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**Into Theatre, Under the Knife:
Cultures of Dissection and Contemporary Art Practice**

Kate Scardifield

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

Dissection can be considered a process of calculated dividing and a form of meticulous dismantling. As a method of analysis, it remains inextricably linked to explorations of the human body and the investigations staged to uncover its hidden depths. This research examines historical cultures of dissection and their relationship to contemporary art practice. It proposes that such a culture is characterised by an inherent cutting spectacle; one that remains grounded within a complex and pre-existing visual culture that has dissected, divided and dismantled the body and its image.

Into theatre, Under the Knife: Cultures of Dissection and Contemporary Art Practice is the outcome of a practice-led research project comprising this written thesis and a diverse body of work that spans sculpture, assemblage, installation and painting. Across the development of both the textual and creative work, cutting has been employed as a methodology for the research, and forms a significant basis for the material and conceptual inquiry of the study. Over the course of this thesis historical source material, theoretical propositions and the work of contemporary artists are gradually and methodically dissected for examination. The paper that has then developed as a result of this process-led research proposes a series of significant intersections, and a framework of ‘cuttings and cross-cuttings’ to consider art practice as a form of anatomical enquiry. In suggesting these points of connection, and by intentionally traversing the historical and contemporary, new ground is proposed to consider a culture of dissection within contemporary art through an analyses of the seminal practitioners who maintain and continue to enact their own distinct practice of cutting.

Whether undertaken as a light incision to permeate a surface, or a dramatic slash that severs, this research will attempt to reveal that cutting is a significant yet under-recognised gesture being used by contemporary artists. Much like the surgeon or anatomist who performs incisions in theatre, artists too inflict cutting gestures with strategic and decisive intent. The cutting gesture that embodies both dual creative and destructive possibilities acts also as a sign of authorship, a signature of authenticity from one who wields the knife.

Introduction

The author lays down his idea on the marble table of the café. Lengthy meditation, for he makes use of the time before the arrival of his glass, the lens through which he examines the patient. Then, deliberately, he unpacks his instruments: fountain pens, pencil and pipe. The numerous clientele, arranged as in an amphitheatre, make up his clinical audience. Coffee, carefully poured and consumed, puts the idea under chloroform. What this idea may be has no more connection with the matter at hand than the dream of the anesthetized patient with the surgical intervention. With the cautious lineaments of handwriting the operator makes incisions, displaces internal accents, cauterizes proliferations of words, inserts a foreign term as a silver rib. At last the whole is finally stitched together with punctuation, and he pays the waiter, his assistant, in cash.

Walter Benjamin, *Polyclinic*

Couper, c'est penser
(To cut, is to think)

Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni,
La Robe: Essai psychanalytique sur le vêtement.

Statement regarding the subject

The act of cutting is a gesture imbued with a range of possibilities: when employed with intent it can open a surface, divide a substance, delineate boundaries, fragment and separate. Cutting also has the ability to find space previously unexposed, to access hidden depths by penetrating a surface and revealing its subterranean matter. In her seminal text *La Robe*, French psychoanalyst Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni states, “The first act is always already a cut: one must cut into magma to beget form. Before the cut, there is nothing, after there is only a shape, a line, and an unassimilable remnant.”¹ Lemoine-Luccioni’s words serve as a reminder that *to cut* is a verb, an active gesture that performs. Whether by scissors, scalpel, knife or blade, cutting remains implicitly performative, it begets an act of theatre. Its delivery can be manual and of the hand, or the machine by proxy. It can also be characterized as a type of surgical intervention, implying that a level of dexterity, control and calculation can be asserted in the act.

This thesis will examine cutting as a method employed by artists, a way of working with and through physical matter, a mode of defining conceptual parameters and as a strategy for dissecting historical material in the context of the present. The dual creative and destructive possibilities inherent to the process of cutting suggests that this gesture exists as a unique form of mark making; its inflictions have the potential to be traced across the practices of collage and assemblage, into performance, body art, installation, and many areas of new media. As this thesis will demonstrate cutting can be a significant methodology employed by artists, whether engaging its ability for the reduction, division and fragmentation of form or rousing its capacity to remake, reimagine and reassemble. The intent of this study is to explore the idea that there is a ‘culture of dissection’ operating in contemporary art practice. This thesis will focus specifically on how this dissective culture can be characterised by the presence of a *cutting spectacle*— a term used throughout this research to describe a cutting action or gesture that is performed, creating a division or producing a doubling effect on the body, or a material substitute used to represent it.

Culture(s) of dissection

Art, science and medicine have long been engaged in explorations of the textual nature of human body. In both a cultural and temporal context, and indeed in a literal sense, the visceral body continues to be read within and across these discourses as a “body of knowledge.”² When literary historian Jonathan Sawday identified a “culture of dissection” operating throughout Renaissance

¹This English translation of Lemoine-Luccioni’s statement has been taken from, DalMolin, Elaine. *Cutting the Body: Representing Woman in Baudelaire’s Poetry, Truffaut’s Cinema and Freud’s Psychoanalysis*, The Body, in Theory: Histories of Cultural Materialism (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 1. The original French text is “Le premier acte toujours déjà advenu est la coupure : il s’agit de tailler dans le magma pour engendrer la forme. Avant la coupure il n’y a rien; après, il n’y a qu’une forme, un trait, et un rest inassimilable”. Lemoine-Luccioni, Eugénie. *La Robe: Essai Psychanalytique Sur Le Vêtement* (Éditions Du Seuil. Paris: Octobre, 1983), 17-18.

² Detsi-Diamanti, Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou and Yiannopoulou argue that political and ethical shifts induced by new medical technology and its relationship to the body have seen a return to the focus on flesh and the visceral body. See introduction Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou, Effie Yiannopoulou, ed. *The Flesh Made Text Made Flesh : Cultural and Theoretical Returns to the Body* (New York: P. Lang, c.2007), 2.

Europe, he argued that this specific culture had been galvanised by science through its multilateral approach to the “seemingly endless partitioning of the world.”³ According to Sawday, this practice of networks, social structures and rituals divided the body into fragments and dismantled its form both physically, metaphorically and by proxy.⁴ In asserting the body’s centrality within this culture of dissection Sawday maintains that dissective practices are not only anchored to our understanding of human anatomy, but expand *outside* the body, permeating broader socio-political discourses and pedagogical systems that lie beyond the boundary of flesh.⁵

Anatomical enquiry can then be thought about as a mode of dissective analysis, including but not limited to the confines of the body. For artists, making incisions or cuts into matter is also about a form of analysis, being able to comprehend and gain knowledge of a particular material or idea. The iconic *Tagli* or ‘Cuts’ composed by Italian artist Lucio Fontana in the 1950s and 1960s present the gesture of cutting in direct correlation with the practice of art making. Fontana offered up the rupturing possibility of the cut and the cutting gesture as an action to not only break surface, but also to expose a potential void or chasm existing between and below the broken boundary. Described by art historian Anthony White as “lodged somewhere between pictorial space and sculptural object,” Fontana’s interrogation through puncture and cutting techniques applied to canvas was primarily one of space.⁶ As White points out, it is important to consider Fontana’s cut works as spatial studies, as opposed to applying a reading that centres solely on the cutting gesture as a sign of authorship or authenticity.⁷ White makes clear that Fontana’s work is often aligned and contextualised within the genre of *Informel* painting and whilst there are significant connections stylistically, he insists on a broader analytical lens in order to examine the cutting works as spatial studies where the artist’s intention was to negotiate volume and depth.

Fontana’s use of the cutting gesture to stage a spatial investigation implies a methodological connection between art practice and anatomical enquiry. In order to investigate depth, Fontana employed the cut to break through the canvas surface and breach its material boundary. In doing so, the artist created a gap, characteristic of a void or chasm, which allowed one to witness the object’s spatial volume. Understanding the body’s spatial organisation and the comprehension of its physical depth were crucial pursuits undertaken during the dissection of a cadaver in the early modern anatomy theatre. Sawday confirms this, stating, “Anatomy and perspective shared a common tendency... both were concerned with volume rather than surface.”⁸ When one considers the physical implications of cutting, whether applied to the body or to the canvas, it reveals the enactment of this gesture to be closely aligned with an interest in acquiring

³ See ‘*The Autoptic Vision*’, 2-4. Sawday, Jonathan. *The Body Emblazoned : Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 1995.

⁴ Ibid. 2

⁵ Sawday states “partition stretched into all forms of social and intellectual life: logic, rhetoric, painting, architecture, philosophy, medicine, as well as poetry, politics, the family, and the state were all potential subjects for division. The pattern of all these different forms of division was derived from the human body. It is for this reason that the body must lie at the very centre of our enquiry.” Ibid. 3

⁶ White, Anthony. *Lucio Fontana: Between Utopia and Kitsch*, An October Book (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2011),196.

⁷ Ibid.196-198.

⁸ Op. cit. Sawday. See Chapter 5, ‘Sacred Anatomy and the order of Representation’, 86.

knowledge of three-dimensional space. Subsequently, Sawday also asserts, “The study of anatomy was the study of the organisation of space.”⁹

In *Spatial Concept, Expectations* (Fig. 1) Fontana’s cuts into canvas move between appearing clean and surgical in manner to presenting as dramatic, almost feverish, gesticulations. Their presence creates a rupture amidst the monochromatic surface of the painting, which White describes as a “vandalistic trace” left by the artist after slicing through the canvas with a Stanley knife.¹⁰ In this instance it is the cut we bear witness to, as opposed to the act of cutting itself. What we experience is the relic of the cutting gesture, a mark or demarcation. French psychoanalyst and theorist François Baudry notes that in the creation of an object there is a reduction that occurs to condense it to a singular form. This reduction (or cut) is prescriptive of an action that has already occurred. Literary theorist Elaine DalMolin describes this as a “concrete disappearance (leaving no apparent trace of its passage) when it engenders the line.”¹¹ There is an absence that can be made apparent by the cutting gesture: this intervention into matter or material is remembered via the mark of an incision, asserting Baudry and DalMolin’s insistence that “the cut is always already past.”¹²

The mirror and the knife

Where Sawday located the body at the center of the dissective culture during the Renaissance period, he dually acknowledges the significance of the anatomy theatre that housed and facilitated the body’s opening up and its subsequent division. Exploring the implications of the early-modern anatomy theatre as a site in which the cutting spectacle was active and practiced is crucial within the context of this study. As will be established in the first chapter, the act of cutting is a performed gesture, one inherent with attributes of stagecraft and active within the context of *theatre*.

According to Sawday, the two signifying objects inherent to anatomisation (*Anatomia*) are the mirror and the knife, both these emblematic tools having been drawn from the mythological story of Perseus and Medusa.¹³ Dwelling momentarily on their symbolic implications seems pertinent in order to continue framing the context of this study. Much of the significance of the mirror and the knife lies in either their potent coupling or in the mutually exclusive ground they occupy, not only within the tale of Medusa but also in their ability to garner knowledge of the human body and display its hidden interior. Where the knife is designed and understood as a cutting implement, its sharpened blade has the ability to incise, sever and delineate matter, the mirror is an image-making tool—reflecting, doubling—that makes a copy or exact replica of what it sees. Both utilitarian objects have the ability to bring about rupture and instigate an act of cutting. The knife slices through surface, puncturing and incising boundaries. The mirror, according to

⁹ Ibid. 86

¹⁰ Op. cit. White, 223

¹¹ Op. cit. DalMolin, 5

¹² Ibid. 5. White also argues that Fontana’s cutting gesture “instantiates a presence under erasure”. Op. cit. White, 223.

¹³ Op. cit. Sawday, 3.

