

Why the rush to see someone die? People climb to the top of the wall, strain forward, and jostle others, frantic to see with their own eyes the end of life (plate 1). Anticipation increases, sensation intensifies, but what can be seen at such a moment of turmoil and uncertainty? Those eager to see could turn to the body of the man already hanging from the scaffold, now beyond life and available for observation. Yet they have moved to the other end of the wall in order to have better access to the next hanging. All eyes search in expectation that this time something about the transition from life to death might become visible. The people in the crowd do not look to the past—the man already dead—or even to the future, the man being pulled up the ladder but still out of their sight. Instead they activate a present moment, a sliver of time in which potential is unleashed but disruption holds sway. For us, those looking at the drawing rather than attending the execution, time works differently. We are offered a strategic viewing point: the two men subjected to the punishment of hanging are paired for us as a before-and-after image. Each man is a discrete point in time within the narrative of execution, but also the same human body in different states of being. Time can flow in opposite directions: from right to left, one man has just been executed and a second will soon follow; from left to right, the living body is transformed into the lifeless corpse. But does this opportunity for attentive reflection at the threshold of death reveal any more about this transition than the immediate moment that belongs to the crowd of onlookers? Probably not, but what it does suggest is that while the crowd, by being in the present moment, feels much but sees little, the viewer of the drawing, which has been organized for extended observation, sees much but does not feel enough.

The desire to see the transition between life and death is usually regarded with suspicion and even moral indignation. As Michel Foucault wrote, “Capital punishment remains fundamentally, even today, a spectacle that must actually be forbidden.”<sup>1</sup> In early modern Europe, the people who attended public executions, and claimed the right to see who was executed and how, were frequently described as aggressive, disruptive, and vengeful.<sup>2</sup> Michel de Montaigne, who was among the first to argue against the use of torture in public punishment, declared that at times the crowd at executions could be much more cruel than the cannibal of the New World.<sup>3</sup> Yet the unruly crowd was necessary to the sovereign’s authority over the body and imposition not only of death but also of extreme pain through cutting, quartering, and dismembering.<sup>4</sup> In the drawing, the crowd expresses frustration and anger as it anticipates the next hanging, but the event has also become the prerogative of a much more dispassionate witness, the observer of the drawing and its meticulous display of the techniques of execution. The formation of new knowledge depended on careful visual observation, and the intersection of life and death was increasingly important to anatomical study, which attempted to acquire human bodies for research as soon as possible after execution.<sup>5</sup> The anatomist Andreas Vesalius did not even wait for bodies to be brought down from the scaffold to pursue his research:

“Persons who have been hanged in summer and put on a cross as is customary in my country and in France, swell up to an enormous size within a few days after their execution as if they were bladders distended with water.”<sup>6</sup>

In the drawing, the force of bodily punishment has not ended, but attentive observation has already begun. Foucault’s well-known argument on the shift from the public spectacle of punishment to the disciplinary practices of the jail presupposes the displacement of violence in the formation of knowledge, especially in the human sciences.<sup>7</sup> Yet while the official imposition of physical violence came under attack, it did not disappear. Instead, it was reconstituted elsewhere—for instance, in representations of travel to distant lands, where encounters with unknown people frequently turned into excessive acts of carnage. The study of anatomy, like public punishment, developed strategies to deal with increasing concerns about the visibility of physical violence, including the institution of the public anatomy lesson, which was delivered annually to a general audience, usually during Carnival, and presented an alternative to the dissections carried out privately in hospitals and universities.<sup>8</sup> The anatomy lesson remained a highly unstable event and was, like Carnival, constantly subjected to official regulation.<sup>9</sup> At times it served the study of anatomy, especially in relation to teaching. Yet for many anatomists, including Jacopo Berengario da Carpi and Andreas Vesalius, the public anatomy lesson was a distraction from the proper work of anatomy and did little to inform its audience and even less to advance medical knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

In this book, I examine how anatomy’s imposition of physical violence on the human body produced a new kind of image of the body. As the genesis of the anatomical image, violence became the constitutive component of a body conceived as reenacting its actual fragmentation and its imagined reconstruction. At the level of the image, this seemingly continuous narrative becomes an inversion, transforming the act of violence while retaining its memory.<sup>11</sup> For many people, anatomy was associated with the defilement of the dead and with alarming accounts of the illicit acquisition of bodies for dissection. Scholars acknowledge that the practices of anatomy were regarded with suspicion and fear, and most assume that visual images were a means of concealing or even neutralizing these practices.<sup>12</sup> Yet the inescapable memory of the body’s destruction became an indispensable tool precisely because it could claim the disclosure of previously unknown information about the body and simultaneously harness the energy unleashed by the force of this destruction.

The anatomical image had a stake not only in the display of violence but also in the transformative power of violence. In this kind of image, the dismemberment of the body became a performance of the destruction that had already taken place. The performance itself started with the stripping of clothing at the time of punishment and continued with the penetration and removal of the skin, flesh, and fat, whether as part of punishment at the side of the scaffold or on the table of anatomical dissection. Not all images explicitly reveal the crucial link between death under the

authority of the state and reconstitution through anatomical procedures, but the link is implied in the performance itself, which increasingly traced a line between the imposition of violence and the revelation of knowledge about both life and death. In the image, the unveiling of the body promises the removal of all obstructions and in the process produces forms of erasure that are presumed to stand in the way of truth: family and individual identity, geographical belonging and social standing, and even, with the denial of proper burial, the distinction between life and death. Nudity, according to Giorgio Agamben, is always experienced as a process of denudation, never as an action completed or possessed. The same may be said of the anatomical image, which enacts the process of dissection as a search for knowledge but also works to reconfigure the act of violence as a process of erasure that must be extended endlessly for truth to emerge. Agamben traces the link between denuding and knowledge to Genesis and the shift from the “theological signature” of the body’s perfection in Paradise to the exposure of the body’s ontology as human after the Fall. If Adam and Eve suddenly recognized their state of nakedness, argues Agamben, it was because the clothing granted through God’s grace had previously covered the body’s inherent state of human imperfection. But the discarding of the clothing of grace also uncovered the desire for knowledge, although to know nudity is not necessarily to have knowledge of something but rather to know “only an absence of veils, only a possibility of knowing.”<sup>13</sup>

Anatomical dissection entailed not only the total denuding of the body but also its reassemblage, a process that brought increasing attention to the body as a fabricated entity with future potential for change. As others have noted, anatomy, by producing knowledge through the act of cutting and separating body parts, presumed the reassemblage of parts that would form a new artificial body.<sup>14</sup> The anatomical image produced bodies that existed in the interstices between annihilation and animation and oscillated between human and artificial life. On the surface, this type of image approximated the physical appearance of the human body in startling ways, especially in the case of the wax model. But resemblance did not always mean physical likeness, and it frequently concealed difference. The shift from print to wax sculpture, which also entailed a shift from printed book to a space of display, contributed to the new concern with the materiality of the body and altered the image from simulation to artificial substitute. Both print and wax sculpture introduced technological and artistic innovations that radically changed the image of the body as much as they changed the image itself. This important but neglected aspect of early modern anatomy brought into tension the replication of the human body and the attempt to exceed human limitations. I argue that the early wax model and the articulated skeleton should be regarded within a larger history of the simulation of artificial life that included the automaton. Would these new bodies return to the perfection lost in the Fall, or would they be transformed through new models—for example, antique sculpture, recently unearthed and inciting doubts about the time

line of the Fall described in the book of Genesis? Certainly these bodies complicate the already blurred boundaries between nature, technology, and God.<sup>15</sup>

The anatomical image followed no prescribed formula for depicting the body. On the contrary, violence's force remained unpredictable and introduced a range of yet undetermined transformative possibilities. The image, especially in its early stages, was highly experimental in relation to the needs of anatomy itself, and its incongruous components of destruction and creativity gave a remarkably wide scope to what could be produced. Considered through the lens of violence, the anatomical image reveals the extent to which the imaginative possibilities of visual representation contributed to the formation of early modern anatomical knowledge.

In the many exchanges between body and violence, the anatomical image recalibrated established notions of flesh and bone and confronted questions on what exactly constituted the human body. On the one hand, arguments for the unity of embodiment held flesh and blood to be the essential life force and the experience of violence the source of pain and suffering against which the body struggled. On the other hand, new arguments for the structure of the body asserted the primacy of bone and muscle in the production of the body's state of animation, interconnecting physical energy with new ideas of free will and self-determination. Instead of the constant process of mutation associated with embodiment itself, the body as an assemblage of parts implied a more outward direction of internal and external forces. These notions of the body, however, were never entirely separate. For an image with its genesis in the act of physical annihilation, violence was how bodily matter was tested and made to reveal its truth. Some anatomical images foreground the power of violence to change the body through destruction and reconstitution, and imagine the mechanics that would improve human animation and challenge natural mutation. Others, especially those that retain a connection to the state of embodiment, are less confident. But none could fully erase the question of pain.

How do the transformations of the dissected body relate to its status as object of study, an issue rarely addressed in anatomical studies? Is this the body sacrificed rather than killed, which, according to René Girard, retains a liminal place in relation to authority's imposition of bodily violence?<sup>16</sup> The status of the dissected body has been ignored even though the relation between public punishment and anatomical dissection continues to be the focus of disagreement. Not all bodies used in early modern dissection had been condemned to death for criminal acts, but a decisive link was forged in the sixteenth century between the criminal body and the object of dissection, and not only because the growth of anatomical research created a new demand for corpses.<sup>17</sup> The performance of dissection, like that of punishment, was made to strip the body of its place in the world. Anatomical practices attempted to challenge the state's authority over the human body, even duplicating some of the rituals of public punishment. According to Cătălin Avramescu, "Once the executioner has been transformed into a public functionary, there is one other personage

alone who still shares with the cannibal the domain of bodily disposal: the physician.”<sup>18</sup> The executioner and the physician had shared persistent rumors of unspeakable bodily cruelty and were constantly paired in relation to new forms of producing pain. Reconceived as having regressed from civil to natural law, and even as having renounced natural law, the criminal was to be exiled to the lands of cannibals.<sup>19</sup> The criminal would now become an inhabitant of the state of nature, comparable to the disruptive crowd and the savage cannibal. In these guises, people were moved outside civil law but also closer to new domains of knowledge, including disciplinary practices in prisons, ethnographic studies, and anatomy.<sup>20</sup>

Violence, as an active component in the formation of the anatomical body, challenges the scholarly tendency to separate the development of medical knowledge from the human experience of sensation, pain, and death. As with public punishment—which, according to Foucault, banked on the excesses of torture to transfer the violence of the crime onto the body of the condemned—anatomical images transformed the difficult materials and brutal practices of anatomy into a new site in which violence remains in plain sight while being contained by the promise of a recuperated future.<sup>21</sup> I argue that violence in the anatomical image is both productive and destructive and in this respect informed the formation of new notions of the body. In comprising the potential of the body, violence was not simply that which had been imposed through anatomical procedures but also that which the body itself produced through its inner forces.

