



# Life Matters Journal

V. 6, ISSUE 4 — JUNE 2018



## Connection That Does Not Kill: Technology for (re)Humanization

CJ Williams discusses the ways technology can be used to heal and to hurt.

## Extermination by Hunger: *Red Famine's* Story of Lethal Injustice

John Whitehead reviews the book *Red Famine*.

## In the Future, No One Starves

How will the ethics of human beings in the future differ from our own? Sara Rose Hertz's short story attempts to answer this question through the experience of a man who is suddenly thrust into the future.



# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear friends,

The medium is the message,” say Marshal McLuhan, meaning: how we convey information is not merely throwaway packaging, but part of the package itself.

Communicating with another through a bullhorn sends a message before the words are even spoken. Communicating in a whisper does the same.

Do our technological tools treat our fellow human beings as if they were intrinsically valuable, or do those tools dehumanize them?

As rational and volitional individuals, we are called to be active participants — molders of our world. We are challenged to consider the words we use, and the avenues through which we convey both thought and action, because these tools are gifts. Are we *conscious* and *deliberate*; or do we must submit to being used by the tools we purport to use?

It's my pleasure in this issue to present John Whitehead's exploration of the factors contributing to deadly famine in the USSR. Peripherally, this book review touches on technology in agriculture that was aimed at higher production and profit, but not at human thriving — this misuse of power and misunderstanding of human value lead to a famine that killed countless Russians. I also touch on digital connection: do digital media form, or deform, our perception of others. Are they objects or subjects? Throwaway or priceless? And in two lovely pieces of creative writing, one by Sarah Rose Hertz, another by a Alexandra Moldovenau, we have a prose and poetic glance at the development of technology to the detriment of our ability to cherish human dignity.

Technology is a creation of a human hand. It looks like its maker. We use FaceBook to shame and isolate each other. FaceBook also became a global platform for expression with the #MeToo movement. Good/bad? Used/misused? Medium/message?

Do we use the hammer to hammer a nail into a new home — or hammer someone's head?

Yours for peace and every human life,

*CJ Williams*



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# Life Matters Journal

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This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, halfway attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence. We are *Life Matters Journal*, and we are here because politics kills.

Disclaimer: The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the consistent life ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.





# In the Future, No One Starves

By Sara Rose Hertz

Simon Kale's day started like any other Wednesday. He got up, brushed his teeth and sat down at the computer to write. He easily slipped into the rhythm of his novel. This would be his tenth book, and, with any luck at all, his eighth best-seller.

He was so immersed in his fictional world that he did not notice the dull, steady hum until it was so loud it shook the foundations of the house. He barely had time to stand up before there was a brilliant flash of light.

Now he was in a different room. It looked like a banquet hall, and was packed with men and women, all staring at him. The room was hung with crystal chandeliers lit up in every color of the rainbow. Beautiful flowers in boxes hung around the table.

A wave of dizziness hit him. His legs buckled, and there was a man on either side of him, helping him into a nearby chair. Simon closed his eyes and put his head in his hands. A voice cut through his disorientation. "Here. Drink this."

A glass of colorless liquid was put to his lips. He forced himself to swallow the liquid, which tasted like ordinary water. Immediately the room was still. His vision cleared. The dizziness was gone. The woman who had handed him the glass smiled at him. She was wearing a blue evening gown and a necklace glittering with what looked like diamonds. Her blonde hair fell in waves around her perfect face. Her eyes were crystal blue.

All the men and women were well-dressed, the women in beautiful evening gowns. As he looked from one smiling face to another, he noticed how attractive the women were. They all had perfect figures and young, smooth faces. The men, he realized, were also young. At almost 50, he was, by far, the oldest person in the room. There were about twenty people there.

He looked at the woman. "After effects from the travel. Don't worry," she said. "You haven't gone insane."

"Am I dead?"

There was laughter. "No, you aren't dead. You're in what you would call the future. And you are an honored guest."

She took him by the arm. She smelled of a sweet fragrance that he couldn't quite place.

"I'm Amara," she said.

"The future? I don't understand."