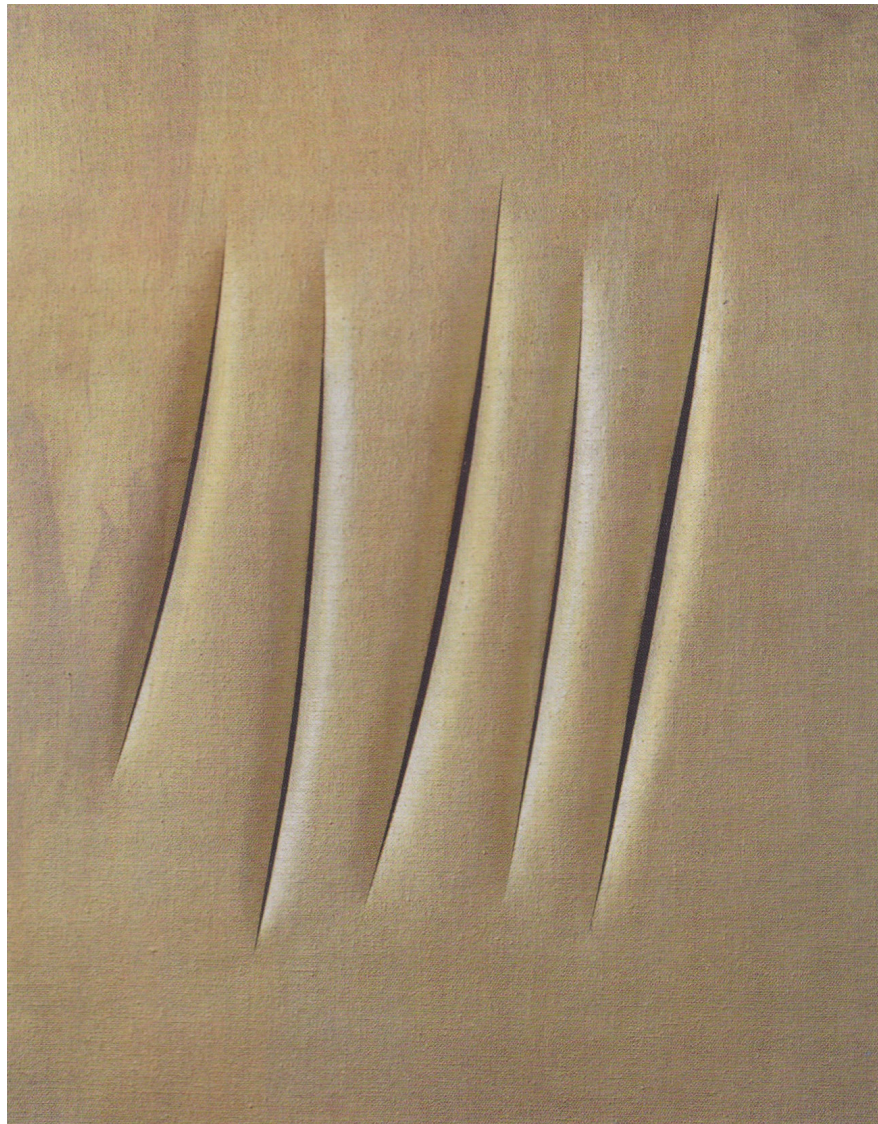


Figure 1.
Lucio Fontana, *Spatial Concept, Expectations* 1962.
Oil on canvas, 82 x 65 cm.

Lacanian psychoanalysis, is the splitting point where the self and the other are consciously separated and made distinct.¹⁴ The myth of Medusa is recurrent throughout Sawday's examination of the dissective culture in Renaissance Europe, and throughout this thesis the Medusa allegory will also be revisited for its metaphorical and theoretical implications towards core ideas addressed in this study – after all, it was a cutting gesture, the severing blow dealt by Perseus, that cut off the gorgon's head.

Justification and significance of the study

In the process of undertaking this study I have come to identify a lack of scholarship that addresses the significance of the cut and acts of cutting that are occurring in contemporary visual art practice. Within existing scholarship, cutting has been examined across the fields of film, literature, psychoanalysis, photography, organisational studies and quantum physics.¹⁵ This literature includes Elaine DalMolin's examination of the incisions and cutting gestures inflicted on the female body in the poetry, cinema and psychoanalysis of Baudelaire, Truffaut and Freud. DalMolin's research parameters did not include the field of visual arts, however her scholarship has helped frame the significance of cutting as a dual creative and destructive process inflicted on the body and inherent to its representation. In their recent scholarship media theorists Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska have suggested that there is a recurring absence of acknowledgement regarding the practice of cutting in artists' work, going on to infer that the cut is arguably made more visible within digital media, film, photography, graphic design and writing. The authors state,

The psychic symbolism of art as a metaphorical process of cutting the world, with all the connotations of violence, pain, and pleasure this process entails, frequently remains unacknowledged in many artists' work, as well as in broader debates on indexicality, referentiality, and representation in photography.¹⁶

As will be demonstrated by this thesis, my research has come to show that both the cut and the act of cutting are in fact implicit within and across diverse forms of visual art, that extend beyond and are not limited to those identified by Kember and Zylinska. The cut and the act of cutting will be revealed as modes of practice regularly activated by artists whose work is engaged in explorations of materiality and representations of the body, as a type of historical enquiry or

¹⁴ See Elizabeth Grosz for a particularly informative reading on Lacan's theorisation of the mirror stage and the ego. In regards to the splitting and rupturing effect of the mirror, Grosz states, "The ego is split, internally divided between the self and other. It can represent the person as a whole (as in the realist view) only in so far as it denies this internal rupture and conceives of itself as the source of its own origin and unity. It maintains an active, aggressive and libidinal relation to the other on whom it depends." Grosz, Elizabeth. *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 47-48.

¹⁵ Cutting has been explicitly examined in regards to the fields previously stated in the following publications: Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007. Dale, Karen. *Anatomising Embodiment and Organisation Theory*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. DalMolin, Elaine. *Cutting the Body: Representing Woman in Baudelaire's Poetry, Truffaut's Cinema and Freud's Psychoanalysis*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000. Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska. *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012.

¹⁶ Op. cit. Kember and Zylinska. 88-89

critique. Through this study my aim is to reveal this idea of a cutting spectacle operating in an under-recognised yet active culture of dissection and how this can attribute further significance to current enquiries within art practice. This thesis will argue that this culture can be characterised by the engagement of a cutting spectacle that remains grounded within a complex and pre-existing visual culture that has partitioned, divided and dismantled the body and its image. Given the potential breadth of this field, I do not intend to position this study as all-inclusive as it has been primarily undertaken through a western European lens. I acknowledge that there is ample scope for further research into non-western cultures of dissection and modes of anatomical enquiry that fall outside the necessary parameters of this thesis.

The first question this research addresses is, *where in western European history can we locate existing cutting spectacles imposed on the body?* This thesis will attempt to locate cutting spectacles operating in the early modern anatomy theatre, at the guillotine during the French Revolution, in eighteenth century physiognomic discourse and in the eighteenth century anatomical museum. I have examined these sites not with the intention to trace a chronological path, but rather with the hypothesis that they have collectively contributed to a specific genre of representation ascribed to the body that can be characterised by the infliction of a cutting spectacle. As this thesis unfolds, each site will be examined as a platform for incision, revealing how the cutting spectacle operates as a type of dissective visual language, one that has led to a translation of the cutting gesture from site, to body, to image; therefore enabling an economy of incision to permeate art practice.

This will then lead me to the question, *where are cutting spectacles currently being enacted by artists and how do these characterise the presence of a contemporary culture of dissection?* I will propose that cutting as a methodology can be both an act of spectacle and a strategy used by contemporary artists. I will then test the idea of present culture of dissection in art practice by undertaking an analysis of seminal practitioners within the field who employ a methodology of cutting and dissective strategies as ways to engage with historical material in the context of the present. By locating and examining this field of artists, I will then contextualise my own art practice and augment my idea of art making as a form of anatomical enquiry.

Framing the cutting spectacle: a definition of terms

When employing the term *cutting spectacle*, I do so in a way that considers *cutting* as a causal action, one that has the ability to generate a representation that in turn becomes the site, image or stage for the spectacle to take place. Jonathan Crary importantly questioned whether the notion of spectacle presents a risk of imposing an “illusionary unity” or a “totalizing and monolithic concept” onto a selected discipline or branch of knowledge, particularly when a definite article proceeds the term – as in *'the spectacle'*.¹⁷ Crary also strongly advocated for an awareness in regards to the changing emphasis and shifts in underlying meaning that are continually imposed

¹⁷ Crary, Jonathan. "Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory." *October* 50 (1989): 96-107, 96.

on the term *spectacle*.¹⁸ In acknowledgement and agreement with Crary, I consider the term *spectacle* as one that remains essentially dependent on context, time and place.

In framing the cutting spectacle and attempting to understand its implications within this research, I have been influenced by Guy Debord's emphasis on the phenomenon of separation occurring within the genesis of the spectacle. Debord argues that the separation between real life and representation is bridged by the spectacle, and that the split that occurs between reality and its representation can be characterised by its image.¹⁹ Debord states,

The spectacle divides the world into two parts, one of which is held up as a self-representation to the world, and is superior to the world. The spectacle is simply the common language that bridges this division. Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its separateness.²⁰

The emphasis on splitting and separation that occurs in Debord's theorising of the spectacle, has led me to consider cutting as a congruent phenomenon. By undertaking an incision or making a split in matter, a doubling effect is created and an investigation into space can occur. Where the act of cutting has the capacity to divide, the cut engendered can be perpetually redefined through a *re-cutting* of the boundaries it creates. Cutting, like the spectacle, can be understood as a form of communication by which divisions are made and transgressed, in order to be remade.

As previously stated this research will focus specifically on where and how the cut and the act of cutting is signified on the body and its representations. In defining the body as a term used within the parameters of my research, I acknowledge the complexities, inherent meanings and misunderstandings that are associated with the notion of 'body'. Rather than pinning down finite and rigid definitions of the *body*, the *body politic* or the *body artefact*, my aim is to articulate a framework for understanding these sites in relation to the cutting spectacle, one which is fluid and adaptable in its characteristics, in order to acknowledge a multiplicity of bodies and embodied states.

When employing the term *the body*, I am predominantly referring to the human body (living or dead) in a biological and medical context. The body is also understood as a physical and psychological entity, whereby cultural, social and experiential variables contribute to the grounds of its diversity. I acknowledge these variables and multiplicities and also acknowledge that my lived experience is that of my own body. It is through my own body that my experience of gender, sexuality and age are activated through social and cultural frameworks, informing and contributing to my perspective on the world.

¹⁸ Crary states, "For the term to have any critical or practical efficacy depends, in part, on how one periodizes it – that is, the spectacle will assume quite different meanings depending on how it is situated historically." Ibid. 98

¹⁹ It is important to note that Debord stresses that it is not the image that is the spectacle, but the mediation between people and images – "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images." See Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. First paperback ed. (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 12-13.

²⁰ Ibid. Pg 22

When employing the term *body politic* I have considered it as a metaphor for a collective group of people, community, or the social fabric of society. I acknowledge that referring to the *body politic* has implications of collective citizens within a nation or state. My definition of the *body politic* within this research also reflects how the systems and structures that govern a group of citizens can bear a likeness to the organisation of the biological body; a housing for separate but interconnected systems, understood as correlative parts that contribute to a larger whole.

When referring to the *body artefact* I have defined this within the context of my research as a fragment or piece of the body viscera, an alternate material representation of the body, or an image of the body either whole or reduced to its parts. Throughout this thesis it is made explicit that the *body artefact* also has the ability to be understood as a physical synecdoche for the whole body. My employment of this term often refers to an object of interest within the context of somatology.²¹ The *body artefact* is addressed more widely in the second and third chapters of this thesis, particularly in regards to the analysis undertaken of comparative specimens within the eighteenth century anatomical museum.

Methodology for the research

This study takes the form of practice-oriented research, the dual outcome being this written thesis and a diverse body of artwork that spans sculpture, assemblage, painting and installation, the result of a speculative and experimental studio enquiry. My intention to undertake this research came from the realisation that within my studio practice, process driven investigations had led me to employ a way of working that I considered surgical in both manner and intent. Put simply, I was thinking about my practice of cutting into and incising paper, fabric and cloth as a substitute for the physical body, and what broader significance this particular way of working has within the diverse landscape of contemporary art.

This thesis intentionally employs the analysis of historical source material to contextualise the cutting spectacle as an incisive gesture inherent to past cultural practices of dissection, dismemberment, bodily division and their representations. By reconsidering how earlier visual cultures imaged the cut and the act of cutting applied to, or inflicted upon the body, I am attempting to weave a structural framework in which the contemporaneous employment of cuts, incisions and dissective strategies within art practice can be considered with greater significance and revealed as meaningful ways of making. Moving in and between the historical and the contemporary and by integrating my literature review throughout the body of the thesis, I intend to make explicit the significance of my approach as a dissective form of enquiry.

²¹ My understanding of somatology is informed by Edmund Husserl who defines the study as “a material science to the extent that it investigates the material properties of the animate organism.” See Husserl, Edmund. *Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences*. Translated by William E. Pohl Ted E. Klein (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980), 7-9.

American author William Faulkner's ubiquitous turn of phrase "The past is never dead. It is not even past" seems pertinent to consider in relation to the transgression I am suggesting; a moving in and between, and the undertaking of cuts and incisions into the historical and the contemporary.²² Rather than attempting to trace a linear or chronological trajectory of the cut and the act of cutting over time, I consider it more compelling to investigate the practice of cutting as a diverse collective of various types of incisions, and approach these as oscillating gestures. It is not the intention of this thesis to homogenise the practice of cutting, as no two incisions are ever the same. However by moving back and forth between past and present, this thesis will attempt to reveal the cutting spectacle operating across multiple visual systems of enquiry and patterns of signification.