I return to the drawing of the double hanging in order to reflect on how the visibility of violence is perhaps at its most persuasive when it is able to transform the moment of the now into the potential of the future. In the drawing, the practices of execution are contained within high walls, guarded by soldiers, and kept away from intrusive eyes. But the violence within holds the potential to move outward and to activate the image itself through the force of that violence. The presence of the table beside the scaffold and in front of the least secure part of the wall is intriguing, and not only because this table is used to dismember the body after execution and to display body fragments to the public at large. The table is partly outside the image, directing our attention elsewhere, perhaps to the space of the table of anatomy upon which the body of the condemned might later be dissected. The precise display of the tools and practices of hanging indicate violence deployed and controlled through rigorous procedures, yet the crowd that peers over the wall, generating an excess of emotion and anger, threatens at any moment to disrupt the logic of these procedures. Another site for the potential of violence is the image within the image, the painted tablet held in front of the man about to be dragged up the ladder. The established practice of showing images of Christ’s physical suffering to the condemned was partly an attempt to distract the person from the site of punishment and postpone the realization of imminent death. The drawing, then, holds in reserve the potential of violence to transform one thing into another, punishment into

display, knowledge of the crime into knowledge of the body, and, of course, the living into the dead.

Usually dated to the end of the sixteenth century, this drawing has had two separate lives: one as witness to early modern practices of corporal punishment, the other as a manifestation of the troubled psyche of its maker, the Bolognese painter Annibale Carracci.<sup>22</sup> In the scholarly literature on corporal punishment that followed Foucault's 1970 *Discipline and Punish*, the drawing makes frequent appearances, usually attesting to early practices of hanging.<sup>23</sup> In effect, the drawing becomes witness to the method of hanging in which a rope was tied to the crossbeam of the scaffold and around a person's neck, leaving the person, once pushed off the ladder, to suffocate for a substantial amount of time—a practice that preceded the use of the floor trap.<sup>24</sup> We are invited to observe how the scaffold was constructed and used: vertical beams are carefully inserted into the ground and balanced by short posts, the crossbeam is nailed on one side and wedged on the other, the criminal body is marked with the crime of theft by the money bag hanging from the waist, and the condemned is comforted by a member of a religious confraternity, who shows him an image as he is forced up the ladder. Yet this scholarship, in which the drawing is treated as a viable source of evidence, remains entirely silent about how violence actually operates in the image.

Turning to the history of art, the drawing has been discussed as a “snapshot” of the street unexpectedly captured by Carracci while wandering through Rome.<sup>25</sup> The source of this story is Carracci's seventeenth-century biographer Carlo Malvasia, who enfoldes drawings like this one into a poignant account of the painter's mental deterioration in the late 1590s, when he was in Rome working on frescoes in the Farnese family palace: “And when, because of weariness or late hour they finally left and took a stroll through the city or went outside the city gate for some fresh air, their fruitful pastime was to take note of unusual sites or chance encounters with people.”<sup>26</sup> Scholars even mention that Carracci's friend and doctor, Mancini, attributed the painter's practice of drifting across the city to “an extreme melancholy accompanied by a loss of memory and speech.”<sup>27</sup>

The idea of capturing the past as a present moment is appealing: Annibale and his brother, Agostino, walking along the river suddenly encounter a scene of multiple executions by the Pont Sant'Angelo. The gallows is fully operational, as one man already hangs from the crossbeam, and another, hands tied tightly behind his back, is painfully being hauled up the ladder backward by the executioner. Anticipation mounts as a crowd gathers behind the back wall, eyes wide open and mouths agape; shouts and jeers ricochet across the inner space. Some people demand to see who the man about to die is, for his head is turned downward toward the image that a religious companion holds up to him. The crowd surges forward, but a cluster of spears projecting above the wall indicate that guards protect the most vulnerable part of the barrier, the door with a keyhole at its center. Expectations rise. Might the wall be breached and the second execution interrupted?

For art historians, then, the drawing is the product of a fortuitous encounter within everyday life and keeps to a sense of the present that is compounded even by Carracci's presumed loss of memory and language. Yet, Malvasia's idea of capturing something on the street, conjoined as it is with a dispirited psychic state, seems less about the truth of the moment than about how something unexpected might emerge from the artist's confused sense of space and temporality. This kind of interpretation has recently turned Carracci into a modern painter of fragmented time and space rather than the rigorous classicist he became at the hands of his seventeenth-century biographer Giovanni Bellori.<sup>28</sup> It is difficult to ignore that the drawing does not privilege the viewing point of the crowd located on the street but rather a wide range of viewing points from the back of what seems to be an internal space.

But how might one consider an image that gives the impression of a fleeting encounter yet is carefully observed, projected from different viewing points, and somehow remains not fully understood or fully digested? Malvasia's account of Carracci's street drawings bears an interesting relation to film theorist Siegfried Kracauer's celebrated analysis of film's inextricable link to the street. In the 1940s, Kracauer argued that film is at its most radical when it "clings to the surface of things," which is to say when something is deposited in the film frame before it can be fully seen, recognized, and made meaningful. For Kracauer, this can happen when shooting is conducted on the street and the camera captures something unexpected, or when the material presence of something emerges so vividly on the surface of the screen that it detaches itself from the preconceived narrative.<sup>29</sup> In Carracci's drawing, the description of the surface of things is as attentive to the shape of the nail that holds the sections of the scaffold together as it is to the decisive twist of the neck of the hanged man. This lack of differentiation achieves an immediacy that implies no gap between the eye and the hand and no hierarchy between the animate and the inanimate. The strokes of the pen describe things out there—the roughly hewn wooden posts that make up the scaffold, the leather straps of the folding table—but they retain the gestures of attempting to describe but never fully achieving a fixed form. Unlike in film, the unplanned and indistinct is not a by-product of the apparatus but instead is produced by bodily gestures that draw our attention to the constant contact between the process of observation and the lines on the paper. In effect, the material rituals of death become entangled with the attempt to give them life, and thus one thing is transformed into another by the continuous markings on the paper, regardless of how these two things might usually be distinguished from each other. Bodily contact is crucial to the drawing's ability to make the transition of things visible, including the transition from life to death.<sup>30</sup>

In film, the close-up tends to be the most stable viewing point, usually at the service of the narrative.<sup>31</sup> But in Carracci's drawing, this is precisely where the narrative starts to break down. The strokes of the pen are never apart from the gesture of the hand, and thus to look closely at the strokes is to see the moment of drawing, to



trace the uncertain paths of the line, and to consider what it might have become or what it failed to become. In effect, it opens a different time than the wide-angle view, which turns separate lines into definable objects that can be considered on their own or inserted back into a narrative. Moreover, unlike film, in which the close-up and the wide angle are imposed through editing, the drawing requires the viewer to navigate between these two distances and those in between, and to consider the coexistence of different temporalities within the same image.

For the drawing to retain a semblance of the real, in the sense that Kracauer proposed for film, the narrative components must be in the process of becoming. Yet the spaces in between are no less important. In film, separate frames are spliced together, but it is the interval between the frames that produces the impression of movement from one to another or even produces an intermediate image.<sup>32</sup> In the drawing, the spaces between episodes seem to clarify a continuous narrative. Yet these are much more than empty spaces or intervals of time in the continuity of the narrative. They generate movement in the image and raise unexpected possibilities between its constituents. One man is starting to climb up the ladder, while the other has been pushed off the same ladder to his death only recently. As if in a loop, the two bodies repeat the same action as others before and others after. We recall that the dead man too walked up the ladder backward, was pulled up by the noose around his neck by the executioner, and painfully tried to balance his body. We can foresee that the man going up the ladder will be pushed from it to swing outward and be slowly asphyxiated. The two men begin to resemble each other. Both wear only long shirts that leave their legs exposed, while their arms are tied tightly behind them. The rear view of one is completed by the front view of the other; the tension of the naked leg that bends awkwardly to climb the rungs of the ladder is released by the naked legs that point lifelessly downward; the lack of sensation in the twist of the dead man's neck is recovered when one notices the painful pulling of the other man's neck by the executioner. At this point, the interval disappears and the images intersect, producing the inevitable cycle of life and death. Even the tools of execution become part of this intersection. The rope strangulating one man's neck is wound around the crossbeam and will soon be choking the other man.

Of course, the head also works to separate the two men, to differentiate life and death. For the man already hanging, the tilt of the head confirms death and brings the body to its full state of visibility. This kind of visibility depends not only on the readable signs of death but also on the relationship of the body to space. While all else is lost, the man keeps his verticality, which, like the posts of the scaffold, depends on the tying, piercing, and penetrating of matter.

This tilt of the head becomes a pivotal point between life and death, morphing the two heads and bodies into one and merging the sign of death (the broken neck) with the sign of internal life (the pensive head). The repetition of this pose starts to split the image, separating the transition between life and death. The viewer of the



drawing does not need to become enmeshed in the emotive desire of the crowd to see what it so urgently seeks, namely, the face of the man starting the climb up the ladder. Nor does the viewer need to seek what the crowd has left behind, namely, the face of the dead. The rope keeps the man straight, and the purse that hangs from his waist only reiterates this orientation. Foucault argued that the spectacle of the scaffold threatened not only the productivity of the body but also its subjection by way of instruments that, instead of imposing pain, brought the body into the “direct, physical pitting of material force against material force.”<sup>33</sup> For Foucault, this force was located not in a particular institution or state apparatus but in the ways in which institutions gained recourse to it. As Gilles Deleuze put it, “Violence expresses well the effect of a force on something, some object, or being. But it does not express the power relations, that is to say *the relations between force and force*.”<sup>34</sup> In the drawing, the instruments of violence—the scaffold, the rope, the table—have transformed but not destroyed the hanged man, who himself becomes an instrument ready to serve the interests of observation and knowledge.