"We're a historical society," she said. "We get together every year. And every year, we bring a person here. Someone from the past. To share a meal with us. To talk."

"Time travel?"

"Yes. We can take someone like you from the past, but only temporarily. We'll have to send you back in three hours or so. Unfortunately we can't go into the past ourselves. It's...to tell you the truth, I don't know exactly how it works. Our technicians have figured it out.

"Is this some kind of joke?"

"No joke. Do you like the place?" asked Amara. "We wanted it to be familiar to you. And the clothes—" she gestured towards the other people, who were watching him and whispering among themselves. "Suitable for the early 21st century."

The group enveloped him. People began to pepper him with questions. "What was your life like in the 21st century?" asked one woman. "Did you drive a car?" asked a man.

"Did you really have to write on paper? What was it like to write books?" And then, "How did you feel when we discovered those things on Europa? Did you really think there was no life on other planets?"

"What?" he said to the last.

"Oh," said Amara, giving the man who had asked the question a reproachful look. "That hasn't happened yet where you're from. Don't worry about it."

Then she turned to the group, "Now I know we all spent quite a bit of money to be here, but let's not bother our guest with questions until after we've supped and had a few drinks."

Simon looked around him. "I'm really in the future?" he asked.

Amara smiled at him.

"It's all nice." Simon said. He felt dazed.

She led Simon to a table, and people began to take their seats.

A portion of wall next to the table shimmered and disappeared. Figures entered the room carrying trays full of glasses with bright liquids. The waiters seemed strange to Simon. Their hairless skin

was tinted gray, and they were dressed in simple, white smocks. The waiters' foreheads seemed to slope slightly, and their faces were a bit elongated. The nose and mouth were set in what looked like a small muzzle. Yet they stood and walked like ordinary people, and their faces were far more human than animal.

The strange creatures walked around the table, as men and women helped themselves to the brightly colored drinks on their trays.

"Amara?" Simon asked, very quietly, "What are— I mean—"

"Oh, they're simi-sapians. Biological chimeras. They work for us here at the hotel. Have a drink!"

Simon looked in the face of the waiter standing next to him. Her face was slightly wrinkled, but her human eyes looked into his. She smiled at him. He took a drink, and looked at it uncertainly as the creature silently withdrew. Simon held the glass filled with bright blue liquid to his nose and sniffed. It had no smell he could discern.

Amara, seated to the left, smiled at him. "Go ahead. Enjoy it."

"I'm, uh," Simon started, "I'm on medication. I'm not supposed to drink."

Amara smiled. "Don't worry. You'll be fine. This is JEB ViaSoma. You've chosen well. The blue one works to release endorphins and cause a surge of serotonin in the brain. It's far more powerful a boost than you get with alcohol. I think you will find it quite satisfactory. Don't worry, it's not addictive. We've made great advances in JICs since your time."

"JICs?"

"Joy Inducing Compounds," Amara smiled. "Try it."

Simon looked at the blue liquid, still hesitating. But now everyone was looking at him. With a shrug, he took a sip.

The high was instant and intense. It felt like an explosion in his brain. His vision sharpened and he felt a surge of energy. He wanted to sing, to dance, to jump up on the table. Only an effort of will prevented him making a fool of himself. "It's .... amazing," he said.

The men and women sipped their drinks and chatted among themselves. He didn't understand much of what they said, but he didn't care. He felt like he was floating, lighter than a cloud. He drank more.

There came a sound like wind chimes. The wall disappeared again, and the same humanoid figures moved into the room. They held trays heaped with food: thick cuts of meat with creamy sauce, something that looked like mashed potatoes, and what might have been cheese over vegetables. Simon didn't recognize any of it, but it smelled heavenly.

A plate was placed before him. Those around him immediately began eating, with gusto. Simon hesitated, shrugged, and cut a slab of meat. It tasted as good as it smelled.

"This is good," he said to Amara. "What meat is this?"

"I'm not sure. We'd have to ask David. He arranged the catering. I think it's product A-3."

"Is that chicken, beef, pork?"