Michel Foucault attested to this notion of moving in and between time when he discussed transgression as the crossing and recrossing of a line or a limit. Once transgressed, the line or limit contracts in order to close and re-establish a boundary. However, being reciprocally co-dependent, the limit is never *uncrossable*. Foucault therefore reasoned that the relationship between transgression and the limit "takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust."²³ This metaphor speaks to the moving back and forth between the historical and the contemporaneous that characterises the structure of this study into the cutting spectacle and cultures of dissection, whereby established limits that concern the body are transgressed in order to be re-established, and transgressed once again. Foucault spoke of a knowledge of history not in terms of achieving a consistency but in defining its "oscillating reign"; he insists that a retracing of the past under the guise of definitive continuity requires a necessary dismantling. Foucault states,

"Effective" history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.²⁴

When Foucault expressed that knowledge was made for cutting, he did so in opposition of this "pretended continuity" that is often proposed by an attempted linear reading of historical content to justify and attribute a sequential outcome. Building upon Foucault's alignment of the act of cutting with the discernment of knowledge, cutting has been used as the overarching methodology throughout this study. It has been employed across both my studio practice and thesis as a way of dissecting, dismantling and piecing together materials, images and information with the intent of making explicit the relationship between anatomical enquiry, art and research practices. In my opinion, one must use the cutting method in order to comprehend its significance; put simply, I have thought about this research process like wielding a double-edged blade. Cutting is both a subject of enquiry in this instance and a methodology for the research: it

²² Faulkner, William. *Requiem for a Nun*. (New York: Vintage Books, Random House Inc, 2011), 73.

²³ Foucault, Michel. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 34-35.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 154.

permits the dismantling of ideas and matter as well as the division and the extraction of fragments from knowledge both past and present. In bringing together this thesis the same metaphorical blade used for incising and partitioning is one imbued with potent creative possibilities where disparate fractions of knowledge can then be sutured or hinged together, re-establishing, re-making and re-visioning a limit or boundary that can once again be transgressed.

Organisation of paper and chapter outline

Throughout this thesis I will revisit cornerstone ideas presented in the study and reiterate how the threads from the historical and contemporaneous, the theoretical and material, are being analysed as a way of proposing intersections between art practice and anatomical enquiry. Further layers of implication regarding the cutting spectacle will be revealed progressively over the course of each chapter. The foundations of a contemporary culture of dissection will be brought to light through an investigation of seminal artists who instigate their own distinct form of cutting spectacle to negotiate the body, site and space.

Chapter 1 will begin by proposing a return to Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty in order to examine how the cutting spectacle operates as a particular mode of incision, one that is inextricably linked to the anatomisation of the body. It will examine the early modern anatomy theatre as a space imbued with sacred and performative sentiment, and as a site that proliferated the cutting open of the body as a spectacular act. Responding to Sigmund Freud's call for an "aesthetic enquiry" in his theorising of the uncanny, this examination will lead to an analysis of historical source material that imaged the anatomised body and represented it as flayed or cut open for display. I will focus specifically on how these images formed part of a dissective visual culture within art practice and begin to reveal the contemporaneous significance of the cutting gesture through an examination of works by ORLAN and Teresa Margolles, artists whose approaches engage specifically with cutting open the body, either physically or via a material metaphor.

Chapter 2 draws on Foucault's genealogical understanding of inscription as the process of imprinting, engraving or inscribing past occurrences onto the body, which in turn become indelible markers of being and knowing. It will examine the guillotine employed during the French Revolution and also the eighteenth century pseudo-scientific practice of physiognomy as alternate theatrical scaffolds in which a cutting spectacle was also operative. I will attempt to demonstrate that in both instances a mechanised decapitation occurred in which the severed head became an emblematic signifier for the whole body, part of what Julia Kristeva describes as an 'icon economy', characterised by incision and positioned at the hinge of visibility and invisibility. Building on the examination of the anatomy theatre and the anatomised body in chapter 1, the cutting spectacle will be analysed as a gesture of political significance, one that has historically been employed to impose moral and judicial values within a broader body politic. This chapter will then demonstrate how the cutting spectacle employed to anatomise and examine

the body's *interior*, had the ability to transgress and embody another type of incision employed to detach, demarcate and delineate the body *exterior*. Put simply, it will address the relationship between cutting open and cutting out the body by examining the dissective acts employed in the representation of severed heads and the practice of silhouette cutting. Turning to contemporary visual artists whose practices engage with the visual language of silhouettes and cutouts, I will examine key works by Kara Walker, Sally Smart and Deborah Kelly to demonstrate and augment their cutting practices as forms of excavation, critique and subversion towards representations of the body and body politic.

In Chapter 3 I will consider the historical significance of presenting and displaying collected body fragments. The chapter will analyse the eighteenth century anatomical museum as a site that proliferated the excavation of the body using dissective methods. This analysis will focus on images and source material gathered from first hand field research into the collections of Musée Fragonard (Maisons Alfort, France) and *La Specola* (Florence, Italy). The intention is to reveal how the dismantling of the body for comparative analysis and taxonomic display remains engrained with a sacred and performative sentiment similar to that of the anatomy theatre and early anatomical illustration. Drawing relationships between these specimen collections and the work of Catherine Truman, Mark Dion and Christine Borland, this chapter will demonstrate the cutting spectacle as inclusive of a number of archaeological approaches and stratigraphic methodologies which are employed within these artists' practices. Building on the analyses and examinations undertaken in the first two chapters of the thesis, the significance of the cutting spectacle, the practice of display and the imaging of knowledge derived from incisions made into historical material will be made explicit.

In Chapter 4 I will analyse my studio research and expand on the practice-lead investigation I have staged over the course of this project. By examining key artworks that represent the creative outcomes of this research I will address the approach taken to the body of work I have produced as one of *thinking through making*. This final chapter will consider the speculative enactments of the cutting gesture I have undertaken across forms of sculpture, assemblage, installation and painting. Importantly I will contextualise my practice as a form of anatomical enquiry by drawing on the historical, theoretical and contemporaneous intersections proposed in the first three chapters and attempt to re-activate these through a discursive analysis of my work. Responding to Kember and Zylinska's assertion whereby an "in-cision is also a de-cision," I will discuss how this lead me to create site-responsive assemblages that have the ability to evoke a reverberating or reflective action within the viewer.²⁵ On a material level, I will consider how cutting can be about carving shape and delineating form whereby an object may be extracted from matter, and space can be created via the remaining void left in the physical material. Both the cut and the act of cutting are to be addressed as potent metaphors for the way in which I process and construct information and ideas. By demonstrating how cutting as a form of analysis is also a method employed to ascertain knowledge, I will attempt to unpack facets of my practice as

²⁵Sarah Kember, Joanna Zylinska. *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012), 82.

interconnected yet fragmentary parts, in which a discussion around their relationship to the idea of the whole can be pursued.

Chapter 1
Under the Knife: A Return to Cruelty

For one moment, I long to leave it there, encased. To let it out, to cut it open, is to risk loosing it over the earth, an oceanic tide.

– Richard Selzer²⁶

In his collection of essays on the art of surgery, Richard Selzer makes this statement at the moment when placing his hand upon the abdomen of a patient suffering from peritonitis. It is through touch that the surgeon infers a ruptured organ. The sentiment captured in Selzer's words seems to acknowledge one of the seminal ironies of the surgical act – that associated with the risk of transgressing the body's outer boundary in the pursuit to make visible the body's hidden interior. A medical condition that without intervention presents as life threatening, will most often require a life-risking invasive surgical procedure in order to enter the body and attempt its repair.

To let it out, to cut it open

However, the concept of one's body going 'under the knife' is not only invested with associations of convalescence, surveillance and repair. Contemporaneously, surgical intervention is conducted under the guise of aesthetic transformation, re-modelling and even re-making the body. As this chapter will explore, the act of cutting into and cutting open the body casts a wide net beyond that of medical discourse, the implications of which have evoked parallel enquiries within visual arts practice. In the context of contemporary art practice, when thinking about performing the cut, one must recall Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (fig. 2). First performed by the artist in Kyoto at the Yamaichi Concert Hall in 1964, this seminal work has since gone on to be re-performed multiple times in various public exhibition contexts.²⁷ The performance consists of the artist seated on a stage, the audience present are invited one by one to ascend the stage and with a pair of scissors, cut into her clothing and remove fragments of cloth from the artist's body. Ono positions her body as the recipient of the cutting gesture; each incision is inflicted by a spectator and anxiously observed by an audience. Each animated cut differs as each individual undertakes their own type of incision; the level of severity or sincerity imbued in each gesture is determined by the spectator who, like Ono, reciprocally performs. Conversely, in ORLAN's *Suture/ Secularism* (fig. 3), performed for a live audience in 2007 at the Musée d'Art moderne, Saint-Etienne, it is

²⁶ Selzer, Richard. *Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996), 42.

²⁷ Extending on the original performances in which Ono positioned herself as the recipient of the cutting gesture, the artist has developed *Cut Piece* into a series of scores or versions. An alternate version scripted by Ono intends for the audience to cut into each others clothing. In my description of the work I am recalling the first iterations of the work performed solely by the artist. See Bryan-Wilson, J. "Remembering Yoko Ono's 'Cut Piece' (Performance Art)." *Oxford Art Journal* 26, no. 1 (2003): 99-123.



Figure 2.

Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece* 1964.

Performed by the artist, Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, 1965.

Photograph: Minoru Niizuma. Image courtesy and copyright the artist.



Figure 3.

ORLAN, *Suture/Secularism* 2007.

Live performance at the Musée d'Art moderne de Saint-Etienne Métropole.

Photograph: Yves Bresson.

Image courtesy Musée d'Art moderne de Saint-Etienne Métropole.

the artist who inflicts the cutting gesture. In the performance ORLAN moves between live models, each wearing items of the artist's own clothing. Taking scissors, ORLAN cuts into the garments, extracting sleeves and severing seam lines. Here ORLAN enacts the cutting gesture with the intention to flay open and deconstruct the cloth that covers the body; the semiotics of this cutting gesture also read as a potent metaphor for incisions made into flesh.²⁸

Both artists in this instance enact what can be described as a cutting spectacle in order to perform a transgression of boundaries and a symbolic rupturing of surface. Just like the surgeon, for the artist knowledge is attained through practice, whether it be an investigation into the physical body, or another type of corporeal metaphor in which matter is contained within a form. Across operating rooms, studios and exhibition spaces, in order to know the subject, it must be cut open, its internal matter made visible. The act of cutting can be considered analogous with forms of analysis, and therefore we can understand the cutting gesture as an action which is inherently performed in the acquisition of knowledge. In her scholarship on agential realism, theorist Karen Barad asserts that "cuts are part of the phenomena they help produce"²⁹. My understanding of Barad's claim is that the cutting gesture cannot be reduced to a destructive or evasive action; in fact the act of cutting not only retains the ability to generate new forms and delineate alternate compositions within matter, it can do so in a way that is acutely decisive and determined. Ono's work attests to the ability of the cut to create; throughout the performance potent ideas around the exposure of female flesh, the infliction of the gaze, the stripping back and destruction of the body are made apparent with each incision. ORLAN's gestural cuts create what British curator Simon Donger describes as both "a gap and a bridge", a transformation of material identity that mirrors the artist's own surgically realised metamorphosis.³⁰ In their essay "Cut! The Imperative of Photographic Mediation," Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylińska make the proposition that "an incision is also a de-cision."³¹ If such is the case, the cut can be understood as a transformative choice when inflicted upon matter, a determinative act of judgment, or even a calculated manoeuvre.

In this chapter I propose to undertake what I have defined as a return to theatre, the intention being to examine how the cutting spectacle has been performed and to reveal it as a dynamic yet decisive mode of incision. The chapter will begin by examining Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty as a framework for understanding the cutting spectacle in the context of the early modern anatomy theatre and the images of the anatomised body it proliferated. Historical source material will be analysed in order to demonstrate how the practice of dissection has fostered an intrinsic visual language, one which has the ability to transgress between site, body and image. This will lead me to respond to Freud's call for an 'aesthetic enquiry' into the uncanny, by analysing images of the flayed body or *écorché* and their ability to generate a disembodied or illusionary

²⁸ The fragments of cloth that resulted from the performance were then used by the artist to develop the sculptural series *Suture/Hybridization/Recycling*, a reassembling of textile hybrids that hinged and joined together disparate pieces of cloth to create dynamic forms. See Donger, Simon. "Carnal Vertigos." In *Orlan: A Hybrid of Body Artworks*, edited by Simon Shepard, Simon Donger, ORLAN (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 159-160.

²⁹ Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 200), 42.

