition of Ourselves. Using the Dead to Fight the Battles of the Living," in *Archeologist and the Dead. Mortuary Archeology in Contemporary Society*, ed. Howard Williams and Melanie Giles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 251–67 and 259.