In the context of dissection, it is significant that anatomists preferred the bodies of people who had been executed by hanging and were likely to be less damaged than those killed by other means.<sup>35</sup> The hanged man’s fragile but resolute verticality is worth comparing to images from Antonio Gallonio’s 1591 *Treatise on Instruments of Martyrdom*, in which instruments of torture enact their full will on the condemned, twisting, bending, and crushing the body (fig. 1).<sup>36</sup> In Carracci’s drawing, the dead man has encountered the instruments of punishment, but they have not been used to distort his physicality, at least not his verticality. The man, like the other instruments on view, has entered a realm of visibility and displays his functionality, though now imbued with faceless anonymity. He has been removed from the turmoil of urban life, literally placed aside and framed by the straight lines of the instruments, even the *mannaia*, a small, guillotine-like instrument that stands on the table and was used to cut limbs, especially the hands of those condemned for theft.<sup>37</sup> In sum, all instruments perform their given task: the ladder will slide along the gallows; the legs of the table will be folded; and the body will be brought down, bent over, laid down, cut up, examined, and reconstituted into something new.

In the narrative presented to the observer, the full force of violence waits to have its way with the man being taken up the ladder, but in the transition between life and death, the force of violence is already at work. The man faces toward us but his head is lowered, preventing us from having a direct encounter. He is enfolded between two figures that are moving together but pulling in opposite directions. The executioner’s upward pull by the rope evokes the need to go up in order to come down, while the companion holding an image guides the man’s attention downward, apparently to turn it beyond the world of the scaffold. A circuit of sensation is produced through this chain of bodies that tug, yank, push, and pull. Like his hanging counterpart, the man about to be hung is physically constrained, but his body seems



Figure 1. Breaking wheel, from Antonio Gallonio, *Trattato de gli instrumenti di martorio* (Rome: A. and G. Donangeli, 1591), 27. Engraving. © British Library Board, 487.h.13.

more spectral, as if already detaching itself from the embodied state that has produced a confusion of inner vibrations, uneven breathing, and uncontrollable trembling. While one man has become an image of unbendable instrumentality, the other is mutating and moving toward death. Yet he still feels the tug and pull of his escorts, he hears the frenetic noise emitted by the crowd, and he sees one image of violence while being part of another.

The practice of showing a person religious images, especially of Christ on the cross, as they moved toward the scaffold was widespread and had many variations in early modern Europe. Capital punishment increasingly included the participation of religious groups, especially lay confraternities, who deployed tools related to the last rites such as crucifixes and rosaries and provided a counterforce to the official executioner.<sup>38</sup> Their presence could be controversial, and, like the crowd, they were frequently accused of instigating disruption and even conflict during the event. In Jacques Callot's 1633 *Great Miseries and Misfortunes of War*, brutal scenes of public punishment include a religious representative who imposes a crucifix on the condemned man as aggressively as the executioner imposes the weapons of execution

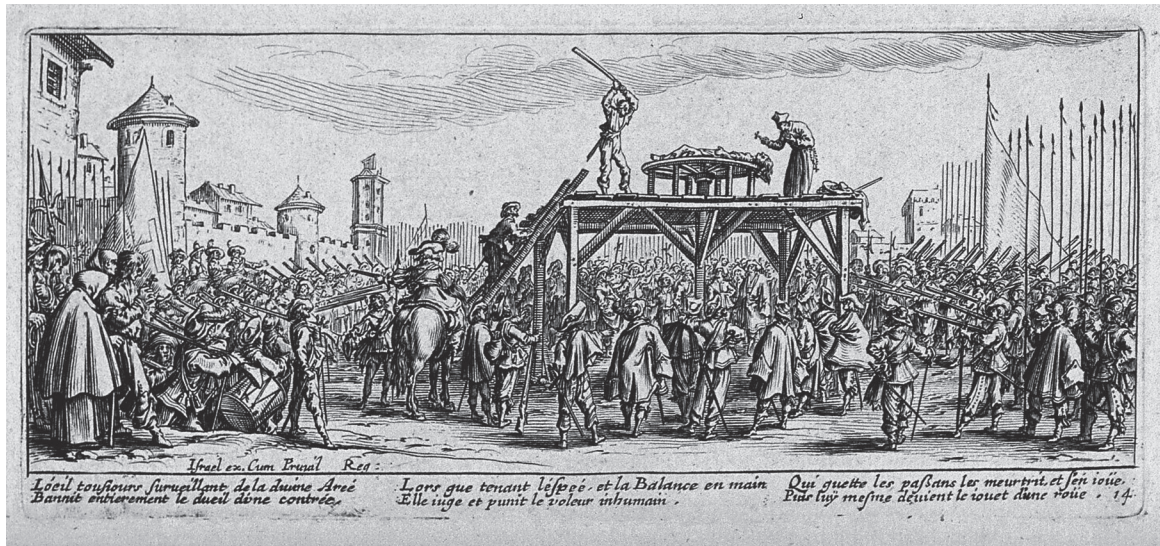


Figure 2. Criminal soldiers on the breaking wheel at a scaffold, from Jacques Callot, *Great Miseries and Misfortunes of War*, 1633. Etching. Wellcome Collection (CC BY 4.0).

(fig. 2).<sup>39</sup> The executioner and the religious representative share the platform with the wheel in which torture and death are combined. The condemned faces the crucifix, and when the wheel spins, he will have no choice but to face the sword.

According to the regulations of the Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decolato, its members served as companions to the condemned in Rome, and the crucifix was the main image that they offered to prisoners as they moved from the jail to the site of execution. Like the executioner, the religious companion was defined by the handling of the prisoner's body and the deployment of instruments.<sup>40</sup> The two functionaries were brought into close proximity at the scaffold and shared the instruments of punishment, although these also worked to draw crucial distinctions. For example, the rope used by the executioner to hang the accused became for the confraternity a kind of relic, as it was saved and ceremonially burned on the feast of the confraternity's patron, John the Baptist.<sup>41</sup> The ladder was the primary point of encounter and the instrument that belonged to both, although the religious representative had to yield to the executioner's higher authority.<sup>42</sup> Both used the sword; the executioner used it to cut up the body if torture or postmortem mutilation was required, while the religious representative used it to cut the rope around the neck and sometimes even to behead the corpse when it was collected the night after the execution.

The space between scaffold and table is where the transition between life and death takes its biggest leap by moving beyond life to a state of uncertainty. The table,



as the subsidiary site of violence, is set off at one side of the scaffold awaiting the next stage in the process, which might well include the dismemberment of the body and display of body parts. Foucault discusses the imposition of torture after death, especially the importance of the anguish of those who witnessed the mutilation of the corpse, which was considered to be the severest form of punishment, partly because it encroached on the right of burial.<sup>43</sup> Montaigne, who witnessed an execution in Rome in 1581, was especially dismayed by the continuity of punishment after death: "After he was strangled, they cut him into four quarters. They seldom put a man to any simple death, and exercise their barbarity after he is dead. . . . The people are terrified by the severities practised upon dead bodies: for the people here, who had shown no feeling at seeing him strangled, at every blow that was given to hew him in pieces burst out into piteous cries."<sup>44</sup> Montaigne was bewildered by what he considered to be the spectators' odd response, "as if everyone had lent his own sense of feeling to that carcass."<sup>45</sup> The effects of excessive physical violence were not, it seems, limited to the confrontation with another person's experience of pain and death.<sup>46</sup> For Montaigne, the continued imposition of pain before, during, and after execution was pivotal to his objection to public punishment and was the basis of his defense of the cannibal, who he claimed dismembered and ate people only after they were dead.<sup>47</sup> Yet for those present at the scaffold, the brutal rituals of death produced a visual image of violence that superseded the image of the transition from life to death "to make everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign."<sup>48</sup>

There are almost no images of this highly charged moment of violence. Perhaps this moment had to be enacted but also concealed. An exception is the image of the sixteenth-century martyr Thomas Holland in Mathias Tanner's 1675 volume on Jesuit martyrdom (fig. 3).<sup>49</sup> Holland is about to be drawn and quartered on a table framed by the familiar wooden structure of the scaffold. His executioners stand over him on the table, one removing the noose and another raising his hatchet, while the Jesuit lies naked and seemingly lifeless. In his state of nakedness, Holland loses his religious identity and, by becoming an anonymous body, complies with the procedure of reducing as much as possible the identity of anyone condemned to the punishment of being not only executed but also dismembered.

A space that at first seemed empty now becomes filled with potential, awaiting the bodies that will be brought down from the scaffold. Legal and religious officials met at this table, and in Rome the members of the Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decollato were responsible for collecting and burying the dead after execution and public display.<sup>50</sup> By the end of the sixteenth century, the lay confraternity, Florentine in origin, also had gained the right to oversee the condemned person in the journey from the top of the ladder to the shattering descent.<sup>51</sup> It developed very strict procedural regulations and kept detailed records of who had been executed, whether the person had confessed to the crime, and the method of execution, which

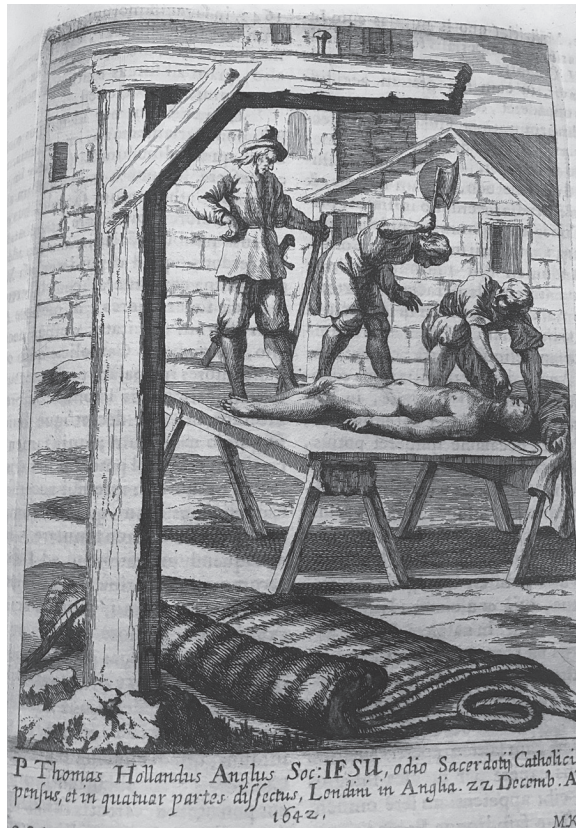


Figure 3. The martyrdom of Thomas Holland, from Mathias Tanner, *Societas Jesu usque ad sanguinis et vitae profusionem* (Prague: Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandee, 1675), 125, plate 117. Etching. © British Library Board, 487.i.25.

was usually hanging but also often included quartering.<sup>52</sup> The confraternity, which still has its headquarters at the edge of the Forum in Rome, renegotiated its rights and increasingly extended its privileges over the body of the condemned after execution (plate 2). An important new responsibility was administering the use of corpses in the medical school of the university of the Sapienza, including the terms of exchange.<sup>53</sup> After the death penalty was abolished in Italy in 1889, the confraternity turned to visiting prisoners in jail and, even more recently, to providing financial support for families with relatives in jail.