³⁰ Op. cit. Donger. 159

³¹ Op. cit. Kember and Zylińska. 82

reflection of the anatomised corpse. By understanding the historical value of the relationship between anatomical enquiry and the art practices that imaged anatomy, this chapter will then consider the work of ORLAN and Teresa Margolles, seminal contemporary artists who employ or subvert their own cutting spectacles. Both artists through their own distinct practices engage in gestures of cutting open or cutting into the body, either physically or via a material metaphor. Through the analysis of specific works I will propose that these artists-come-anatomists make a significant contribution to the contemporary culture of dissection in visual arts, and that both ORLAN and Margolles have the ability to evoke a similar state of uncanny anxiety in their audience as the anatomists who performed the cutting spectacle on corpses in the early modern anatomy theatre.

A return to theatre via the cutting spectacle

According to the American scholar and dramatic theorist Bert O. States “theatre is the one place where society collects in order to look upon itself as a third-person other”.³² Etymologically derived from the Greek *theatron* ‘to see’, theatre is essentially a ‘seeing place’ embodied by architected structures or specific spaces purposely designed to house an ensemble of performers and observers.³³ Within the context of this thesis theatre refers to the performance and observation of cutting spectacles as a form of dramaturgy present within both artistic and medical modes of practice. Acknowledging the operating or surgical theatre as sites where the body is clinically opened for repair, examination or display serves to reiterate that theatre in all its contextually distinct forms exists as dedicated space where the body remains centre stage.

When Artaud proposed the Theatre of Cruelty it was with intention to effect truth within theatrical performance. He believed that inciting a visceral experience was necessary in order to bring about a primordial awareness and acknowledgement of a stark (but true) reality. According to Artaud, “There can be no spectacle without an element of cruelty as the basis of every show. In our present degenerative state, metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body.”³⁴ It is important to note that the infliction of pain or psychological horror that is often associated with dissection or bodily dismemberment within the confines of the anatomy theatre does not correspond with Artaud’s understanding of cruelty. It is not the objective of this chapter to manipulate his use of the term ‘cruelty’ in a way that restricts it to a definition of brutality, torture or physical malice. Rather, I wish to adhere closely to Artaud’s definition of cruelty for the purpose of this study, one which he proposes must occur within the context of theatre:

This cruelty is not sadistic or bloody, at least not exclusively so... One may perfectly well envisage pure cruelty without any carnal laceration. Indeed, philosophically

³² States, Bert O. *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 39.

³³ Kennedy, Dennis, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance*. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2010), 598-600.

³⁴ Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double*. Translated by Victor Corti (London: John Calder Ltd 1977).77.

speaking, what is cruelty? From a mental viewpoint, cruelty means strictness, diligence, unrelenting decisiveness, irreversible and absolute determination.³⁵

Artaud's description of the characteristic qualities of cruelty—diligent, decisive, determined and irreversible—echo key characteristic qualities of the surgeon who wields the scalpel or cutting implement with the context of the operating theatre. The cutting hand must be steady and accurate, above all decisive in its manoeuvres, where each incision made into the body reflects a calculated decision.³⁶ Demonstrated progressively throughout this paper, dissection is a practice that involves inflictions of cutting into, cutting open, cutting off and cutting out. These corresponding gestures operate as methods of analysis long engrained in mapping our understanding of the body, surveying its form and charting the explication of this knowledge. It is the aim of this study to make explicit the significance of the cutting spectacle entrenched within existing cultures of dissection, and in turn this will reveal cutting as an anachronistic gesture that implicitly characterises a culture of dissection occurring in contemporary art practice. A return to the anatomy theatre is paramount in order to understand the significance of the cutting gesture, not only in terms of its analytical intent, but also its inherent agency within the ritualised and ceremonial performance of dissection, making it a gesture that remains inherent to the conventions of theatre. Before undertaking further analysis of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, it is important to acknowledge that whilst this thesis deals at points with audience reception, the scope of this study and the application of this particular theoretical lens is primarily engaged from the perspective of artistic practice. The significance of the viewer's experience is not omitted, but would benefit from further unpacking once outside the parameters of this research.

Artaud is adamant that theatre is pre-existing, we do not bring it in to being, rather we activate the theatre; we "install" it.³⁷ This point Artaud makes is important to consider, as it suggests a permanent, yet quiescent, scaffold for performing knowledge or explicating the real. Samuel Weber reiterates this, referring to theatre's primacy and its constant presence, "albeit dormant".³⁸ Weber notes,

To "install oneself", however, is to *take* a place that is *already there*, to occupy it, indeed, to *expropriate* it and, in the process, to *transform* it. That is precisely what the theatre does when it makes the site into a scene, the place into a stage, and it is this alteration and expropriation that makes it cruel.³⁹

By proposing a return to theatre via the cutting spectacle it must also be considered how the Theatre of Cruelty operates as a doubling medium or a site of duplicity, and therefore what relationship potentially exists between theatre and the cutting spectacle. "The Theatre of Cruelty

³⁵ See the first of Artaud's *Letters of Cruelty*. Ibid. 77

³⁶ In his second manifesto on regarding the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud explains, "The Theatre of Cruelty was created in order to restore an impassioned convulsive concept of life to theatre, and we ought to accept the cruelty on which this is based in the sense of drastic strictness, the extreme concentration of stage elements. This cruelty will be bloody if need be, but not systematically so, and will therefore merge with the idea of a kind of severe mental purity, not afraid to pay the cost one must pay in life." Ibid. 81

³⁷ Ibid. 80

³⁸ See Samuel Weber, 'The Greatest Thing of All: The Virtual Reality of Theatre' 9-17 in Sheer, Edward, ed. *100 Years of Cruelty: Essays on Artaud*. Sydney: Power Institute: Centre for Art & Visual Culture, and ARTSPACE, 2000.

³⁹ Ibid. 28, emphasis in original.

at once exists and never will” explains Rex Butler, “Theatre doubles reality, or reality becomes the double of theatre.”⁴⁰ Considering Artaud’s intentions for the theatre of cruelty to reveal our stark (true) reality, in which he emphasises whole body consciousness towards exposing this truth, the theatre will still and always remain a *representation* of truth and therefore a virtual perception of the real. Butler understands this effect of the Theatre of Cruelty to mean that, “Reality henceforth is only conceivable in the form of theatre, in other words, on the basis of a sign.”⁴¹ In thinking about this real and the virtual division it is possible to draw connections between the cutting gesture and theatre’s doubling effect. It is the theatre and its double or virtual that produces a void—“a gap is opened up”⁴²—between the real and the copy, and thus it produces a hollow or empty space. “The world now lacks something,” according to Butler, something which is now embodied by the copy or its double.⁴³ The void, the gap or the space between the world and its copy (theatre) is analogous with the outcomes of the cut. The cut as we have already seen in the work of Fontana, creates a void via incision and in order to interrogate space it required the breaking through or rupturing of a surface or barrier. As previously stated, the study of anatomy was about the schematic organisation of bodily space, which required incisions to be made into and through its surface. When matter is cut, not only is space created, but two sides or severed edges are formed. This split in the matter (its doubling) is mutually inclusive with the creation of space: it occurs simultaneously and one cannot exist or be understood without the other.

For Artaud, the audience exist at the centre of the Theatre of Cruelty; all boundaries are to be removed that conventionally separate the stage and spectator, and all barriers between actors and audience are to be disassembled. In fact, Artaud proposed the total abandonment of traditional theatres and the establishment of new purpose built structures that recall the architectural characteristics of churches and temples.⁴⁴ Artaud’s intention was thus for *dismantling* – the breaking down of partitioning barriers that had constituted the rhetoric of theatre, the intent is therefore *making new space*. On the significance of the body and space, Weber notes,

The space of the theatre would not be “outside” or “inside” – it would take hold of the body itself, that of humans as of things, turning them into stages for unheard of peripeteias where sound becomes silence, fluids freeze, and matter becomes hollow.⁴⁵

To take hold of the body and to seize its whole anatomy were crucial strategies intended to activate the sensorial faculties of the audience and heighten their visceral perception.⁴⁶ According to Artaud, it is the power and visceral energy imbued in a gesture which has the ability to

⁴⁰ See Butler’s discussion on the limit, gesture and the virtual in the Theatre of Cruelty. Op. cit. Sheer, ed. 42-43

⁴¹ Ibid. 43

⁴² Ibid. 43

⁴³ Ibid. 43. Further, Butler states, “In a sense the world cannot be understood without this copy which doubles it. It is only in the very relationship between – the umbilical limbo linking – the world and its copy that the truth of the world is to be found.”

⁴⁴ Op. cit. Artaud., 74. See also Weber— “The audience was to be placed at the centre of the theatrical space, but on moveable seats, so as to be able to follow a spectacle that was to exploit *all* the dimensions of space, not just what was positioned “in front” of the public.” Op. cit. Sheer, ed. 28

⁴⁵ Ibid. 28

⁴⁶ Artaud uses the analogy of charming snakes, by which he emphasises the snakes sensory response to the vibrations of sound that propel them to move and dance: “I propose to treat the audience just like those charmed snakes and to bring them back to the subtlest ideas through their anatomies.” Op. cit. Artaud, 61.

physically resonate (*reverberate*) through our anatomy, affecting the body and inflicting a sentiment that is reflective of the gesture itself.⁴⁷ The cutting gesture, whether imposed on the body within the anatomy theatre or employed by the artist in performing a material or self-incision, has the ability to incite a palpable and visceral sensation within those who watch. It is through the cutting spectacle in which a fragmentation or division of the body is *performed* and enacted. The cut's ability to reverberate and convey an innate corporeal sensation can be considered paradigmatic to the Theatre of Cruelty as this decisive, irreversible and determinate gesture is essentially also one of spectacle. The creation of space via a hollow or void, and the doubling effect or state of duplicity that results, signifies that the cut *is* theatre and the act of cutting the body endures implicitly *as* theatre.

Setting the scene: the performance of anatomy

The public anatomy theatre of seventeenth century Western Europe was a site steeped in ritual. The human body was dissected and opened up both to reveal its internal workings and to symbolically explicate known anatomical knowledge to a captive audience. It was a site of ritual in which the cutting spectacle actively functioned and therefore warrants exploration in order to understand how and why cutting open the body is inherent to theatre and can be implicitly understood as an act of spectacle.

In an early seventeenth century artistic representation of the Leiden anatomy theatre (fig. 4), one can see the practice of dissection symbolically aligned with histrionic codes. Surrounding the corpse positioned at centre stage is a vivid tableau comprising male observers and macabre human and animal skeletons flying banners over the arena. The supine corpse on the dissection table is poignantly framed: above is the presiding anatomist and the surgical cutting tools to be used to open the body; directly below the corpse an explicit reference to Christian theology and the story of Adam and Eve. What is apparent in this heavily staged and densely scenical image is evidence that opening the body was an action to be performed in front of an audience, one infused with ceremonial attributes and pageantry along the lines of a theatrical performance. To demonstrate this connection further, I will firstly consider how architectural design and function provided a space for spectacle to exist and prosper through the practice of anatomical dissection. Secondly, I will consider how the ritualised performance of dissection within the academy occurred, and thirdly, how these conditions augmented a state of sacrality that surrounded the practice of cutting open the body.