For a moment, she looked horrified. "All our meat is lab grown. We don't eat living things anymore. I forgot that in your time you used to slaughter living creatures. It makes me shudder just thinking about it. How horribly, hideously cruel." Then she looked alarmed. "I didn't mean to be rude. I suppose it seemed normal in your time."

Looking at Amara's beautiful mouth curled in an expression of disgust, Simon realized that, now that he thought about it, it was

kind of barbaric to raise animals for slaughter.

Simon was only half finished with his food when those around him had empty plates. The humanoid waiters moved among the tables, taking dishes and putting new dishes down. Amara had a second dish, then a third, and then, while Simon was sitting back, comfortable and full, a fourth. A waiter kept hovering, trying to put down a plate in front of him. He shooed him away, but he kept coming back until Simon finally let him put a second plate on the table in front of him. He poked at it with his fork and took a few more bites.

When Amara was on her seventh or eighth plate he asked, "How can all of you eat so much? I can barely finish a second one."

Amara smiled and said, "We each have a genetically engineered symbiont inside us. It consumes the majority of food we eat. That's how we stay fit. We can eat whatever we want." She smiled. "Obesity is a thing of the past. I heard it was common in your day. Biologists have fixed that problem."

"So, you just eat as much as you want? And this...symbiont consumes most of it?"

Amara smiled. "Pretty much, yes. Every child is given the symbiont at four years of age. It grows with us and lives as long as we do. Genetically engineered. I think you used to call them tapeworms."

Simon shuddered.

"It doesn't matter though," Amara said with pride. "There is plenty of food. No one goes hungry anymore. Our labs produce as much food as anyone could ever eat. It's like that everywhere. Mass starvation doesn't happen anymore. We've also eliminated most forms of violence. War is a thing of the past. No one has killed a person in this city in a hundred years. Accidents occasionally happen. But people don't kill people anymore."

Simon smiled. He, like most writers, had often envisioned terrible dystopias in the future, worlds torn by war, disease, famine. It was great to know the future was so advanced and enlightened.

Simon had a few more drinks. With each drink, his mind grew sharper, his speech wittier. The men and woman hung on his every word. They shuddered when he told them about how frequent car accidents were in his time ("All of our vehicles are AI, very few accidents happen") and shook their heads when he told them about debates over health insurance ("All people who need it get medical care now"). He drank more. And more, mixing bright red and bright green with wine-colored glasses of fluid. Waves of pleasure passed through his body. He had never been happier in his life.

Before he knew it, he had eaten the plate in front of him and the waiter was again trying to put a plate down. He waved the waiter away and barely noticed how clumsy his movements were. He turned to ask Amara another question, but realized as soon as he tapped her shoulder and opened his mouth that he had forgotten what he had wanted to say.

Time passed in a blur. Soon Simon was nodding with the conversation, listening as if from a distance. He finally remembered what he had wanted to ask Amara.

"Bathroom?" he slurred. "Do you still use bathrooms? I need one."

Amara laughed. "Yes, we still use bathrooms. We're not that different from you."

She pointed to the corner of the room. Simon squinted. There was nothing there. "Just walk. The wall will fade away. Just walk

into the corner.”

Simon staggered up onto his feet and walked, unsteadily, into the corner. The waiters parted in his wake. The wall did disappear, and Simon saw that the bathroom was, in fact, the same kind you'd expect in any hotel.

He took care of business, then as he was leaving, a stab of pain in his head caused him to stagger. There was a pulsing sensation of pain. Damn. A hangover hitting already? Simon's eyes blurred, and he stumbled towards the door and out into the banquet hall.

It took him a minute to find his place at the table. The damn waiter was still trying to put a tray in front of him. It felt hot, stifling. With an angry grunt he knocked the plate from the creature's hand and gave it a hard shove.

The simi-sapien fell backwards. There was a loud crack as the creature's head hit the floor. Simon stared, horrified, as blood began to pool on inoffensively pale linoleum around the creature's neck.

Suddenly, everyone was silent. The remaining waiters gathered around their fallen comrade. One man was getting up from the table. He pushed away the other simi-sapiens, some of which were making soft noises of alarm. One turned to the man and said, in a surprisingly human voice, “Clor's hurt real bad.”