In Carracci's drawing, the relation between prisoner and religious companion is different from the one represented in Callot's print, and now revolves around their exchanges over the small painted panel known as a *tavoletta* (plate 3).<sup>54</sup> This small, double-sided framed image is usually regarded as a type of confessional tool, encouraging the prisoner to acknowledge culpability for the crime in question. In accounts of the charitable works of Rome—for instance, in Camillo Fanucci's 1601 *Treatise of all the pious works of the holy city of Rome*—the confraternity is praised for its use of this kind of image to verify the crime and offer the possibility of repentance.<sup>55</sup> Yet the records of the confraternity reveal great concern with the failure to

achieve contrition, even when the confraternity gained the right to temporarily interrupt the execution if the person confessed.<sup>56</sup>

The *tavoletta* has a wooden handle attached to the frame, which allows a firm grip but also flexibility for quick changes in direction and proximity. Very few *tavolette* survive, even fewer with their distinctive frames. The rectangular panel that appears in Carracci's drawing was the most common. The elaboration of the frame during the sixteenth century seems to have addressed the challenge of an image used while moving on the street for long periods of time. In the late sixteenth century, triangular panels were introduced, some with smaller panels hinged to the main panel, serving to limit the prisoner's lateral vision.<sup>57</sup> The *tavoletta* covered but also brought attention to the prisoner's face, separating it from the urban environment and at times angering those who claimed the right to see who was being executed.<sup>58</sup> It was precisely this aspect of the practice of showing images to the condemned that intrigued Montaigne when he attended a public hanging in Rome in 1581: "There are two monks, clothed and masked in the same way, who stand by the side of the criminal in the cart; one continually holds before his face, and makes him incessantly kiss, a tablet on which is the image of Our Lord: this is done in order that the face of the criminal may not be seen as they pass along the street. At the gallows, which is a beam between two supports, they still kept this picture close before his face, till he was thrown off."<sup>59</sup>

For Montaigne, the *tavoletta* becomes an instrument of agitation, pitting different participants against one another and producing a sense of increasing urgency. The rules of the confraternity required that the religious representative hold the *tavoletta* in such a way that the condemned could not see the scaffold and the preparations for execution.<sup>60</sup> To quote a manual from Bologna, "keeping the *tavoletta* in such a way that he always has his eye on it, that is, so he always sees it."<sup>61</sup> Yet the *tavoletta* itself reveals the very environment it was supposed to mask. The themes represented in the *tavoletta* ensured that punishment always remained at the center of the condemned's attention. Of the ten *tavolette* until recently kept in a cluttered cabinet of the confraternity meeting room, nine have a scene of Christ's Crucifixion on one side, in keeping with the wide use of crucifixes in comforting rituals. Scenes of punishment and torture of saints on the other side of the *tavoletta* further reaffirm the parallel between the prisoner's journey and Christ's stages of the Passion.<sup>62</sup>

Physical evidence suggests that the *tavoletta* with the Crucifixion on one side and the lamentation of Christ on the other was the one by far most frequently used (plates 4 and 5). All the *tavolette* required repairs over years of grueling use, but this one was painted and repainted repeatedly, including by the Flemish painters hired by the Monastery of San Giovanni Decollato in the sixteenth century to decorate the oratory.<sup>63</sup> Along the way it has accumulated the marks of a frantic and inescapable proximity; it has been rubbed, stroked, touched, and kissed so many times that the painted surfaces are literally covered with traces of this intense contact.<sup>64</sup> The pur-

suit of the intimate encounter between *tavoletta* and face was such that for a time there was even the promise of a papal indulgence if one kissed the *tavoletta*.<sup>65</sup>

Instead of something that prompts perception, interpretation, or devotion, this type of image mounted an assault on the senses: the unexpected blind twists and turns along the street, the contrast between excessive sound and limited vision, the weariness of trying and failing to adjust to the changing surroundings—all contributed to the merging of image and urban space. The Crucifixion, after all, was an official execution and was frequently considered in relation to public executions.<sup>66</sup> The scene of lamentation is the aftermath of that execution, and in this instance it is staged within two distinct spheres. One belongs to the prisoner's body: after many hours of hanging on the wooden structure, it has been cut down, brought down the ladder, and stretched out horizontally on the ground, its orientation due to an excess of feeling and suffering as much as to the weight of gravity. The other sphere belongs to the crowd: the scene is full of turmoil and agitation; women weep, wail, and cover their faces and turbaned men argue and gesticulate, in relation not to the spent body (as is the convention) but to the site of execution itself (plate 6). This site now becomes bewildering, no longer perceptible as urban space but as vertiginous swirls of color that twist and flow in multiple directions.

The lamentation moves time back to the scaffold and the disorienting backward climb up the ladder, drawing the viewer's attention to the unimaginable moment of reaching the top and confronting the void beyond. The prominent ladder intersects the spheres of the prisoner and the crowd, linking the upsurge of energy in the upper part of the image to its deflation in the lower part. The cross itself is only visible through a vertical post and one side of the crossbar, which turns the cross into a scaffold and brings the ladder into the foreground as the primary tool of punishment.<sup>67</sup> But the ladder, with its stress on vertical movement, is also an instrument of transformation that suggests the body's climb up only to be brought down to the horizontality of the spent body. Halfway down the ladder there is a man suspended between upward and downward orientations.<sup>68</sup> With his dazzling vermilion cape, this figure galvanizes attention at the crucial point between the two directions and holds the potential for changing orientation just as the prisoner/viewer is reaching the top of the ladder. The *tavoletta* spills onto the empty space in the drawing between the two men at the scaffold and, instead of a gap in narrative time, it becomes the link between climbing and being thrown from the ladder. The members of the confraternity were very aware of this moment, and their regulations are especially careful about what to do once the condemned had reached the top of the ladder: "When push is given by executioner, the comforter will pass to other side of ladder, which the said afflicted has climbed, and keeping always a hand attached to one of the rungs for proper security, he will seek to maintain the tavoletta before the face of the suspended afflicted as long as he thinks the afflicted has not departed to the other life."<sup>69</sup> At this point, the companion was to use the *tavoletta* to block the view of the instruments of torture, and especially



the executioner, and this was to be achieved while maintaining his own balance and not affecting “the tools of the master of justice.” This was difficult, and there were technical problems to overcome in order not to get in the way of the executioner but also not to make it more difficult for the prisoner: “And take care always to hold the tablet in front of his face and not too low. Go as high as you can, which will make it easier for you and so that he will be better able to understand what you tell him. And do not be there in a way that would block him when he is about to swing down, so that when he is knocked off the ladder he falls freely.”<sup>70</sup>

The empathetic bond between prisoner and companion suggested by Carracci’s drawing is important to consider in relation to how practices at the scaffold were adjusted when the confraternity became involved with the anatomy school. Instead of “the condemned,” those to be executed began to be called “patients,” and the religious companions became their “spiritual doctors.”<sup>71</sup> There is evidence that new physiological knowledge was also taken into account. Guided by medical debates on the persistence of sensation after being deprived of oxygen, the confraternity recommended that the companion keep the *tavoletta* in front of the dying person’s face long after he had been pushed from the ladder.<sup>72</sup> This required unwavering determination, as the companion had to find ways to deal with a precarious physical position while observing the state of the person as he choked and ceased to breathe. In effect, the *tavoletta* offers some insight into the space between the two prisoners in the drawing, a space in which the boundary between life and death disappears.

There are few religious themes with more potential for reflection on one’s own death than the decapitated head of John the Baptist on a salver (plate 7). It is not coincidental that the confraternity, initially devoted to those who must confront death, adopted the beheaded John the Baptist as its patron. The traditional rendition of the decapitated head of the saint on the salver is found throughout the monastery.<sup>73</sup> The Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decollato aligned its rituals with the narrative of John the Baptist’s martyrdom and thus by implication brought a considerable level of ambiguity to its practices and relation to capital punishment. Most executions in early modern Rome were carried out by hanging, but by cutting off the possibility of breath, hanging was associated with decapitation.<sup>74</sup> In Christian theology, the image of the head of John the Baptist holds a key place in the emergence of Christ as the Son of God. In effect, John is the prophet who must erase himself in order to fulfill his prophecy.<sup>75</sup> The severed head is crucial to his transitional status, as it shows him to be of his body and beyond his body, and becoming himself only by being separated from himself.<sup>76</sup> Seeing himself as an image of violence marks John the Baptist’s transition, which is why the platter that holds his head frequently includes an inscription about the act of seeing oneself.<sup>77</sup>

To reflect on the *tavoletta* of the head of John the Baptist is to confront one’s own face at the moment of death. What would it be like to be shown the image of John the Baptist, the head severed from the body but filling the entire visual field? The

image is pressed up to your face, like a mirror that cannot be evaded. Every attempt to look away only reinstates it, bringing it back in spite of your fading vision. The head seems slowly to turn in an arduous attempt to continue this painful encounter, yet blood is draining and starting to pool at the edges of the platter. The eyes, no longer open but not entirely shut, struggle to look outward, to resist the fading of sensation and keep the darkness at bay. In this transition from life to death, experienced not only in one's own body but also as an image of violence, the *tavoletta* fills in the final part of the interval between life and death that in the drawing remains invisible.