Kate Cregan's comparative historical study of London's seventeenth century architecture built to house the practices of law, medicine and drama, has assisted me in augmenting ideas around distinctly separate fields that embody common theatrical conventions. In thinking about the anatomy theatre, the playhouse and the courthouse as transgressive sites where the body is

⁴⁷ "Theatre can reinstruct those who have forgotten the communicative power or magic mimicry of gesture, because a gesture contains its own energy, and there are still human beings in theatre to reveal the power of these gestures." Ibid. 61

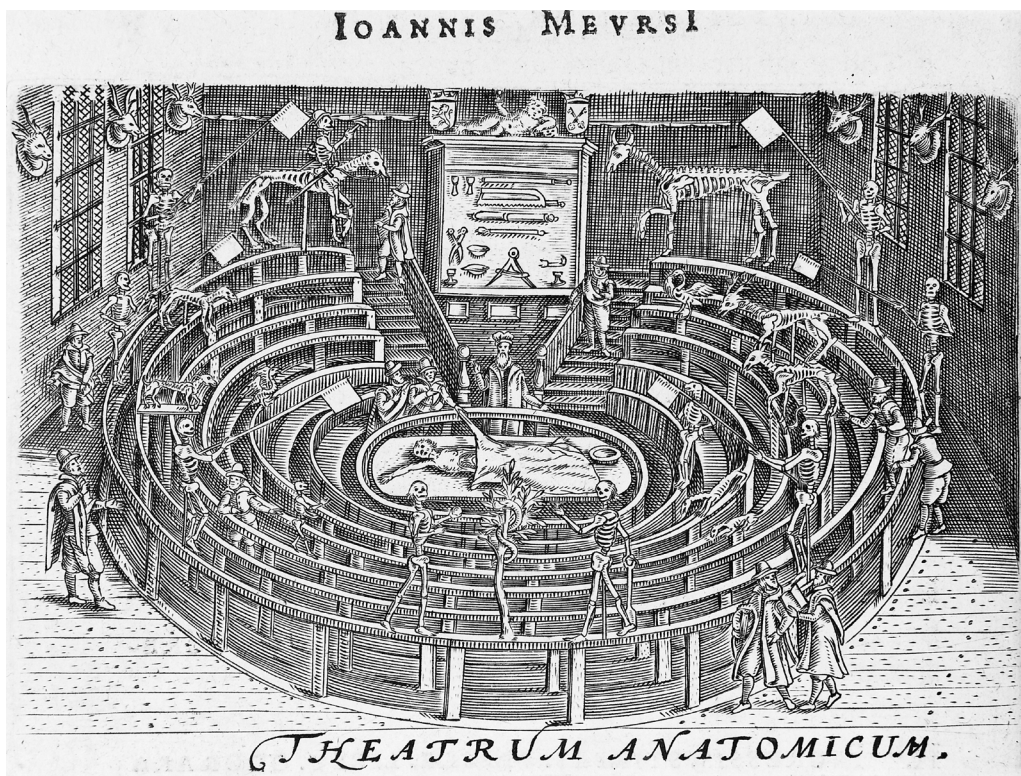


Figure 4.

Engraving of an anatomical dissection at Leiden, c.1614.

By Johannes Meursius, published *Elzvier Leiden* 1625.

Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.

performed or enacted, Cregan asserts that theatres in all contexts are firstly intended as spaces for “mass viewing.”⁴⁸ She goes on to demonstrate significant design correlations between the architecture of public playhouses and anatomy theatres, warranting specific focus on Inigo Jones’s anatomy theatre constructed for the Barber-Surgeons in 1638.⁴⁹ Cregan has drawn stark parallels by identifying “areas equivalent to the *orchestra* or *auditorium*, the *procaenium*, and the *arena*” present in the design function of both the anatomy theatre and the playhouse.⁵⁰ Looking at Charles Harding’s cross-sectioned illustration of Jones’s design (fig. 5) confirms Cregan’s assertion that a number of conventional theatre attributes (both pragmatic and ornate) were endemic to architectural structures where dissection was presented and anatomical knowledge performed. The tiered raised seating and standing observation deck maximised viewing ability and enabled the dissection to be observed from multiple viewpoints. This particular attribute of Jones’s design also presented itself in the structural interiors of anatomical theatres across Western Europe, such as the Leiden theatre in Holland, as well as those in Padua and Bologna in Italy. This research has benefitted from first-hand visits to Leiden and Bologna in September 2011.⁵¹ Here, in reference to the Bolognese theatre (fig. 6), I will affirm some of the design functions previously discussed, but will also make explicit the extraordinarily ornate interior of this theatre and how this sumptuous aesthetic further emphasised the presence of theatrical drama inherent in performing dissection as a cutting spectacle.

Bologna’s original anatomy theatre designed in 1637 for the Archiginnasio building was severely damaged during an air-raid bombardment on January 29th 1944.⁵² Following the war, the Archiginnasio was meticulously rebuilt, including the anatomy theatre in its original location. A number of the original sculptural works that adorned the interior of the anatomy theatre were recovered from the rubble and were able to be reinstated.⁵³ Upon entering the reconstructed theatre, one is confronted with lavish timber paneling and ornate engraving work throughout the space. The cathedra positioned to govern over the dissection scene is supported by two classical *écorchés* figures carved from wood and attributed to the artist and anatomical wax model maker Ercole Lelli (1702-1766). Surrounding the walls of the auditorium are full-bodied sculptural effigies of the great anatomists, including Hippocrates and Galen. They appear to not only guard this hallowed site, but also sanctify the demonstrations of anatomy that would have repeatedly taken place before them. The timbered ceiling is intricately decorated with astrological iconography. In the centre of the ceiling and poignantly positioned directly above the dissection table is Apollo, the God of light, healing and medicine.⁵⁴ Each ornamental facet of the

⁴⁸ Cregan, Kate. *The Theatre of the Body : Staging Death and Embodying Life in Early-Modern London*. Vol. 10, Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2009), 42.

⁴⁹ Cregan identifies two anatomy theatres in London at the turn of the 17th century. One was located at the College of Physicians and the other designed by Jones at the Hall of Worshipful Company of Barber-Surgeons. Ibid. 45

⁵⁰ Ibid. 46, author’s emphasis.

⁵¹ In both instances, the anatomical theatres of Leiden and Bologna are reconstructions of the originals. In Leiden there is a replica of the famous theatre in the Museum Boerhaave, the Dutch National Museum for the History of Science and Medicine.

⁵² Ferrari, Giovanna. "Public Anatomy Lessons and the Carnival: The Anatomy Theatre of Bologna." *Past & Present* 117 (Nov 1987): 50-106. 50

⁵³ “The Anatomy theatre”, Biblioteca dell’Archiginnasio, accessed 7 July, 2013.

<http://www.archiginnasio.it/english/palace/visita6.htm>.

⁵⁴ Cregan notes that the walls of London’s anatomy theatre at the Hall of the Barber-Surgeons are also painted with signs and images from the zodiac: “In other words, individual bodies were located within an abstracted cosmological setting that had become as much decoration as signifier of Truth of the Cosmos. The use of decorative paintwork and astrological

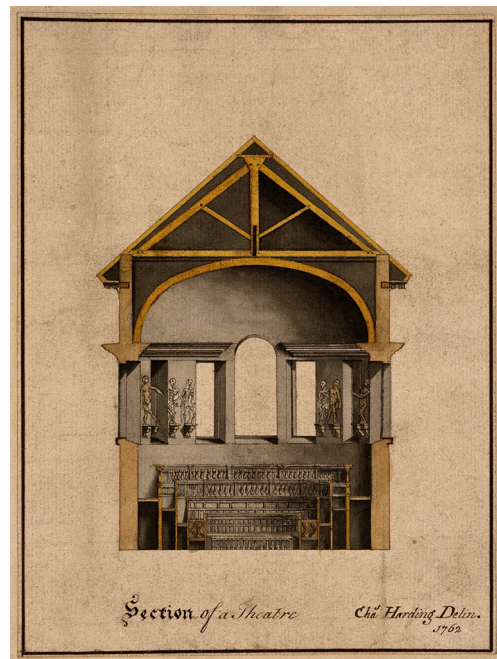


Figure 5.
Anatomy theatre cross-section. Watercolour by Charles Harding, 1762.
Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.



Figure 6.
Anatomy theatre, Archiginnasio building. Bologna, Italy. Photograph: Kate Scardifield, 2011.

Archiginnasio theatre is symbolically drenched and astutely encoded with mythical and celestial meaning. This site strongly attests to the theatrical impetus of anatomy and the performance of ceremony invested within the practice of dissection. It was a site never designed to be medically or scientifically neutral; rather, as Giovanna Ferrari suggests, its primary function demanded the “eminently spectacular.”⁵⁵

The renaissance period saw a significant shift in anatomical discourse that critically questioned the rhetoric of classical texts and the adherence to ancient medical practice galvanised by Claudius Galen (c.130 AD – c.210 AD). Galen’s teachings on anatomy were predominantly informed by inference and by the dissection of animals, as opposed to the dissection of the human body. Of the Renaissance anatomists who questioned the accuracy and currency of Galen’s scholarship, it is most widely acknowledged that Andreas Vesalius (1514 – 1564) pioneered the shift in discourse that implored cutting open the human body.⁵⁶ Vesalius asserted that the act of looking and describing the body alone could not offer anatomists, scholars or students adequate knowledge of human anatomy, and that this needed to be accompanied by tactile investigation and the handling of bodily matter via dissection. His revolutionary text, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, published in 1543, was seminal in aiding this shift away from Galenic anatomy to a discourse that would position criticism over explication. At a later point in this chapter, the implications of this text, with regards to the uncanny and grotesque visioning of the body living and breathing in dissection, will be addressed.

At this stage, it is important to remember that whilst Vesalius was instrumental in bringing about a revision of anatomical practice and theory, in no way should this shift in discourse be positioned as an overnight phenomena, or one where past conventions were expelled in light of a new approach. In reality it is very much the opposite, as engrained traditions and the taboo associated with cutting open the body or rupturing the whole persisted well into the seventeenth century.⁵⁷ These engrained traditions and taboos, as well as those surrounding the body in death and the sanctity of the corpse, can be considered to still permeate contemporary attitudes towards the body in death—particularly from a western perspective—and will be considered at a later point in the chapter with regards to the work of ORLAN and Teresa Margolles. Kate Cregan, whose scholarship also addresses embodiment and its complexities over space, time and culture, argues

symbols had its counterpart in the paintwork described as being present in playhouses like the Globe.” Op. cit. Cregan.140

⁵⁵ Op. cit. Ferrari.76. Ferrari compares the interior design and fit out of the anatomy theatres of Bologna and Padua, concluding that Padua’s theatre prioritised practical function over ornament, whereas the Archiginnasio theatre was richly opulent in a way that enhanced the spectacle of the anatomy lesson.

⁵⁶ Vesalius’ contribution and key role in the critical shift from description to dissection began in the 16th century and carried through for hundreds of years. His significance is widely addressed in existing scholarship and this research has benefitted from the analysis of his contribution in the following publications: Carlino, Andrea. *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c1999. French, Roger. *Dissection and Vivisection in the European Renaissance*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 1999. Harcourt, Glenn. "Andreas Vesalius and the Anatomy of Antique Sculpture." *Representations*, no. 17 (1987): 28-61. Klestinec, Cynthia Jennifer. "Theatrical Dissections and Dancing Cadavers: Andreas Vesalius and Sixteenth Century Popular Culture." University of Chicago, 2001. Sawday, Jonathan. *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 1995. Stafford, Barbara Maria. *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.

⁵⁷ Andrea Carlino writes informatively on what he describes as “inertia” within anatomical discourse and the “obstacles blocking its progress.” Carlino focuses his study on the anatomical practices of Rome, but offers a very interesting approach that considers the socio-cultural and ethical expectations of the body (alive and dead). See Carlino, Andrea. *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c1999), 3-7.

that shifts “occur much more slowly and unevenly over extended periods of time in a way that does not obliterate what came before.”⁵⁸ It is my belief that Cregan articulates a significant issue here that often underpins historical analysis formed in light of the present. There is often a general or superficial assumption that progression within a discourse is linked to supersession - that we replace old knowledge with new knowledge when it becomes available. Whilst we might surpass knowledge that has come before, it is not forgotten or erased when it falls into the past and must still be considered as significant epistemological intelligence that contributes to the shape of discourse. There is significant merit to recall Pierre Bourdieu in this regard, as he reasoned, “The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable, dispositions.”⁵⁹ The concept of *habitus* as the indelible markings of time and place are described by Bourdieu as not only being robust and withstanding, but most significantly as being capable of maintaining a presence amongst either the subtle changes or evolutionary shifts that occur over time. Habitus, which Bourdieu also referred to as “the product of history”, produces “individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history.”⁶⁰ Regarding the anatomy theatre, Vesalius did not formulate an entirely new theatre in which the anatomists and the observing audience experienced a completely new way of seeing the body. Rather, Vesalius elevated the practice of dissection through the emphasis of touch and direct bodily contact with the corpse. However he did so within an already heavily coded and symbolic theatre, one that remained a reflection of cultural attitudes towards death and upheld the sacrality of the body as a whole. It therefore warrants brief analysis of this pre-existing theatre, one in which the cutting spectacle enacted on the body was ceremoniously performed and undertaken as part of a rhetorical ritual.