Simon looked on in horror. His stomach turned over. What had he done? He tasted vomit and staggered up and back towards the bathroom.

He heaved over the toilet, his mind spinning. Overwhelmed with guilt, he prayed to the god he didn't believe in that the waiter would be alright. Tears came to his eyes, and he wept softly. Eventually, there was a knock on the door. Amara stepped in.

He looked at her though his tears. “I'm so sorry. I couldn't think—I didn't mean to—”

“It's OK, Simon. Don't worry about it. Everything is fine. It's my fault, I should have realized your primitive system couldn't take that much JIC.”

“Is, is the waiter OK? Am I going to jail?”

“What? Of course not. Don't worry about it. Our insurance covers this kind of thing. Come back. They've taken it away.”

Simon let him lead her to the table. He seemed to be walking fine now. He felt sober and now wanted more than anything to be drunk. Everyone was sitting around the table. The simi-sapiens were back, taking away people's trays. The people around the table were looking at him.

“Are you alright?” one asked. They watched him, concern in their eyes. “I'm so sorry,” Amara said again. “That was really unpleasant. But don't worry, these things happen. I mean, it will probably have to be put down, but it's not that big a deal.”

“Put down? But...”

Everyone had gone back to eating and talking. Simon felt sick. But after a while, he began to get back into the swing of things. They asked him to talk about his writing process, and he did. He described to them how he came up with an idea for a novel, how he mapped it out in his head, and how he created the finished product. They hung on his every word. He found himself sipping another drink.

He began to relax, feeling warm and happy.

The future really was an amazing place.

## Baby Material

By Alexandra Moldovenau

the eggs of a Czech girl  
sperm from a Danish man  
a surrogate in Ukraine

what connects them is the hollow  
end of a syringe  
refrigerated  
trucks and shipping containers  
cryogenically cold baby material

it's worth any other connection  
you might have to erase  
a plus on a stick a tick on a box

you pay for what you get  
the tech inside

the goods





## Extermination by Hunger: *Red Famine's* Story of Lethal Injustice

By John Whitehead

Joseph Stalin took a fateful trip to Siberia in January, 1928. Stalin, soon to become the Soviet Union's supreme leader, traveled to the country's outskirts to identify the causes of poor agricultural production and food shortages. He concluded that Soviet farming was too small-scale: most peasants tended small farms that were not economically efficient, while larger, more efficient farms were in the hands of better-off peasants whom the Communist Soviet regime derided as exploitative *kulaks* (literally, "fists"). Stalin's solution was to replace small-scale farming with collective farming. Peasants would communally hold and tend large farms for which the government would provide tractors and other machinery. In the following years, collectivization of agriculture became one of Stalin's most important policies—and led to one of the worst famines of the 20th century.

This largely man-made disaster, which took its greatest toll on Ukraine (the Soviet Union's breadbasket) is recounted in *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* by Anne Applebaum (Doubleday, 2017). Applebaum, a *Washington Post* columnist and author of two other books on Stalin's regime, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Gulag*, draws on Soviet archival documents, oral histories, memoirs, contemporary journalism, and secondary sources to reconstruct the story of what Ukrainians call the *Holodomor*—roughly "extermination by hunger." The result is a clearly written, often gripping, popular history of an event that offers defenders human life and dignity much to ponder and mourn.

Collectivization and famine unfolded in the Soviet Union during 1928-1934. Various agents of the Soviet regime—including local communist parties, the secret police, and thousands of working-class activists from the cities—tried to force peasants to abandon their old farms and join the new collectives, to which they had to turn over their livestock and tools. Meanwhile, farmers desig-

nated as kulaks lost all legal rights and had their property confiscated by methods that ranged from progressively more severe taxation to sudden, violent seizure. Dispossessed kulak families would be sent to the *gulag's* concentration camps; into exile in other parts of Soviet Union, where they would have to eke out a living; or to the cities to become workers in Soviet factories.