And what of the many eyes that have looked upon the *tavoletta* of John the Baptist, willingly or unwillingly, some seeking to keep the connection and others trying to look away: how do they accumulate in this space? What this image has witnessed is in many ways unthinkable, but its place in a history of images of violence is important to consider. The *tavoletta* is situated between comfort and violence. It was an imposition, even an aggressive imposition, but it was also a counter to the kind of time exacted by the executioner through his use of instruments. For the confraternity, the aim was to prolong time by combining distraction (from the event) and concentration (on the image). The longer this time lasted—through the readjustment of the *tavoletta*, the repetition of prayer, the kissing of the surface of the image—the more likely the person was to reach the equilibrium needed to achieve self-reflection and the possibility of confession. This is in contrast to the executioner, whose goal was also to extend time, but in order to display the imposition of pain.

Ultimately, the *tavoletta* disrupts the divide between before and after in relation to life and death by showing these to be not distinctive states but states on a continuum of sensation. The *tavoletta* accumulates the destructive force of violence in ways that resemble the table of torture at the execution and the table of anatomical dissection. All three seek to uncover concealed knowledge, and all three entail the body's move into horizontality (death) as the key factor in the production of knowledge. In Carracci's image, the hanged man's body retains its uprightness for our close observation, but it also foretells the loss of verticality. The tilt of the head leads us in that direction and signals its changing status as corpse, which is to say as mutating and deteriorating matter. The drawing signals this change through the horizontal hatching that defines the back limit of the image. The horizontal orientation, and the dispersion that it implies, has been there all along, in the back wall that separates the horizontal space of attentive observation at the front from the space of turmoil and uncertainty behind.

The body's loss of verticality is a primary concern in anatomical procedures and usually remains hidden in images of dissection. But it does appear in Andreas Vesalius's 1543 treatise *De humani corporis fabrica* (*On the Fabric of the Human Body*) within one of the illustrated letters, a site in which the troubling aspects of anatomical practice are revealed and even mocked (fig. 4).<sup>78</sup> The letter L exposes the secretive collection of corpses from the scaffold at night by religious representatives, who

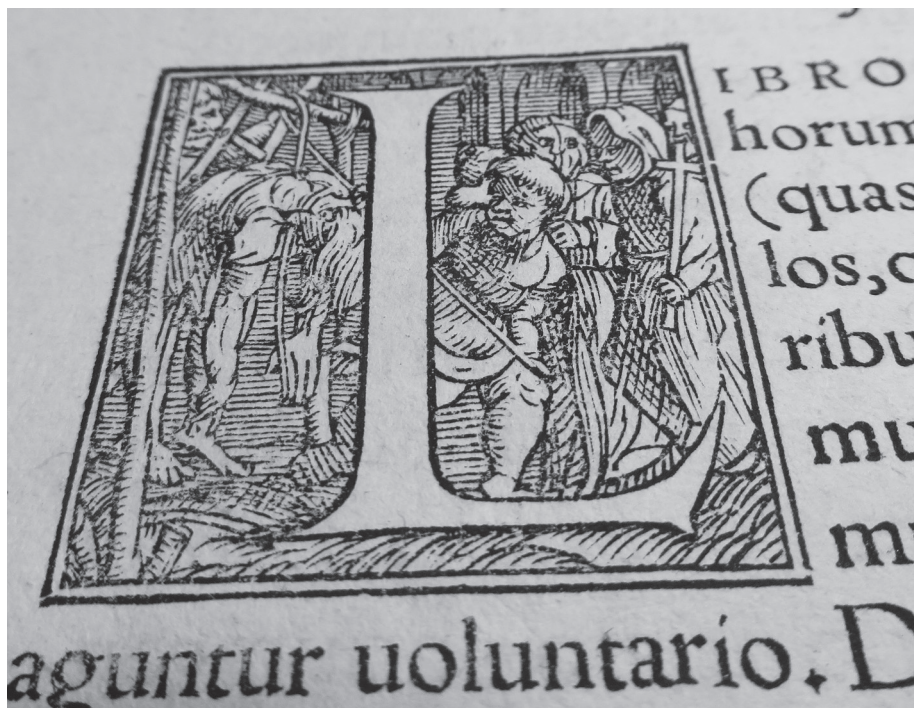


Figure 4. Illustrated letter L (man cut down from scaffold), from Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (Basel: Oporinus, 1543), bk. 1, chap. 13, p. 55. Woodcut. c British Library Board, c54.k.12.

huddle and stare from inside their hooded masks as the body is cut down. No longer supported by the instruments of punishment, the body's dead weight pulls it down, rendering it unwieldy and formless. In this state, there is no memory of having climbed upward and no possibility of the contemplative horizontality granted to Christ after being brought down from the cross. Instead, the body is a corpse, suspended as if on four limbs, with a mane of hair covering the face, transformed into the state of natural law.

The Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decollato developed many regulations for the bodies collected for burial and even more for those that it turned over to the university.<sup>79</sup> The university kept bodies for five to ten days, and a large percentage of any one body, including every part that had been dissected, had to be returned in order to comply with burial practices. The confraternity was obligated to protect the family of the condemned and thus the regulations state that all transactions were to be conducted at night, and even that members of San Giovanni Decollato should remove the head of the corpse before submitting it for dissection. It is unclear how closely this regulation was followed, but the equipment they brought to the execution certainly included a sword for decapitation. In Rome, state regulations did not

specify that the person whose body was dissected had to be a foreigner, as was the usual practice elsewhere, and although most were, there was considerable worry about the recognition of someone designated for medical dissection.<sup>80</sup>

While many anatomical dissections in Rome were carried out in hospitals, research at the university had to follow Roman statutes, which stated that those dissected, including in the annual public anatomical demonstration, had to have been condemned to death and turned over by the governor or a senator.<sup>81</sup> Sometimes physicians would come to the place of execution, select a body in relation to their needs, and submit a receipt.<sup>82</sup> And there are instances when civic authorities bypassed the rights of the confraternity and designated dissection as a means to negotiate the punishment of a favored citizen. Rodolfo di Bernabeo, who was hanged with three companions in 1587, was, on the order of the governor of Rome, “given to the scholars at La Sapienza for them to perform an anatomy lesson” instead of being quartered in public like the others.<sup>83</sup>

The move of the corpse to the horizontality of the table is not revealed in Carracci’s drawing, since death is observed through the verticality and anonymity produced by the instruments of punishment. And it is rarely made explicit in the anatomical image, which transposes the accumulation of violence at the dissection table into an image of knowledge. One celebrated exception appears in the frontispiece of Vesalius’s treatise, which, as Andrea Carlino has argued, offers a rare glimpse of the use of the cadaver in anatomical practice before it was turned into images of knowledge.<sup>84</sup> By the time Carracci produced his drawing of the execution, Vesalius’s treatise had been in circulation for more than fifty years, and its images of bodily dissection had acquired the status of a prototype, which it would continue to have well into the eighteenth century.<sup>85</sup> Yet this would seem an unlikely source from which to access the imposition of violence that the drawing suppresses. As I argue in this book, Vesalius’s images do not avoid violence, but they always assert the productivity of its effects.

At the center of a large and tumultuous audience, Vesalius conducts a public anatomy lesson on a corpse (fig. 5).<sup>86</sup> The agitated gathering resembles Carracci’s crowd, full of expectation and apprehension at the possibility of seeing something that is usually prohibited. The setting is a temporary scaffold, before the anatomy theater in Padua was built in 1594 and before the university regularized public anatomical lessons.<sup>87</sup> Observers and participants—the barbers who would have done most of the cutting of the body, the assistants who dealt with the bucket of viscera removed from the corpse, and Vesalius, who has his right hand inside the corpse’s abdomen and holds a retractor with his forefinger—are not separated as in Carracci’s drawing, thus making the proximity between observers and corpse not only uncomfortable but disturbing.<sup>88</sup> By contrast, the 1651 engraving commemorating Padua’s new anatomical theater represents an elliptical structure that reduces all elements to facilitate unimpeded observation (fig. 6).<sup>89</sup> The theater was designed to physically separate the onlookers from the physicians and their assistants and to





Figure 5. Public anatomy lesson, detail of frontispiece, from Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (Basel: Oporinus, 1543). Woodcut. © British Library Board, c54.k.12.

limit the disruptive movement and noisy quarrels of students. In the image, the experience becomes entirely disembodied, imagining the theater structure itself as an eye that orders the space and constrains the body on the table to the exacting demands of observation.<sup>90</sup> Vesalius's frontispiece, with its object of investigation laid out haphazardly, as likely to slip out of place on the table as to press flesh with living bodies, leaves little space for concentrated observation.

The corpse on display in Vesalius's frontispiece is physically unstable, besieged by the surging crowd, exposed from the bottom up, fully disemboweled, and female. If the face of the dead in Carracci's drawing is kept from the observer, Vesalius's frontispiece has no such qualms, projecting the face so insistently that it seems as if the dead eyes still stare back. The incongruity of an image of a totally obliterated body in Vesalius's treatise has been largely ignored—until, that is, Katharine Park, in her work on women in early modern anatomy and medicine, unsuccessfully tried to

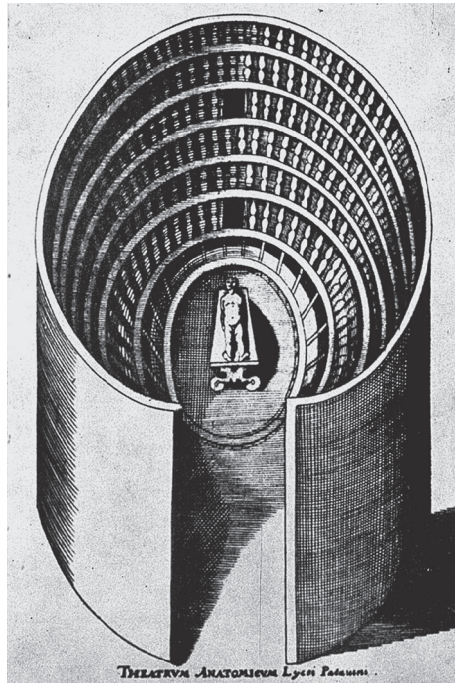


Figure 6. Padua Anatomy Theater, from J. Tomasini, *Theatrum anatomicum Lycei Patavini*, 1654. Engraving. Wellcome Collection (CC BY 4.0).

learn the identity of the woman in question.<sup>91</sup> Vesalius himself writes that the woman was executed by hanging in Padua in the winter of 1541.<sup>92</sup> He explains that she attempted to forestall her execution by claiming to be pregnant. A midwife testified to the contrary, and she was not only hanged but sent for dissection to the anatomy school, in part to confirm the legal judgment. Vesalius boasts that his public dissection of the woman accomplished just that and also revealed that she had given birth to a number of children.