Fig. 7 published in 1493 formed part of a compilation of medical teaching manuscripts and effectively captures a sense of the long-engrained and rigid ceremony involved in dissecting the body prior to the influence of Vesalius.⁶¹ Before public anatomy demonstrations, the anatomy lesson had been reserved for explicating knowledge of the body to scholars of medicine, where each dissection conformed to the strict parameters of academic ceremony. The lesson depicts a very small group of men, all but one dressed in academic regalia, who are observing the beginnings of a dissection. Gathered around the dissection table are three men who participate in cutting open the body, however each role is acutely defined by a ceremonial function that warrants an interpretive explanation. Seated above the anatomy table and looking over the dissection scene is the *lector*; charged with reciting an anatomical text (presumably one adhering to Galenic doctrine), the order of dissection and analysis of bodily material was dictated aloud. The lector has no direct contact with the body, but rather delivers a scripted edict, which is then

⁵⁸ Kate Cregan echoed the concern of Philippe Buc who advocates caution when applying contemporary social theory to historical content or artefacts. Cregan quotes Buc saying, a “scholar should not confuse the intensity of his or her interest in an object (here “ritual”) and the degree of centrality of this object for a past society.” Op. cit. Cregan. 3

⁵⁹ See “Structures and the Habitus.” Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Edited by Jack Goody Ernest Gellner, Stephen Gudeman, Michael Herzfeld, Jonathan Parry, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 82

⁶¹ I am indebted to the analysis of this image by Andrea Carlino and the context of his investigation into seven pictorial representations of Mondino’s anatomy lesson. His explanation of the academic roles of office that governed the anatomy lesson were insightful and particularly useful in helping me to develop a stronger awareness of rigid academic protocols that governed institutional anatomy theatres. See *The Quodlibetarian Model: The Title Pages of Mondino Dei Liuzzi’s “Anatomia”*. Op. cit. 8-25



Figure 7.

A dissection in process: the anatomy professor at his lectern.
Line block after a drawing after a woodcut, 1493. After Mondino dei Luzzi.
Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.

adhered to by other specific participants in the scene. To the right of the man bearing the knife—whom we will come to—is the *demonstrator*, who with the white rods of office points to and demonstrates the passage of text relayed by the lector.⁶² It is the role of the demonstrator to effectively and accurately translate text onto flesh, but once again the demonstrator, like the lector, does not touch the body and is removed from having physical contact with the cadaver. This role is reserved for the only man in the image not wearing academic robes – the *sector* or *barber*. It was this man who was charged with making the incision into flesh, of cutting through fat and sinew to expose the internal workings of the body. Though he bore the knife and cut open the body, the sector was not of scholarly regard, as his lack of academic dress reveals. This image demonstrates what Andrea Carlino identifies as the “quodlibetarian model” of dissection; a ritualised and choreographed performance where anatomical theory and practice are maintained separately.⁶³ According to Carlino, the barber’s act was one of manual labour, therefore it was considered of lower esteem than that of the learned academic.⁶⁴

This hierarchical structure is particularly interesting to consider alongside contemporary tiers of authority operating amongst medical practitioners. It is implicitly understood that the surgeon who wields the knife on the body in theatre commands a higher standing within the broader medical profession than the General Practitioner or the attending physician. The surgeon’s role is at once both learned and lifesaving, performing crucial operations under strenuous circumstances. These acts require the application of dense anatomical knowledge within a framework that demands exact technical precision. However, as we have just seen, the role of the surgeon or the individual charged with cutting into the body has not always been regarded with such stature. The term surgery derives from the Greek *cheiros* (*hand*) and *ergon* (*work*). Since ancient times and throughout early medical history, surgery was considered a form of labour and a practice of *handiwork*. As indicated by this image, the authorial hierarchy of the anatomy lesson lay firstly with the demonstrator, a professor of medicine; secondly with the lector, understood as a more junior member of the faculty; and lastly with the sector, the only person to be in physical contact with the cadaver. The paradox being that authorial and scholarly knowledge of anatomy was segregated from the necessarily tactile practice of dissection prior to Vesalius, who advocated the importance of direct contact and touch.

Turning briefly to consider the title page of the *Fabrica* (fig. 8), the practice of dissection is presented with remarkably different sentiment and procedural intent. It is a seminal image that has been analysed by a number of historians and scholars, most who point out the importance of not taking it to be a literal account of the goings on of a Vesalian dissection, but rather that its significance derives from its emblematic symbolism that captures the seminal epistemological

⁶² Cregan draws an interesting parallel with the white rods of office (or “pointers”), used by the surgeon who demonstrates the transference from recited text to the cadaver in the anatomy theatre, with the rods of office used in the royal or noble transference of power and title from the dead to their living heir. See Op. cit. Cregan. 15

⁶³ Carlino borrows a definition of the “quodlibetarian model” from W. Heckscher’s *Rembrandt’s Anatomy of Dr. Nicolaas Tulp: An Iconological Study*. Carlino quoting Heckscher, describes the “quodlibet” as “the sophisticated public disputes that, from the thirteenth century onward, had become, as it were, the show windows through which the non academic outsider could observe and enjoy the goings-on of the universities.” Op. cit. Carlino. 13

⁶⁴ Ibid. 86



Figure 8.

Title page, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica libri septem*. Andreas Vesalius. 1555 publication.

Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.

shifts at work within anatomical discourse.⁶⁵ The title page is densely symbolic and easily warrants intricate extrapolation, however for the purposes of this study I wish to focus attention on two key elements, the first being the dense huddle of men grappling to view the corpse on the dissection table. This frenetic scene captures the insatiable curiosity of what it was to witness the performative spectacle of cutting open the body. It positions the anatomy theatre as a site no longer reserved for only medical students, philosophers and members of the academy; it is now a theatre open for wider public viewing. Many public anatomy demonstrations included ticketed entry and musical accompaniment, characteristics it shared with theatrical performances.⁶⁶ According to historian Giovanna Ferrari, the alignment of theatre and dissection became most pronounced when the public dissection calendar was rescheduled, so that demonstrations would be performed in January, coinciding with the carnival period.⁶⁷

The second point I wish to make is in regards to Vesalian dissection scene is that of the zero distance maintained between the anatomist and the corpse. As we have seen in the quodlibetarian model, the authorial anatomist was twice removed from having any contact with the corpse, therefore dividing scholarly knowledge from the tactile practice of dissection. The *Fabrica* title-page directly disputes this methodology and revises the role of the anatomist by emphasising the crucial importance of touch as well as sight. Carlino describes this shift aptly: “according to the quodlibetarian model it is the text that produces the dissection, here it is the dissection that produces the text.”⁶⁸ By positioning himself in directly bodily contact with the corpse, Vesalius symbolically denotes himself as both the authorial explicator of anatomical knowledge and the practical demonstrator of such knowledge. Vesalius’s hand is positioned resting on the open abdomen, delicately holding a small scalpel-like knife. With this subtle gesture he emphasises the crucial nature of the anatomist’s hand and elevates the status of their handiwork. If, as historian Katherine Rowe has asserted, “the hand represents and effects a point of contact between collective notions of person and the world of interiority, intentions and will”, then the implicit gesture of knife and hand placed on the open abdomen of the corpse can be understood as one of symbolic potency.⁶⁹ Rather than relegating touch to an inferior position behind visual observation, Vesalius’s gesture intentionally elevates the importance of dexterity and the status of the hand within anatomical enquiry. According to Rowe, “The body imagined in relation to its hand is shaped by those fictions particular to the hand: the principle of rational organisation, the capacity for artistry and manufacture, the dependencies of mutual labour and layered agency.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Thorough analysis on the title page accompanying the first edition of Vesalius’s *Fabrica* can be found in the following publications: Op. cit. Sawday. John B. de C.M Saunders, Charles D. O'Malley. *Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels : With Annotations and Translations, a Discussion of the Plates and Their Background, Authorship and Influence, and a Biographical Sketch of Vesalius* New York: Cleveland World Publishing 1950.

⁶⁶ Ferrari draws attention to these similarities between theatrical performance and public anatomy lessons. Op. cit. Ferrari. 82

⁶⁷ Ferrari notes that there is evidence that the public anatomies were delayed to coincide with carnival in 1523, 1540 and 1544. Ibid. 82

⁶⁸ Op. cit. Carlino.52

⁶⁹ Rowe, Katherine. "God's Handy Worke." In *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, edited by David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, 285-312 (New York: Routledge, 1997), 286.

⁷⁰ Rowe draws on Aristotle’s analogy, where the hand acts as a unifier of parts being that it is already unified whole; each finger exists as a fractioned extension of the palm. Ibid. 288

This idea of mutual labour and layered agency can be understood as occurring reflexively between the hand and the knife. The hand relies on the blade in order to make an incision, yet the incision could not be enacted without the direction and dexterous control of the knife by the hand. Thinking about the ‘capacity for artistry and manufacture’ that Rowe suggests can be born out of the hand, let’s consider briefly the surgical nature of the print makers’ tools; applying the scraper, burnisher, dry point, file and forger’s tong to incise an image into wood or metal. For the practice of early anatomical illustration—first printed by woodcut, and progressively intaglio—to render an image of the anatomised body relied on technical virtuosity, the hand of the artist or artisan, just as the practice of dissection was reliant on the steady hand of the anatomist or barber-surgeon. The dissective cuts made into flesh were to be represented through a medium that required penetrating incisions in order to render an image. These inscriptive marks clear a space to allow ink to penetrate the plate’s furrows; the pigment seeps into the surface, pooling in the cut lines and begetting an image once printed. Like the blood that pulses through veins of the body, the ink runs through the figurative veins etched into the printing plate.

Cutting open the corpse

A selection of surgical utensils published in Helkiah Crooke’s 1615 anatomical text *Mikrokosmographia: A description of the body of man* (fig. 9) gives an indication of the variety of incisive instruments employed in the anatomy theatre for the dissection of the body. The knives or scalpels (synonymous with the act of cutting) are located amongst a torturous-looking collection of other implements. Files, a handsaw, a mallet, forceps, skin hooks and scissors are a reminder that cutting into the body was, and remains, a strenuous undertaking. It involved sawing, hacking, chopping and slicing, not only through flesh but also through bone. Consider the dissection of a cadaver in the early modern anatomy theatre; incisions through fat, slicing through muscle sinew and the spilling of entrails was occurring well before a time of reliable temperature regulation. Given the rate of decay and wanting to avoid a rotting corpse, the anatomist needed to begin by dissecting the parts of the body that would turn putrid first. From making the lengthy incision down the torso, they would begin with the insides of the abdomen, thoracic region and head; the limbs of the body would be dissected last.⁷¹

In reality, the anatomy lesson called for blood to be spilt; the body was carved open and the smell of decomposing flesh could permeate throughout the theatre. The written descriptions of surgical procedures published in anatomical texts of the period would often attest to these truthful (albeit brutal) methods of deconstructing the body.⁷² In stark contrast the images that would accompany

⁷¹ Sawday provides a comprehensive account of the ordering of dissection and notes that when following theoretical texts, a number of impracticalities became apparent when dissecting the corpse. The order of procedure was therefore often re-organised for practical demonstration in order to minimise the rate of decomposition. See Op. cit. Sawday 131-132

⁷² An extract of text from the *Fabrica* reveals the stark reality of dissecting a corpse: “The twelfth figure of the fifth book which immediately follows the preceding complete figure in the sequence of dissection. In it the peritoneum has been dissected away, the omentum removed, and we have also fractured some of the ribs so that the entire hollow of the liver could be drawn more conveniently. The orifices of the stomach are seen since it, as well as the intestine, has been pushed down to the left in order to bring into view part of the mesentery.” Quoted in John B. de C.M Saunders, Charles D. O'Malley. *Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels : With Annotations and Translations, a Discussion of the Plates and Their Background, Authorship and Influence, and a Biographical Sketch of Vesalius* (New York:

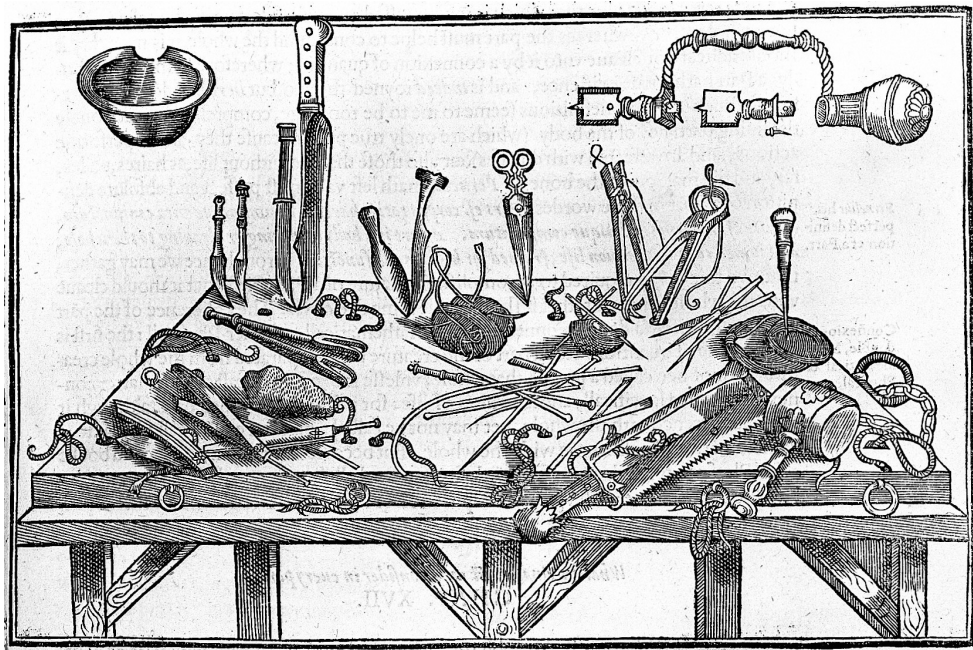


Figure 9.