Collectivization stalled around 1930 in the face of fierce, often violent, peasant resistance. Some peasants rioted, beating up or killing police or other representatives of the Soviet regime. Mobs of peasant women confronted Soviet officials to demand the return of their property or seized grain and other materials from the collective farms. Other peasants turned to more organized armed rebellion. Many peasants perversely—and self-destructively—killed their own livestock and ate, sold, or hoarded the meat rather than hand the livestock over the collective farms. The number of horses, cattle, and pigs in the Soviet Union fell by about half between 1928 and 1933 and the number of sheep and goats fell even more dramatically.

Despite peasant resistance, the Soviet regime's superior power prevailed and most peasants were made to join collective farms. Soviet agriculture had been devastated, though. Farmers were unmotivated (and reduced in numbers because of the purges of kulaks), livestock was scarce, the promised machinery from the state was often shoddy, and the violent process of collectivization disrupted the normal planting routine. Also, drought struck Ukraine, Russia, and Kazakhstan in 1931. By autumn 1931, Soviet agriculture was not going to meet the expected state quotas for grain production. Cases of starvation occurred in Ukraine and elsewhere by spring 1932.

Collectivization's failure posed serious problems for Stalin. He had staked his political standing on the policy. Grain was a vital export that allowed the Soviet Union to buy equipment for its factories. Fear of internal and external opponents might also have shaped Stalin's thinking, as we shall see. He opted, in 1932, to take a hard line. Ukraine was given a completely unrealistic quota of grain (over 4 million tons) to produce for the regime. Grain exports, while reduced, were not stopped. Moreover, Soviet officials adopted a series of draconian policies to keep grain from being diverted from state quotas.

Theft of grain or anything else from collective farms became a crime punishable at best by 10 years in prison and at worst by death. Farms and villages in Ukraine and elsewhere that did not meet their grain quotas were "blacklisted" and subjected to penalties: they could not purchase manufactured goods, trade agricultural products, or use tractors and other machinery. To keep peasants on the collective farms—and prevent refugee problems—the borders of Ukraine and other regions were closed and peasants were forbidden to migrate to cities.

Starvation peaked in Ukraine in early 1933. After that point, the government began to relax its policies: quotas were lowered and in some cases replaced with a tax, while food and other aid was provided to Ukraine. By 1934, peasants were allowed to grow food on private plots for their own use. The damage had already been done,

The result is a clearly written, often gripping, popular history of an event that offers defenders human life and dignity much to ponder and mourn.

however. Precisely how many people died of hunger in Ukraine is unknown. Applebaum cites Ukrainian demographers who reviewed available records and concluded 3.9 million Ukrainians died because of the famine. (Historian Timothy Snyder, in his book *Bloodlands*, estimates that the famine also claimed about 2 million lives in other parts of the Soviet Union.)

Applebaum tells this horrifying story well, including telling details about the famine's effects. Starvation caused people to resort to measures such as eating normally inedible fare: wild animals such as squirrels and frogs; pancakes made from crushed acorns, leaves, or grass; or boiled leather shoes. Some resorted to cannibalism.

*Red Famine* has flaws: the number and complexity of policies issued during this period and the Soviet institutions involved in carrying them out are sometimes hard to keep straight. The book would have benefited from a clear chronology of events, perhaps as an appendix. Moreover, while the focus on Ukraine is understandable given the famine's severity there, a more wide-ranging history would have been welcome. Collectivization was imposed throughout the Soviet Union and millions starved outside Ukraine. More attention to these other famine victims would be welcome.

Beyond its historical importance, the famine should interest consistent-life-ethic advocates for how it illustrates three characteristics of massive, lethal injustice:

1. *Escalating repression and rebellion.* Soviet policy toward peasants could be seen partly as a defense against perceived threats to the regime. Applebaum provides useful historical context: collectivization came only a decade after the Russian Civil War, in which Communist control of Ukraine was undermined by peasant rebellions and Ukrainian nationalists supported by neighboring Poland. Veterans of the earlier rebellions took part in the armed resistance to collectivization in 1930. Soviet officials' worried that resistance to collectivization was a repetition of the Civil War-era resistance. Fear of open revolution might well have contributed to Stalin taking such a hard line. When Ukrainian Communist Party officials subsequently reported hunger among peasants or criticized high grain quotas, as they did in the early 1930s, this could have seemed to Stalin another sign his rule was being undermined. His comments in August 1932 are revealing: "[W]e may lose Ukraine...Keep in mind that the Ukrainian Communist Party includes more than a few rotten elements, conscious and unconscious [nationalists] as well as direct agents of [Poland]. As soon as things get worse, these elements will not be slow in opening a front within (and without) the party against the party." Thus, repression and rebellion fed each other in an escalating pattern. (Would Soviet peasants have fared better if they had resisted in wholly nonviolent ways? Probably not, but they could hardly have fared worse.)
2. *Demonization and scapegoating.* Repressive, paranoid authorities can identify demon figures who can be blamed for problems. Both nationalists and kulak peasants served this purpose for the Soviet regime. Like many demon figures, the kulaks were ill-defined—how wealthy a peasant had to be to qualify as a kulak was unclear—but vagueness allowed Soviet authorities to apply the label freely as political neces-

sity demanded. Peasants too poor to be kulaks might be designated "kulak agents." One peasant woman who criticized collectivization was accused of having a "kulak quirk in her mind." Even the chief of the Soviet secret police expressed concern at one point that "middle and poor peasants" were being branded as "dyed-in-the-wool kulaks."

3. *Suppressing victims' memory.* The Soviet regime tried in various ways to cover up the famine's loss of life. Although provincial and national death records were kept, other evidence was suppressed. Some local authorities confiscated or destroyed registries of deaths (one claimed that recording deaths was "in the hands of class enemies--kulaks"). When the 1937 census—the first after the famine—found Soviet population included 6-10 million fewer people than expected, the census was scrapped and a new, ideologically acceptable one created. For good measure, the census bureau's head and his colleagues were executed. As one Soviet journal explained, "Enemies of the people set themselves the goal of distorting the real number of the population."

Defenders would do well to remember these three patterns and watch for them in the contemporary world. The first two warn that massive, lethal injustice may be ongoing; the last warns that such injustice is being forgotten and is therefore more likely to be repeated. Then and now, erasing the victims of atrocities from history make us less vigilant against atrocities in the future. *Red Famine* serves as a valuable corrective to this danger.



CONSISTENTLY QUOTABLE

"The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that is the essence of inhumanity."

— GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

# Moth and Myth

SCIENTIFIC OPINION

WELCOME TO OUR FIRST "ASK THE SCIENTIST" PANEL, IN WHICH WE ASK SCIENTISTS HARD-ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS!

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON EVOLUTION?

TO NOT TEACH THIS INFORMATION IS TANTAMOUNT TO CHILD ABUSE!

THESE THEORIES ARE CRITICAL FOR OUR NEXT GENERATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND.

ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL INFORMATION THAT EVERYONE MUST KNOW!

WE KNOW TOO MUCH ABOUT THIS THEORY FOR IT TO BE CONSIDERED MERE FICTION!

WOW! GREAT RESPONSES! WHAT ABOUT VACCINATION?

MANDATORY VACCINATIONS SHOULD BE ENFORCED!

IF YOU DON'T VACCINATE YOUR CHILD, YOU MIGHT AS WELL KILL YOUR CHILD NOW!

BABIES CAN'T PROTECT THEMSELVES! THAT'S WHY WE, AS A SOCIETY, MUST PROTECT THEM THROUGH COMPULSORY VACCINATIONS.

DON'T LET YOUR SELFISH BELIEFS HURT YOUR INNOCENT CHILD!

YOUR SCIENTIFIC IGNORANCE IS KILLING OR MAIMING TOO MANY OF THE MOST VULNERABLE IN OUR SOCIETY!

BRAVO! NOW, WHAT ABOUT ABORTION?

...ANYTHING?

MAYBE YOU CAN TALK ABOUT WHEN LIFE REALLY BEGINS?

I THINK THAT'S A REALLY COMPLICATED MATTER THAT EACH WOMAN NEEDS TO DECIDE FOR HERSELF SO SHE CAN MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE.

YEAH!

YEAH!

FAIR ENOUGH. HOW ABOUT SMOKING DURING PREGNANCY?

SO SELFISH.