The table once again has done double duty, producing both the demise of the body, which has literally been deprived of its insides, and medical and legal knowledge. Park argues that Vesalius sought to appropriate the history of women's knowledge about reproduction. In his treatise, the female body appears only in relation to reproduction, which is precisely what this particular body was said to lack. Yet of the four female figures in the treatise, three are, according to Vesalius, based on the dissection of this woman.<sup>93</sup> What the image reveals instead is the imposition of violence beyond what is strictly necessary in the service of anatomical knowledge. Violence retains its inherent ambivalence, and, to quote Jean-Luc Nancy, violence does not "transform what it assaults; rather it takes away its form and meaning. It makes it into nothing other than a sign of its own rage."<sup>94</sup> It would seem that this particular body, with its particular history, could become only surplus matter, but it also retains the memory of the woman's refusal to climb up the ladder and, by implication, to become an object of observation.



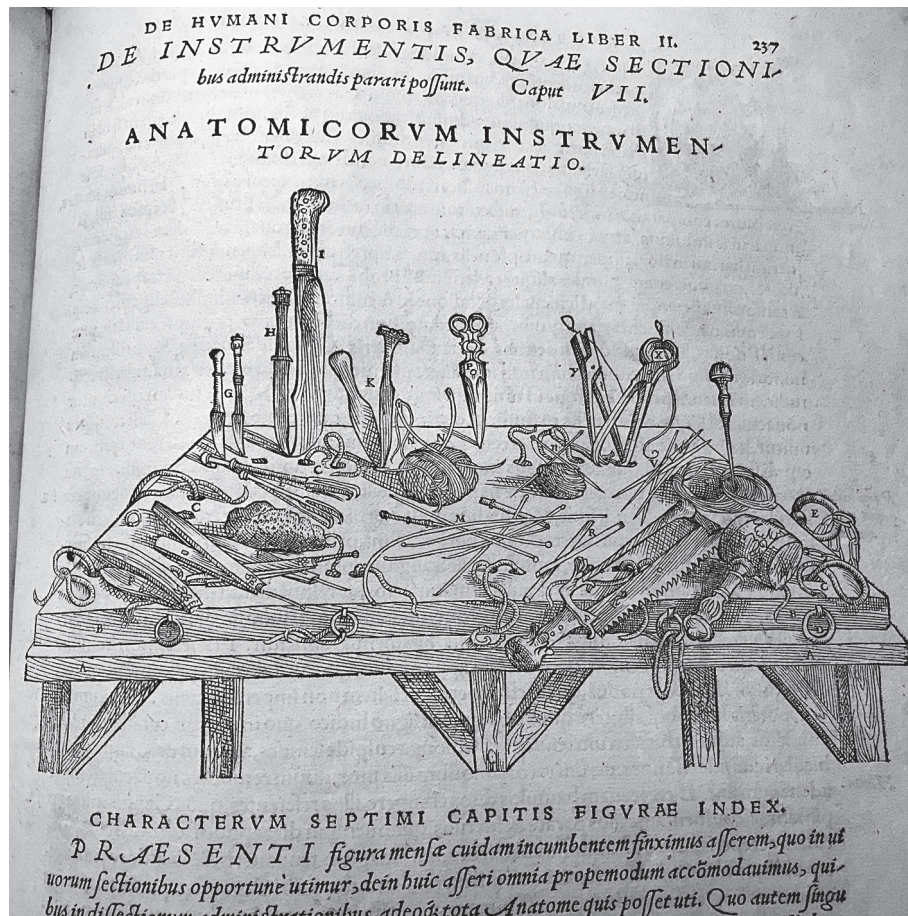


Figure 7. Vivisection table, from Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (Basel: Oporinus, 1543), bk. 2, chap. 7, p. 237. Woodcut. © British Library Board, c54.k.12.

At the table, the human body was at the threshold of change and at the extreme point of obliteration. The transition from table to anatomical image always entailed the attempt to negotiate the site of violence. It is all the more intriguing that in Vesalius's treatise, the only image of the dissection table is declared to be the table designed specifically for vivisection (fig. 7).<sup>95</sup> The table has a double surface, allowing for a set of metal rings and holes through which rope was threaded in order to tie down a resisting body.<sup>96</sup> At this table, it is the instruments of dissection that have replaced those bodies. It recalls Carracci's table, which initially may seem empty but upon closer inspection reveals the guillotine-like *mannaia* used to cut off the hands of thieves. The instruments on Vesalius's table are flamboyantly displayed, ready for use and imbued with energy. The accompanying description explains that they are without exception tools used in crafts and everyday life to manipulate and transform



matter. The instruments that perforate bone are used by shoemakers to pierce leather, the knives and forks that cut flesh are used in the kitchen to prepare food, the small knives that scrape muscle are used to cut feathers into quill pens, and the needles that perforate the nerves are used for sewing.<sup>97</sup> As Elizabeth Hallam writes, these tools privilege knowledge acquired by working with one's hands and require skillful handling.<sup>98</sup> The relationship forged between the investigator and the object of investigation is not that of observer to observed, for it presumes a much more intimate encounter that cannot be separated from bodily sensation and physical interaction. The vivisection table is itself a tool, constructed to bring into close contact the increasing force of two living entities that are able to move and to feel.

The practices of vivisection are frequently underestimated or purposely understated in the scholarly literature, but early modern anatomists are very candid about this practice, which nonetheless remained highly controversial and the focus of much fear.<sup>99</sup> Vesalius himself argues forcefully and repeatedly for the importance of generating extreme sensation in the context of anatomical research, and he loads his specific instructions on how to tie animals down with the prospect of imminent danger to the anatomist. Access to a struggling animal seems to entail the exposure of the most vulnerable parts of the body within a face-to-face encounter: "Take particular thought for upper jaw so it is firmly attached to the plank. . . . Immobilize the head while letting the animal breathe and squeal freely."<sup>100</sup> Scholars have noted that Vesalius does not hide the unpleasant or illicit aspects of his work and instead boasts about its risks and challenges.<sup>101</sup>

Nothing excited Vesalius more than touching with his own hands a human heart that was still beating. In his treatise, he boasts that he was able to feel life itself through the membranes of the heart of a man who had just been executed. The comment appears, not by chance, near an unusual woodcut of a person being dissected while still hanging from the gallows, punished for unknown reasons, wearing his humble street clothes, and experiencing excruciating pain (fig. 8).<sup>102</sup> This image is so unlike others in Vesalius's treatise that it seems to demand an explanation. Is it perhaps, like Carracci's drawing, the result of another so-called unexpected encounter on the street? Vesalius explains that he was eager to find out whether the wrappings of the heart contained water while its owner was still alive, a controversial issue given the belief that water is found in the dead because the spirit is converted into water at death.<sup>103</sup> Vesalius was constantly on the lookout for research opportunities. "One man," he writes, "whose heart we watched being taken out at Bologna, while he was alive, was also seen to have water in the wrapping; but it was not exactly convenient for us to make an examination, even though we joined those witnessing the tragedy."<sup>104</sup> Katharine Park notes that the prospect of human vivisection led anatomists to the sites of public execution, as it sometimes happened that hanged bodies would revive or that people condemned to execution were given to anatomists directly from prison, even with the person's

agreement.<sup>105</sup> As it turned out, Vesalius wrote, after attending an execution in Padua, “we arranged to have a heart still beating brought into a nearby Pharmacist’s shop along with the lung and other viscera as soon as they had been removed, from those whom they cut into four parts while living and we found a quantity of water in the wrapping.”<sup>106</sup> Whether Vesalius performed experiments on living human bodies remains a question of debate, but this kind of procedure resembled vivisection in the need to catch the moment between life and death. And it is worth noting that many of Vesalius’s accounts of his efforts to pursue knowledge regardless of the means are usually carried out through the joint efforts of those in charge of punishment and the anatomist. Vesalius, while refusing to comment on the issue of the conversion of the spirit into water, managed to make his medical point by showing that the heart of this still living body held water.

In this remarkable woodcut, the proximity of life to the moment of dissection is unprecedented. The body is set against the blank page, detached from any setting, but its viewpoint, frontal and slightly from below, suggests that he is hanging at the scaffold. From this point of observation, every detail becomes conjoined in the explosive moment of death. The man’s body is held in a tight close-up as it implodes from within when suddenly deprived of oxygen. The breeches have come undone. Button holes and ties dangle, revealing a naked stomach, pubic hair, and, most unusually, the pouch in which his genitalia were restrained to prevent ejaculation at the moment of the body’s total loss of control. The man’s arms are tied tightly behind him, as was the practice in hanging, constraining the body’s own external animation but also intensifying the buildup of energy within. The buildup of force occurs in tandem with its unleashing; the rupture of what is external to the body, such as the breeches that pop open, combine with internal effects. The lungs are split apart; ribs twist back while the ribcage flaps backward and becomes entangled with the rope. In the treatise, the description of the image stresses the stripping of matter through dissection: “the rib cartilages have been freed from their bones and the bones broken outwards. Finally we have freed the pectoral bone and the cartilages attached to it from the membranes on each side that divide the thorax and raised them up to reveal their inner surface.”<sup>107</sup> The “freeing” of the body from its interior parts through the work of dissection seems to echo its “freeing” from its street clothes at the moment of implosion. Within this seemingly spare image of bodily destruction is the entire performance of denuding that has transformed the stripped body into knowledge, or at least into the search for knowledge.