Instrument illustration, woodcut. Published in *Mikrokosmographia. A description of the body of man.*

Helkiah Crooke. Published by W. Jaggard, London, 1615.

Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.

these texts imagined a very different reality, one absent of blood or any visceral sense of repulsion; more often the body represented was entirely removed from a medical context.

The role of the image was crucial to the dissemination of anatomical research and positioning the field of anatomy within scientific study, as both a noble and necessary discourse. However, as medical historian Ruth Richardson clearly articulates in her analysis of the corpse in nineteenth century popular culture, “The physicality of the corpse demands attention – it is the ultimate evidence that a death has taken place.”⁷³ Death is materialised and made real via the presence of a corpse. It is the abrupt reminder that we are born to die. Death was not simply present in the anatomy theatre – it held centre stage. What remained of the deceased—the corpse—was dismembered and its interior displayed to a living, watching audience. Respect shown towards the dead is a socially upheld and recognised practice across diverse and varied cultures, and from a western European perspective the roots of such practices date back well before the time when Vesalius advocated for direct bodily observation. Families and communities continue to enact a variety of indelible customs and rituals in relation to the deceased. Where ceremonial procedures are undertaken to attend the corpse, the enduring intention is generally to uphold the integrity and identity of the deceased in their absence.⁷⁴ Operating within densely coalesced folklores, theologies and superstitions, the practice of representing dissection and illustrating anatomy needed to evoke the indelible sanctity ascribed to the deceased body. From corpse to anatomised cadaver, ethical and religious boundaries were visually transgressed in order to permit cutting open the body and unveiling its interior. The implicit objectives of these images are multi-tiered and warrant analysis. Understanding how the sacred and theatrical oscillate within visual representations of the body cut open will in turn assist in revealing their inherent presence within a current culture of dissection, one occurring in contemporary art practice.

A disembodied resemblance and an uncanny double

In Maurice Blanchot’s “Two Versions of the Imaginary” he asserts that after the object comes the image. This image at first does not resemble the mortal remains of what has come before it, however in creating distance from what he describes as a ‘cadaverous object’, the image can reveal itself and appear. Blanchot states:

Doesn’t the reflection always seem more spiritual than the object reflected? (sic) its presence freed of existence, its form without matter? And artists who exile themselves

Cleveland World Publishing 1950), 164.

⁷³ Richardson, Ruth. *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*. 2 ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 26.

⁷⁴ Health care ethics scholar Simon Wood writes succinctly and informatively on dignity and the corpse. Regarding the psychological separation between the deceased person and the corpse, Woods states, “For most people it is the grieving process which allows for this separation between corpse and person to take place, but in the immediate aftermath of death it seems reasonable to treat the corpse as if it were the person. In regarding the corpse as the person then it would seem justified to respect the corpse in a way that the living person would have expected to be treated with regard to their bodily integrity, modesty and respect.” See Woods, Simon. “Dignity, Precaution and Solidarity.” In *Cutting through the Surface: Philosophical Approaches to Bioethics*, edited by Peter Herissone-Kelly and Søren Holm Tuija Takala, 69-78. (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), 71-72.

in the illusion of images, isn't their task to idealize beings, to elevate them to their disembodied resemblance?⁷⁵

The suggestion that once distance from the object is realised the image can reveal itself in a state of disembodied resemblance recalls the symbolism attributed to the mirror as a doubling, or splitting image-making mechanism. As previously discussed in relationship to the knife (and as one of the inherent attributes of anatomy), the mirror creates a reflected image of the real – it doubles. However, it also disconnects the real from the virtual by way of producing a rupture between subject and object.

Freud attested to the significance of the double in relation to examining themes of uncanniness. In fact, in addition to his psychoanalytic exploration of the uncanny, Freud saw probable cause to call for an “aesthetic enquiry” into this phenomenon.⁷⁶ At this point in the thesis, I have examined the significance of the cutting spectacle as a gesture that is enacted or performed in the context of the anatomy theatre. In responding to Freud’s call for an aesthetic enquiry into the uncanny, I will now turn to examine images of the anatomised body and how these representations can reveal themselves as signifiers of the cutting spectacle.

To affirm my reasons for such an enquiry, firstly consider Freud’s reasoning that it is through death and the presence of the dead body that an individual can experience a feeling of the uncanny to one of the highest degrees.⁷⁷ The anatomy theatre was the site in which the living learnt from the dead via the confronting experience of dissecting a corpse. Secondly, there is a point in Freud’s scholarship where he connects the fear and anxiety induced at the thought of being buried alive with the uncanny chimeral sensation of intra-uterine existence.⁷⁸ According to Freud, “the uncanny is that class of frightening which leads us back to what is known of old and long familiar.”⁷⁹ The image of the body interior can explicitly encapsulate that ‘class of frightening’ Freud so aptly describes; each body at some point has existed in an intra-uterine state, as a gestating being, living within their mother’s womb. At the post-natal stage following birth, the body interior retreats to a veiled existence – it is now located out of sight and underneath one’s own skin. The home (womb) is now unhomey according to Freud, who echoed F.W.J. Schelling’s insistence that what can be perceived as uncanny is “something which ought

⁷⁵ Blanchot, Maurice. *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader: Fiction & Literary Essays* (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill/Barrytown, Ltd., 1999), 419.

⁷⁶ Freud states, “we must be prepared to admit that there are other elements besides those which we have so far laid down as determining the production of uncanny feelings. We might say that these preliminary results have satisfied psycho-analytic interest in the problem of the uncanny, and that what remains probably call for an aesthetic enquiry. But that would be to open the door to doubts about what exactly is the value of our German contention that the uncanny proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed.” See Freud, Sigmund. *Writings on Art and Literature*. edited by James Strachey (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 223-224.

⁷⁷ Freud notes that many people experience the feeling of the uncanny to the highest degree “in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts.” Ibid. 218

⁷⁸ Freud uses the example of the phantasy of intra-uterine existence to emphasise “that an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolises” He then goes on to assert, “It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This unheimlich place, however is the entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning.” Ibid. 221

⁷⁹ Ibid. 195

to have remained hidden but has come to light.”⁸⁰ Thirdly, the thought of cutting into a corpse easily incites apprehension at the logical thought of one’s body being cut up and probed. This induced anxiety bears considerable alignment with the castration theory articulated by Freud, who also argues that there is a direct correlation between the childhood castration complex and the uncanny effect present in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s story of the Sand-Man.⁸¹ Thinking about castration anxiety is arguably more heightened within the context of an anatomical enquiry and the particular type of psychological distress that relates to anatomising the body. In the context of the anatomy theatre, castration can manifest itself in a multitude of cuts, severings and incisions; the limbs, fingers, toes and any other bodily parts or protrusions can be deemed just as much *at risk* as the genitals.

Anatomical illustrations from the sixteenth century intentionally engaged classical artistic conventions that rendered the image of dissected body ornate and appealing. Any potential anxiety or horror induced by witnessing dissection first hand could be diffused through a strategic visual aesthetic, one that disarmed any sense of fear or repulsion by framing the body cut open as resplendent, and as a subject worthy fine art. The reader or onlooker therefore gazed at the image of the dissected body in absence of an actual dissection. To reiterate Blanchot’s words, the reality of the anatomised object was to be reflected as an illusionary ideal image, allowing for representations of the anatomised body to occupy an uncanny territory, one that elevated the image of the body cut open to a state of disembodied resemblance. From what we have seen of the design of the anatomy theatre and the ritualised dissection that was performed by the anatomists, it is clear that these aesthetic and procedural qualities positioned dissection as a sacramental practice. Images of the anatomised body were engrained with iconographic signifiers that aided to ordain dissection and constitute it as a pious act. The image of the anatomised corpse was to defy death; it was presented living and breathing in dissection. Sawday identified this specific form of bodily representation as “sacred anatomy,” one that allowed new scientific practice and the anatomical method of dissection to conciliate with a body long engrained within complex theological and artistic codings.⁸²

Sacred incisions: sacred anatomy

The iconographic ‘flayed body’ or *écorché* was charged with representing the body cut open for

⁸⁰ Freud’s emphasis here can be interpreted as the state of subconscious dissolution; the separation of lived experience and memory. Drawing on Schelling’s proposition, Freud states, “for this uncanny is nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.” Ibid. 217

⁸¹ According to Freud, the Sand-Man can be re-personified as the looming father figure who threatens castration. Freud states, “the impression that the threat of being castrated in especial excites a peculiarly violent and obscure emotion, and that this emotion is what first gives the idea of losing other organs its intense colouring.” The anatomy theatre can thus be understood as a site in which multiple castrations can occur simultaneously. Freud goes on to state, “We shall venture, therefore, to refer the uncanny effect of the Sand-Man to the anxiety belonging to the castration complex of childhood. But having reached the idea that we can make an infantile factor such as this responsible for feelings of uncanniness, we are encouraged to see whether we can apply it to other instances of the uncanny”. Ibid. 206-208

⁸² Sawday states, “If the body had been ‘liberated’ from theology, it had become subject to ‘science’. But paradigmatic shifts are gradual. Long after the ‘science’ of the body had appeared to dispel a ‘theology’ of the body, the artistic conventions of ‘sacred anatomy’ exerted a powerful hold on the devices – the forms of representation, the controlling metaphors of description – by which the dissected body, and hence the body-interior, was to be understood.” Op. cit. Sawday. 98-105

anatomical viewing. Skin peeled off or partially peeled back, the *écorché* was represented as a living corpse that allowed the viewer to see below the surface and bare witness to flesh, organ and bone; what was once the invisible body interior. Published in Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* is a series of *écorchés* that progressively deconstruct the myology of the body (fig. 10). Each of the classically statuesque male bodies is positioned moving through the landscape, amongst rolling hills and arcadian ruins.⁸³ Active and animated in gesture, and positioned at the meeting point between the living and the spirit worlds, these images appear far removed from any medical or clinical context. Vesalius himself emphasised the intended artistry of the publication's *écorché* images, stating "These plates display a total view of the scheme of muscles such as only painters and sculptures are wont to consider..."⁸⁴ The sense of liveliness and energy imbued in the Vesalian *écorché* is the antithesis of the lifeless and sallow corpse one would expect to find in the anatomy theatre. In what is essentially a gentrified aesthetic, the image of the *écorché* appears perfect in its measurement and proportions – an artistic strategy derived from classical Greek sculpture.

Historian Glenn Harcourt has drawn attention to a section of text in the *Fabrica* where it stipulates the need for a body "as normal as possible"; this ideal 'natural' body would be used for comparative pathology, and according to Vesalius, be likened to creations by the ancient Greek sculptor Polykleitos (c.450–c.420 BC).⁸⁵ For the anatomists, in defining what constituted a 'normalised' body, it allowed them to measure the varying degrees of difference between their exemplar and bodies considered anatomically aberrant. Polykleitos was known for his mathematical system that proportioned the figure to ideal standards, which, according to Vesalius, presented the most appropriate figurative model for the wants of the anatomist. His most widely celebrated sculpture was the *Doryphoros* – a young, male athletic figure, canonically conceived of as the ideal physical form (fig. 11).⁸⁶ Employing a classical sculpture in which perfect symmetry, harmony and balance characterise the 'normal' figure, allowed the image of the anatomised body to appear familiar to the viewer. It also meant that the previously unseen body interior was made beautiful by association.⁸⁷ In chapter 2, the proportion and measurement formula personified by classical sculpture and ordained by anatomical illustration will be examined further; its significance to the rise of the pseudo-science of physiognomy and to cutting

⁸³ There are sixteen plates demonstrating the muscular structure, fourteen of which are full body *écorchés*. According to J.B. deC. M. Saunders and Charles D. O'Malley, these fourteen plates when aligned consecutively, reveal the rolling landscape to connect. The pastoral area with its scattered townships and ruins has also been identified as the regional countryside of Petrarch located south-west of Padua, where Vesalius was Professor of Anatomy at the University of Padua. See– Op. cit. Saunders and O'Malley. 29

⁸⁴ Vesalius quoted by Saunders and O'Malley. Ibid. 92

⁸⁵ Harcourt quotes Vesalius, who states "It is desirable that the body employed for public dissection be as normal as possible according to its sex and of medium age, so you may compare other bodies to it, as if to the statue of Policletus." Harcourt, Glenn. "Andreas Vesalius and the Anatomy of Antique Sculpture." *Representations*, no. 17 (1987): 28-61. 42

⁸⁶ J.J Pollitt provides an informative analysis of the oeuvre of Polykleitos and how this contributed to an aestheticised athleticism of the body. Pollitt states, "Although Polykleitos did a number of images of gods and heros, the majority of his works, and the most renowned ones, were statues of young men which were set up in the sanctuary at Olympia to commemorate athletic victories." See Pollitt, J.J. *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 47.