SHE SHOULD PUT ASIDE HER TEMPORARY DESIRES FOR THE CHILD'S BENEFIT AND GIVE UP SMOKING!

THREE WORDS: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES.

SHE IS DESTROYING HER CHILD'S CHANCE AT LIFE BEFORE THE CHILD EVEN HAS A CHOICE!





# Parkland and Columbine, Photoshop and Tech Paradigms: Do Images Dehumanize?

By Kathryn Malnight

When Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold shot up Columbine High School in 1999, a firestorm of questions and theories erupted. Some said it was bullying. Others said it was bad music. But there was something that could not be denied as a factor: the impact of violence in the media, and the dehumanization of human individuals that was imprinted on them by it.

“Try to hit the tree,” Eric says to Dylan in one of the Basement Tapes, a series of home videos by the two boys. Dylan nails the tree.

“Imagine that in someone’s f\*\*\*ing brain!”

The boys had a fascination with both guns and media — they frequently played and cited in their journals a game called *Doom*. And in the wake of the recent horrific shootings in Parkland, FL, politicians from our president down have cited the virtual violence portrayed and played in video games as formative to the shooter.

In the case of the Columbine shootings, the media (singers, movies, and video games) made causing harm or death common and acceptable. By portraying humans as weapon-crazy in video games, or as murderers in movies, and then roleplaying as those people, we take the value out of them and others. We make them perpetrators (or objects of) death and violence. When people — especially kids — see this, they find it acceptable to act that way, as if they were a soldier in the war game and “first-person-shooter,” *Call of Duty*. Or like the Slenderman girls, who, after playing the computer game *Slenderman*, attempted to murder their twelve-year-old friend.

This act of dehumanization can also affect us inwardly. Gina D. (pseudonym used) has told us about how models and photoshop incite her to starve herself, and make her embarrassed to be seen by others. Photoshop use is proven to influence disordered eating,

and in some cases full-on life-threatening eating disorders. Seventy-eight percent of girls age seventeen are disgusted by their bodies. Their human bodies — seen as dehumanized objects through the lens of technology used to distort images. Hanna M. (pseudonym) also reports that her anorexia was fueled by Photoshop.

“Every time I was about to give up and eat, I saw a magazine and I started all over again.” Girls see unreal, falsified images, and try to remake themselves into objects..

We may live in a society that is programmed to dehumanize through our tools — to maul people into pieces. Technology heightens this. Babies are recycled as “tissue” (or rebranded by Planned Parenthood in bubblegum pop pink as mere “product of pregnancy”), gun violence victims become names in a Facebook article, but for hype, not as humans.

As a society, there needs to be a change. This media is not solely to blame, in our own lives we need to actively work to see people in true color, as humans like ourselves, to see violence not as some game or as “*something happening in the Middle East*.” There needs to be a change in our use of images, technology, and art. To see events as they are: happening to fellow human beings. To see other people as human — like us.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Forbes. “Trump Blames Violent Video Games,” February 22, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2018/02/22/trump-blames-violent-video-games-for-school-shootings-heres-why-hes-wrong/#2c6c318967f3>

<sup>2</sup> Girl Guiding. Girls’ Attitudes Survey. London, UK. 2016. Registered Charity. <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2016.pdf>



# Connection That Does Not Kill: Technology for (re)Humanization

By CJ Williams

## “I daresay,”

remarked J.R.R. Tolkien in a letter to his son, “[Technology, specifically the wireless] had some potential for good, but it has in *fact become mainly a weapon for the fool, the savage, and the villain to afflict the minority with...*” [emphasis added].<sup>1</sup>

As I sit today, mulling the conversations I’ve had recently with friends and colleagues about technology’s ability *to aid or to kill*, to promote human dignity or to destroy it, this quotation from Professor Tolkien summarizes our exchanges nicely.

What is technology? I think the clearest definition of the term, and most useful for our purposes, is *a means to an end*. Is it inherently evil? Luddites say so (as does Boston College philosophy professor Peter Kreeft, jokingly, and writer Wendell Berry, less jokingly). Technophiles say no; and transhumanists, those who believe that the human race can evolve beyond its current physical and mental limitations by means of science and technology, take the tools as gods, ipso facto. But as a *means*, technology is by definition an object to be used, and as in the case of a hammer, it can be used to hit a nail into a house wall or a nail into a head.