The image simultaneously stages the body’s lifelikeness and its brutal destruction, suggesting the importance of the close proximity of the living body to the act of dissection in the early modern formation of anatomical knowledge. The woodcut, a printing technology that offers clarity and agility of line, reproduces the body both in its impending annihilation and its impulse to move and thrive. As an image in the midst of violent change, it generates interest in the body’s physicality and especially

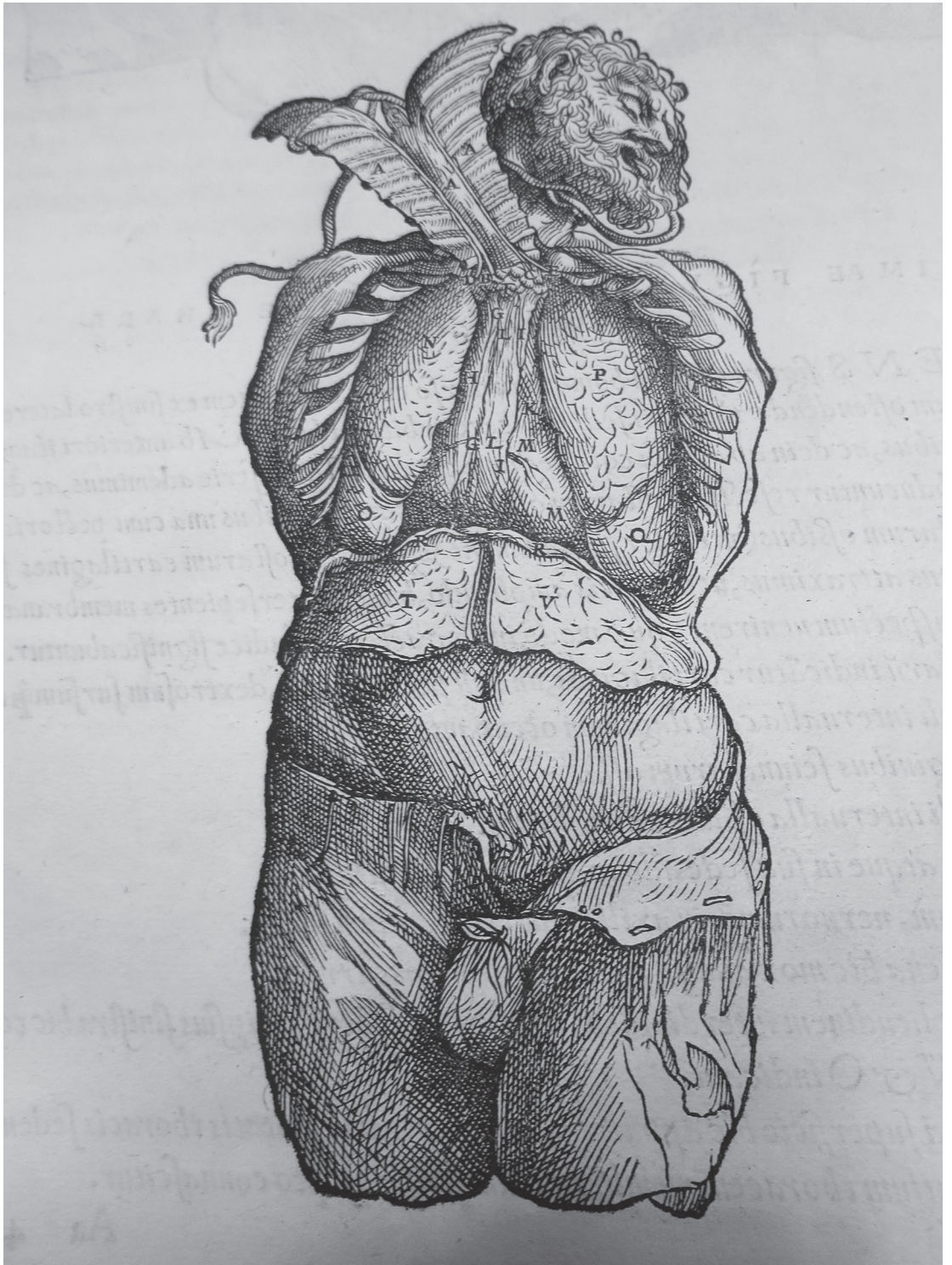


Figure 8. Thoracic cavity, from Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (Basel: Oporinus, 1543), bk. 6, second figure. Woodcut. © British Library Board, c54.k.12.

in the transposition of this materiality into that of the image. But violence's unpredictable force also elicits concern with intense sensation, producing contradictions between the incentive to observe the body's components and the urge to empathize with the person under dissection (and at the moment of execution). Yet if this image, like many early images of anatomy, tends to reveal the experience of pain, this is not simply due to a purposeful eliciting of empathy. Violence does not allow the experience of pain to go unnoticed, but it also opens up the possibilities of experimentation that result in the unexpected.

The most unexpected aspect of the image is how it makes the internal implosion readable on the surface of the face, which twists with a grimace of pain that is difficult to behold but impossible to ignore. It doubles the intensity of sensation incurred in the making of anatomical knowledge. And it inserts itself in Carracci's drawing between the image of the hanged man and the dissection table, filling in a level of intimacy that the drawing could not show. The rope around the neck, and the force of its pull upward, takes us up the ladder to the moment of being pushed off, a moment that has just happened and that we now confront through its bodily effects. If the *tavoletta* of Saint John the Baptist extends the moment of death by suspending time, this image unleashes the suddenness of violent destruction. It reveals what it might be like to see from the perspective of the crowd, but in the form of a view the crowd has left behind. This is a recollection image, one that fills in what in the drawing remains an interval but may still, owing to its own strategies, prevent the interval from turning back into a discrete moment in the narrative.

Once again we encounter the tilt of the head, but now it is due to the pure and uncontrollable force of violence. The head rears back, the cheeks twitch, the mouth opens, and the tongue protrudes as the man gasps and chokes. The man's loss of control of his tongue is perhaps the most disturbing sign of what violence has wrought. The tongue enables speech, and its distortion indicates the loss of communication and the distinctiveness of the human being.<sup>108</sup> In its function as a tool for medical study, the image illustrates the respiratory system in relation to the heart, but as an image of violence, it does not stick to this goal. The body destroyed beyond the necessity of knowledge is found in an image within a celebrated anatomical treatise, where we might not expect it but where it hovers, ready to proclaim a new and fearless form of knowledge.

The image remains unique in Vesalius's treatise, its implications fully realized only when it returns to the space of the drawing, which is to say to the workings of the scaffold within urban life. While the image offers an unflinching confrontation with the effects of the forces of punishment and dissection, it also suggests that extreme forms of violence do not always render their object "defaced" and anonymous.<sup>109</sup> This is not an uncomplicated recollection of the violence of death in the process of anatomical dissection precisely because it remains so emphatically in the now and for this reason seems to block a future beyond the moment of death. The



figure operates within its liminal status between punishment and dissection, between the authority of the state and that of medical research, but it also returns to the crowd. The man is not anonymous in that he remains of the street, in the now; and while violence has imposed itself on the body, it has not erased the presence of a person by becoming its own image. This presence—a conflation of two moments of extreme pain—arrests any sense that it will continue to become knowledge without defiance. Instead, it is firmly located in a deep interiority of the body, in the force of violence that emanates from within.

### Violence and the Image of Anatomy

“The observance of bodies killed by violence, attention to wounded men, and the many diseases, the various ways of putting criminals to death, the funeral ceremonies, and a variety of such things . . . have shewn men, every day, more and more of themselves.”<sup>110</sup> How did knowledge of the body become a framework within which to understand the world and ourselves? William Hunter’s observation, made in a 1784 lecture on anatomy, suggests that this knowledge was prompted by the confrontation with procedures for imposing violence on the human body. His statement may seem like a random list of practices pertaining to the body’s fragility, but I will argue that it is just such diverse encounters with violence that inform the formation of the anatomical image. Anatomical knowledge gained a new footing in early modern Europe by bringing together procedures for dismantling the body and close observation of its fragments. In the sixteenth century, anatomy was established as an indispensable part of university education, and its invasive approach, although by no means turned into a coherent methodology, started to raise questions about received knowledge and to project new possibilities for the body.<sup>111</sup> The concepts of the body forged through anatomy, from knowledge about its mechanisms to an awareness of its political potential, quickly entered other forms of new knowledge, especially those pertaining to an expanding world. Not only did encounters with people previously unknown to Europeans disturb biblical accounts of creation; they also generated interest in the human body outside established European parameters.

The question of authority over the body, in transition between the state and the medical profession, also entered into European claims over the bodies of people in distant territories. In images of the New World, European national rivals often contested claims to ownership and control, and it is precisely in images that critique the imposition of violence on Indigenous communities that the most extreme displays of physical force are frequently found—and without the usual transformative possibilities. Foucault located this level of physical brutality in early modern institutional and political authority, arguing for the value that the excess of bodily pain offered kings but also for a reciprocal exchange in which the state and the condemned colluded with each other. After Foucault’s 1972 *Discipline and Punish* associated the

torture and disciplining of the body with the modern state, anatomical violence was linked to official punishment. Andrea Carlino, for example, has mined Italian archives for evidence that state punishment and anatomical dissection were often linked, as were rituals of the scaffold and rituals of the annual anatomical lesson. Katharine Park challenged the established idea that postmortem investigation of the body started in the Renaissance and was invariably linked to forms of state punishment.<sup>112</sup> The shift from punishment to self-punishment (or from critique to self-critique that is at work in images of the New World) has not been considered in relation to anatomy, even though the many images of self-dissection would suggest an interesting opening to the question of collusion that in Foucault's argument leads to the docile body. And this perspective is particularly relevant to a consideration of violence produced within the body itself. It is by shifting the view of the anatomical image from medical goals to questions of violence that the relation between the dissected body and the forces of dissection can be further investigated.

A key aspect of the shifting status of the anatomical image is the increasingly close relationship between anatomy and the institutions of print publishing, as Carlino has shown. Instead of seeing the image as a direct record of medical endeavors, Carlino initiated a more complicated understanding of the different interests that intersect in the making of the anatomical image. An opportunity to consider anatomical images from a new perspective was also opened up by recent interest in the association of violence and the formation of subjectivity, which has been largely located in the intervention of visual images. The anonymity of those subjected to dissection, like the anonymity of those executed, has begun to be questioned. In *Secrets of Women*, Katharine Park was the first to probe the appearance of a woman in the celebrated frontispiece of Vesalius's treatise. While this frontispiece is widely discussed in the scholarly literature, it is odd that the brutal treatment inflicted upon the woman had not been considered before, especially as Vesalius himself comments on it. Indeed, it is on the rare occasion in which the subjectivity of the person under dissection can be accessed—for instance, in studies of Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*—that scholars come closest to considering how violence permeates both practices and images of anatomy.<sup>113</sup> Even recent attempts to bring ethical considerations to the study of early modern medical research have underestimated how violence underlies the anatomical image.