Today, we encounter an overwhelming myriad of technological tools. Rather than focus on whether the tools as such are dehumanizing, it is much more revealing to focus on how they are applied. Focusing on application gives us the ability to see where we have power, and to use our tools with human compassion, instead of remaining used, victimised, or driven by them.

Tools are inanimate. Their uses, however, amplify and illustrate the tendencies of individuals and cultures to use or to cherish human lives. As Tolkien goes on, the wireless serves to “...afflict, and to destroy thought. Listening has killed listening!”

*Listening has killed listening.*

*Is this because listening is a dehumanizing act? Or opposed to hearing?* No. Listening, in the case of the wireless radio, had become for many an addiction; personal connection, and the ability to sit in silence with someone had been superseded — in Tolkien and his son’s experience — by the free flood of noise, news, and chatter poured non-stop from the receiver. Music! Conversation!

Connection? Understanding?

Perhaps we see the same dehumanizing *use* of digital media today. Our technology is not bad; but our technology has become broad and bullying, larger than we are. Social media has the power to connect us across great distances. But does it allow us to see? To see the other, the human in our connection? Or is it merely expedient, an efficient way to make use of another human being; capitalize on their time; demand more work; plug in more activity...

...and never stop to see. Never *listen*. Has connecting killed connection?

As a friend in Silicon Valley remarked, “Adding technology can certainly turn strong ties into weak ones, but it also creates relationships where none existed before.” Tolkien, also, writes, technology had “*some potential for good*.”

In Silicon Valley, another friend and a few others have used digital tech to create the app *Assist Her*, which connects pregnant women with immediate human aid and relationship in their area when they do not know what do. In Tennessee, Jimmy Mitchell and his colleagues at *Love Good Culture* take and use the current form of audio media — podcasting — to curate art and music that deliberately explore the glory, beauty, and agony, and of human existence.

In both cases, technology is a tool at the service of human dignity, beauty, and value.





In both cases, the creators of these tools make space for listening and for connection.

On the flip-side, it was brought to my attention that Mark Zuckerberg modeled Facebook not off a collaborative communal experience and not with the goal of listening to friends. His “face-book” was rooted in the dignity-effacing experience of dog-eat-dog elite universities. His motto could have read, “Get liked, be someone, or get lost.” The *like* system itself is evaluative and objectifying, rather than humanizing.

In evaluating technology today, whatever the specific tool is — hammers, nuclear energy, social media, or virtual reality — let’s not accept or dismiss the tool simply because of what it is. Like Tolkien,

**Our tools are power; and  
when used, they have the power  
to dehumanize, depersonalize,  
and objectify our fellow  
human beings — or to serve,  
free, and rehumanize them.  
Technology is not a problem, nor  
is it a solution.**

we can look at how it is used. Our tools are power; and when used, they have the power to dehumanize, depersonalize, and objectify our fellow human beings — or to serve, free, and rehumanize them. Technology is not a problem, nor is it a solution.

As G.K. Chesterton once wrote in to a newspaper, answering the newspaper’s question, “What’s wrong with the world?”

“My dear sir, I am. Yours truly, G.K.”

Who’s using the technology? Who is making it?

My dear sir, yours truly...

Let us not be fools or savages, afflicting the vulnerable, or those in the minority — women, preborn children, the ill or disabled, or any other of our fellow human beings — with our technological power. May we connect to cherish and make space to listen. May our tools and tech be — like *Assist Her*<sup>2</sup> and Jimmy’s podcast — connection that does not kill connection, but creates authentic community.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien (ed. Humphrey Carpenter) *Letters of JRR Tolkien* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.helpassister.com>

# Interested in getting involved?

Want to join the movement against aggressive violence? For information on volunteering or writing for the next issue of *Life Matters Journal*, send an email to [info@lifemattersjournal.org](mailto:info@lifemattersjournal.org).

For information about available internships and upcoming events, check out our website:

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