Violence literally changed conceptions of the body. The anatomical image, as an image at the brink of violent change, intensified interest in the body's materiality, specifically in the properties of bone, muscle, flesh, and blood. In part this was facilitated by their transposition to the materiality of the image, whether the pressed paper and ink of a print, or the wax, color pigments, and human materials of the wax model. Initially, woodcuts and engravings reproduced the body both in its impending annihilation and in its impulse to move and thrive. Later, wax sculpture approximated the living body even more closely, with its uncanny simulation of bodily

materials and use of actual human matter, especially bone. But violence's unpredictable force complicated things by eliciting concern with bodily sensation and with the presence of pain and suffering within the image of knowledge. According to Montaigne, who argued for the courage that it takes in the face of death, all living creatures, human and nonhuman, fear pain, especially because the imagination, "anticipating death, gives us a more lively sense of pain."<sup>114</sup> This idea that the image of bodily violence heightens the sensation of pain bears some resemblance to Jean-Luc Nancy's argument that violence "always makes an image of itself, and the image is what, of itself, presses out ahead of itself and authorizes itself." According to Nancy, violence is linked to the image in that it needs to imprint itself on the thing assaulted, and the image, which operates not as an imitation of something but as its rival for presence, offers this imprint as something that becomes the subject of the image.<sup>115</sup> In this book, I use the term *image* to refer to specific examples of both printed images and wax models, but I also argue for a concept of the anatomical image as one in which subjectivity is transferred to the act of violence. Too often, the anatomical image is taken to be an image of the human body like any other, complete and self-contained. The image of violence, however, puts pressure on the force through which fragmentation transforms and reforms the body unexpectedly. In effect, this is an image always in process, always engaged with the physical force imposed on itself.

The participation of the observer is an unpredictable component in the performance enacted by the anatomical image, although as the image was physically revised through reproductive visual technologies, one can discern instances in which ambiguities are clarified and new possibilities are tried out. Some of these revisions had to do with reasserting the image's adherence to biblical Genesis, especially the fixing of distinctions between the pre- and post-Fall body. Others had to do with the uncertainty of the boundaries between the memory of violence and the curbing of that memory through transformative potential. Images press at the limits of what could be given visual form while encouraging the observer's desire to see more. As with public punishment, in which excessive suffering could turn the sovereign into a bloodthirsty tyrant and insufficient suffering could undermine his authority, the anatomical image negotiated its level of violence in relation to other images.<sup>116</sup> In this exchange of possibilities, images of violence cannot be limited to those within medical research, and thus I consider how the anatomical image is constantly in dialogue with other images of bodily violence—public punishment, cannibalism, martyrdom—in order to understand how violence unfolds through the constant making and remaking of the image, not only by makers but also by users. It is worth reiterating that instead of presuming a preestablished definition of what constitutes the violence of the image, I explore how violence and its effects emerge from its relationship to concepts of the human body, the material formats through which it is imaged, and the experience of viewing these images.



## Book Outline

The first two chapters of the book address the formation of the anatomical image in relation to the technology of print. It is with the printed image that a more fragmented form of embodiment came into prominence, and I start, in chapter 1, by considering the implications of the new frontispiece designed for the first Italian edition of Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica* (published in Venice in 1604 under the title *Anatomia*), in which anatomical fragments from diverse sources are sutured together into a new whole. How did anatomical prints produce the concept of the body as an assemblage with as yet unknown possibilities? The force of muscles and the agility of bones take precedence, especially after the 1543 publication of Vesalius's treatise. That treatise, and particularly its remarkable set of woodcuts, argues for the body's future potential through the defleshing of the body, enabling the surface of the muscles and the structure of the bones to be revealed and even bolstered by the removal of all ephemeral and unclassifiable bodily matter. A body increasingly directed by its own self-propelled energy and animation undermined the very concept of flesh so crucial to received notions of embodied experience and sensation. But the body was not neutral matter open to medical reclassification, and this was especially true of the bones, which carried biblical associations with death as punishment for human sin. Vesalius's woodcuts draw on many inventive strategies to pursue the concept of the body as assemblage but also to challenge biblical notions of origins in order to accommodate new findings about the body.

Other anatomical treatises challenged Vesalius's radical interpretation of the body, not by rejecting it but by considering its implications for the body's mutability, especially for its unpredictable flesh. In chapter 2, I consider how Juan de Valverde de Amusco's 1556 *Historia de la composición del cuerpo humano* (*History of the Composition of the Human Body*) takes up the new paradigm offered by Vesalius's treatise but challenges its tendency to displace embodied experience. Valverde's treatise remains misunderstood, both in its relation to Vesalius's treatise and in its contribution to sixteenth-century anatomical knowledge. Valverde's treatise, available shortly after Vesalius's own, reworks the latter's woodcuts into engravings, producing an image that only emerges between the two. Valverde's engravings restore the experience of bodily sensation, drawing on the destructive power of violence to assert not only the body's fragility but also its continual process of remaking itself, even in and beyond death. I argue that Valverde's response to Vesalius's images is innovative, especially as it pertains to Vesalius's deployment of antique sculpture, applying concepts of restoration to bring back layers of skin, flesh, and fat removed from the body even before the dissection in Vesalius's treatise begins. This restoration entails testing out a variety of doubles for a body that, through dissection, approaches the very edge of extinction. The application of animal skins and Roman military effigies counter anatomy's extreme process of denuding with other violent substitutes.

The subject of cannibalism in a book on the anatomical image may be unexpected, but in chapter 3 I examine the question of bodily violence in an arena in which it would thrive. The construction of the cannibal did not simply offer the opportunity to stage an unprecedented level of violence that was increasingly unacceptable in the context of European public punishment; it also generated analogical thinking about the imposition of violence, especially within the expanding geographies of European economic and missionary activity. While the cannibal implies difference, it was only a surface difference, as it tended to forge links between Europe and its others and move back and forth from New to Old World. The cannibal became the anatomical body's troubling double, and together they formed a curious pair, relocated by natural law to distant uninhabited lands, never straying too far from each other in the wider political arena. Both shared anatomy's focus on fragmentation and reconstruction. But the cannibal's promiscuous formation as a performer in the theater of violence was not simply "European"; it was the product of a cultural exchange that also challenged European notions of the body by bringing together the external imposition of violence with internal processes of digestion and indigestion. Instead of regarding the cannibal as an identity located in the Tupinamba communities of Brazil, I propose that its powerful effects came precisely from the inability to be situated within any one cultural context.

This middle chapter is intended to provide a bridge between the first two and the last two chapters of the book, as the mirroring effect of the cannibal links not just the cannibal and the anatomical body but also printed images and wax models. At the center of this chapter is the ambivalent status of the head, which appears throughout the book. Rejected in Vesalius's treatise for its power over the observer, the head was also shunned by the cannibal for being indigestible, mocked by Protestants for its use as a relic, and appropriated by the Tupinamba to deflect European intrusion. The head also brought new opportunities, especially in relation to new forms of knowledge and cross-cultural exchange. The transportation to Brazil of relics of Saint Ursula's virgins by the Jesuits offers a striking case in which Catholic skull relics and Tupinamba ancestor skulls made room for more than one system of belief. In Europe, meanwhile, when skulls and other bones shipped from Asia and the Americas were not recognized by church officials in Rome, they were relocated to anatomical and ethnographic cabinets, where established classifications started to break down.

In chapters 4 and 5, I turn from the printed image to the anatomical wax model and consider how new modes of production and display within public cabinets altered the anatomical image. I start, in chapter 4, with what is probably the earliest wax model, Gaetano Zumbo's late seventeenth-century head, which is unprecedented in confronting the viewer with the effects of violence, revealing the suffering of the person through the nuances of a face both brutally cut and in the process of decomposing. A composite of human and artificial matter, this model

does not merely replicate the body but becomes a lifelike substitute. Not coincidentally, it confronts the head, and in particular the relationship between face and brain, the former impossible to separate from close proximity to physical suffering, the latter difficult to bring into full visibility as bodily matter. The three-dimensional model and its mode of display presented viewers with new challenges, especially the contrast between the face and its opposite side, in which an actual human cranium, cut as prescribed by anatomical practice, reveals the brain. In Anna Morandi Manzolini's wax self-portrait, displayed at the center of her cabinet of wax models in Bologna, the face and brain are also juxtaposed, bringing into proximity the remarkable simulation of Morandi's facial appearance and elegant attire with the abject anonymous cranium, cut to reveal the overflow of brain matter. Violence would now transform not the person but the body's materiality and would bring new kinds of differentiations for the body: artificial and embodied, mechanical and volatile, female and male.

Chapter 5 takes up the first full-scale anatomy cabinet of wax models, installed in the 1740s in Bologna's Institute of Sciences and consisting of life-size replicas of a man and woman engaged in an elaborate performance of bodily dissection. The performance is one of departure, denuding, and differentiation. The departure of Adam and Eve from Paradise overlaps with another departure, the separation of the two wax models as they enact different forms of embodiment. In the case of the female model, the memory of violence is embedded both in the Genesis narrative and in anatomical practice, bringing into display a body that must suffer, age, deteriorate, and die. The violence that is the experience of a body under constant mutation and deterioration is considered not only by the making of the sculpture but also by its afterlife and its problematic current state of conservation. In the case of the male model, the body is linked to the other wax figures in the process of dissection, which together carry out a performance of denuding from skin to bone, energized through the process of being cut into parts. Are these figures Adam and Eve, or are they anatomical performers who carry the memory of the biblical pair? I argue that it is the slippage between past and future identities that counts. The female figure, rendered in a new technique of layering colored wax that activates a remarkable sense of presence, is set apart from the male figures, which are reduced to bones and muscles and reach for artificial life. Does the desire to be human counter the sudden realization that she too has bone hidden within her, a component that becomes of great interest to seventeenth-century medical discussions on technological innovation and surgical skill? Not coincidentally, recent futuristic sci-fi films (e.g., *Ex Machina*, 2014) have turned to early modern interpretations of the creation of Eve to imagine the contradictions between the violence of being human and the violence produced in the search for prelapsarian perfection.

In the scholarly literature, the imagery of Adam and Eve has been attributed, all too expediently, to the need for moralizing gestures in relation to the controversies

raised by new medical practices. Yet the relation of anatomy to Genesis is much more complicated. The encounter of Old and New Worlds raised questions about human origins and challenged the very ontology of the human body. In anatomical imagery, the biblical couple appear and disappear, separate and come together, oscillate between Adam and Eve and the more ambivalent and capacious “man” and “woman.” Chapter 5 proposes that early modern interpretations of Eve—unlike misogynist interpretations that have subsequently become entrenched—argue for Eve as the primary placeholder for the uncertain future of the human.