⁸⁷ Harcourt goes on to cite that Vesalius most likely drew his aesthetic inspiration for the ideal figure from Galen, who cited the Canon of Polykleitos to support his argument that "beauty resides in the due proportion of the parts of the body." Op. cit. Harcourt. (See footnote no.46, pg 59).



Figure 10.

The second muscular tabula. Published in *De Humani Corporis Fabrica libri septum*.
Andreas Vesalius. 1555 publication. Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.

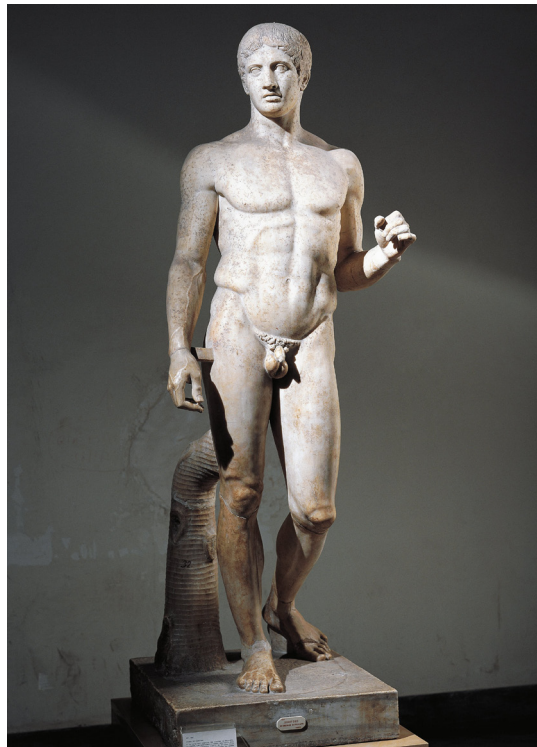


Figure 11.

The Doryphoros, Hellenistic Roman copy after the original bronze by Polykleitos (c.450–415 B.C.).
Marble 5th century B.C. Museo Archeologico, Naples Italy.
Image courtesy the British Library, London.

out the body in silhouette appears once again through the preoccupation with another classical sculpture, the Apollo Belvedere.⁸⁸

As opposed to being defined against a real corpse or cadaver, the image of the anatomised body uncannily drew on the aesthetic and socio-cultural imaginings of the *ideal* body depicted in classical art. Demonstrated by the Vesalian *écorché*, it is apparent that the ‘normal’ anatomised figure was by no means a neutral representation, rather part of its intention appears to be one of making normal a body image considered ideal. From a Vesalian perspective, it must also be acknowledged that the ‘ideal’ and ‘normal’ body was considered male. It was therefore this ideal male body that would become the normalised body specimen of science and persist to codify representations of the anatomised corpse and the body cut open. Representations of the anatomised female were almost always reserved to demonstrate the reproductive system of the female sex.⁸⁹

Cultural historian Janine Larmon Peterson provides a thorough analysis on the specific kind of spectacle afforded to female dissection in early modern Europe. She suggests that the ‘one-sex’ model derived from Galenic and Aristotelian theory can be largely attributed to the view of defining the female body only by its reproductive function.⁹⁰ This idea is affirmed in an image of the anatomised female body published in *De Formato Foeto* (fig. 12). This medical text contained the research of Adrianus Spigelius (1578-1625) on the reproductive body and the formation of the foetus, and was compiled posthumously in 1627. Unlike the male *écorché*, in this instance the flayed female is robed in a cape-like garment which drapes from her shoulders before it balloons out to frame the body – the shape it creates makes a clear reference to female genitalia. Casually placed into a pastoral landscape and entirely removed from a clinical context, the female’s abdomen has been cut open and her skin peeled back in order to expose the reproductive system. There is no trace of stomach, intestine or liver, suggesting the focus was purely on imaging the flayed female as the site of conception and gestation. One could argue that given the explicit reference to female genitalia created by the shapely contours of fabric, the intention was to display the womb as representative of the *whole* female body.

In both images of the anatomised male and female, the significance of the body removed from the medical theatre and placed within an open landscape is poignant. This can be understood as

⁸⁸ See chapter “Man or Machine: Ideals of the labouring Male Body and the aesthetics of Industrial Production in Early Twentieth-century Europe”(Anthea Callen). Published in *Art, Sex and Eugenics: Corpus Delecti*. Callen, Edited by Fae Brauer and Anthea Callen Burlington: Ashgate, 2008.

⁸⁹ Kate Cregan asserts, “The anatomized female is always seen in terms of her gender, her culture and her sexual availability. The male form is predominantly shown as an *écorché*, flayed to varying degrees, like a Martyred Saint Bartholomew or Marsyas. The female body is never shown without some drapery of skin. The muscular, skeletal, and nervous systems are almost exclusively depicted on the male body, as are all the organs common to both males and females. The female body is depicted in these anatomical texts, together with the proliferation of small pamphlets that were indebted to them, solely in terms of its generative function.” See Cregan, Kate. “Blood and Circuses.” In *Images of the Corpse: From the Renaissance to Cyberspace*, edited by Elizabeth Klaver, 39-62 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 55.

⁹⁰ Larmon Peterson states, “The rediscovery of Aristotle in the late Middle Ages and the concomitant waxing of his popularity in the Renaissance within the medical faculties of universities had a tremendous impact, both in terms of promoting the practice of dissections and in terms of promulgating the view that the female body was defined by the uterus, which came to be viewed as physical evidence of a woman’s imperfection in comparison to a man.” See Peterson, Janine Larmon. “See What Is Beneath Your Clothes: The Spectacle of Public Female Dissection in Early Modern Europe.” In *Gender Scripts in Medicine and Narrative*, edited by Angela Laflen Marcelline Block, 3-31 (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010), 8-9.



Figure 12.

Dissected female figure published in *De formato foetu*, Andreas Spigelius, 1627.
Etching and illustration by Odoardo Fialetti (1573-1638) and Francesco Valesio (c.1560- 1643).

an artistic strategy that denies the image of the flayed body any direct associations with the bloody proceedings of the anatomy theatre. The reality of graphic bodily discharge, gore and tactile interactions with the dead are all but omitted; a cadaver is nowhere to be seen. The seductive ornamental aesthetic entwined within images of the anatomised body directly reflects the performative design and architectural ornament of the anatomy theatre, strategies that contribute to further romanticising the practice of dissection. The anatomical illustration disseminates the cutting spectacle by making visible the bodily space invisible on a theatrically animate corpse. The image of the male *écorché* or the anatomised body of a female can be thought about as enacting a separation between reality and representation. An uncanny doubling or a carnivalesque mirror is held up, one that reflects Blanchot's insistence that the image which follows the object becomes an idealised being and exists in a state of disembodied resemblance. The Vesalian *écorché* gazes upwards, not for another body to encounter, but skywards as if in reverie or seeking the divine. The flayed female appears to stand in angelic benediction; her uncanny appearance a stark reference to Baroque images of the Virgin.⁹¹ An atmosphere of reverent benevolence is apparent in both images of the dissected body; the anatomised image served not only to document and display the interests of the medical and artistic fields as their design also implicitly permeates religious sentiment.⁹² Again, a lack of scientific neutrality is evident; the dissemination of these illustrations published in anatomical and medical texts like the *Fabrica* or *De formato foetu* position the flayed figure as both a legitimate and divine body of knowledge. Art historian David L. Martin attests that it is "the visual coding of the body as a site for knowledge production, which allows for the development of an "anatomizing gaze."⁹³ This gaze culminates in the uncanny semblance of the animated corpse, displaying an impossible simultaneous representation; that of the body *living* whilst in a state of exposing both internal and external bodily space.

Through an art historical lens there is evidence of a visual culture that supported the flayed and dismembered body as living and animate in motion, congruent to anatomical illustration that imaged the body as *écorché*. Historian Katherine Park has drawn attention to these alternate existing traditions, asserting that the body interior frequently illustrated throughout early modern painting, printmaking and sculpture often recalled mythological narratives as well as theistic stories of martyrdom.⁹⁴ In particular, representations of the myth of Apollo and Marsyas presented the opportunity for artists to vision the body either partially or wholly skinned.⁹⁵ The

⁹¹ Op. cit. Sawday. 222

⁹² The role of the Catholic Church and the period of Counter-Reformation had an immense impact on the stylistic composition of images and their inherent symbolic narratives. For example, the Jesuit Order in the early Seventeenth Century has been considered "the intellectual and missionary army of the Catholic Church." Their active piety demonstrated the Order's awareness of the possibilities for art to filter through religious doctrine. The Jesuits experienced a surge in influence following 1623 when their devout supporter, Pope Urban VIII, was ordained. The Council of Trent imposed controls on the treatment and depiction of religious figures in art. Their controls eventually made use of art images for anti-Protestant propaganda. See Waterhouse, E. *Roman Baroque Painting: A List of the Principle Painters and Their Works in and around Rome* (Edinburgh Phaidon Press Ltd, 1976), 15-17.

⁹³ Martin, David L. *Curious Visions of Modernity: Enchantment, Magic and the Sacred* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2011), 77.

⁹⁴ See Park, Katherine. "The Criminal and the Saintly Body: Autopsy and Dissection in Renaissance Italy." *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1994): 1-33.

⁹⁵ In her analysis of the imagery generated by the myth of Apollo and Marsyas, Edith Wyss comments on the opportunity for early modern artists to reflect on anatomical dissection through the artistic imagining of Marsyas. See Wyss, Edith. *The Myth of Apollo and Marsyas in the Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Cranbury, London & Mississauga: Associated University Presses, 1996), 110.

thematic inflictions of torture, justice and punishment meant the flaying of Marsyas was a particularly enticing and fecund narrative for artists to explore. The story of Marsyas is complexly invested within Greek mythology. It begins when Marsyas challenges Apollo to a musical contest. Upon losing to the god, Apollo delivers punishment and Marsyas is bound upside down and flayed alive for his foolish act. Titian directly recalled the myth in his grand scale painting *The Flaying of Marsyas* (fig. 13). To the right of the protagonist, an observing centaur holds a bucket whilst two dogs appear to be longing ravenously for the offcuts of flesh. It is perhaps not coincidental that the bucket and awaiting dogs were also regularly depicted by the side of the dissection table in the anatomy theatre.⁹⁶

The Italian artist and architect Giulio Romano (c.1499 – 1546) included the flaying of Marsyas in his commissioned fresco for the Palazzo Te in Mantua, Italy (fig. 14). In this image, a study for the future fresco, the mythological structure of the centaur is fully visible in a way that echoes the profound muscular physique imaged later by the Vesalian *ecorché*. Like Titian, Romano positions the centaur to the right of Marsyas holding a bucket, which one can assume was made available to collect the skin and fascia that were sliced from the body. The myth of Marsyas is a potent allegory, one that depicts the criminalised body in line with punitive punishment. Foucault understood justice to be in pursuit of the body “beyond all possible pain” in which the practice of torture equates to a demonstration of power.⁹⁷ The flayed body of Marsyas, which can be understood as a physical embodiment of judicial rectitude, can also be characterised as another type of body in which a cutting spectacle has been imposed. Foucault’s understanding of punishment supports this, his assertion being that “It must mark the victim: it is intended, either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy.”⁹⁸ In this instance, the cutting spectacle operating in the myth of Marsyas occurs outside of the context of the anatomy theatre, but in a way that can still be considered a theatrical gesture and causal action. These images participate in a wider genre of bodily representation that imagines the body interior or the body being stripped of its skin. In the case of Titian and Romano’s imaging of Marsyas, vengeful rectitude is sanctioned by a public audience. Being flayed or skinned alive was a torturous punishment that could be inflicted on the infamous body of the criminal, yet this heinous act also conjures a sense of suffering that aligns characteristically with an act of martyrdom. Cutting open the body and displaying its interior thus also recalls the plight of Bartholomew, the Christian saint put to death by being flayed alive.

Numerous depictions of the flaying of St Bartholomew appear to coalesce with both the study of anatomy and the doctrine of the Christian church. In his painting *The Martyrdom of St Bartholomew* (fig. 15) Jesepe de Ribera (1591 – 1652) imaged the Apostle and the stripping of

⁹⁶ Referring back the title page of Vesalius’s *Fabrica*, one can observe a dog in the bottom right hand corner of the plate. Another example is William Hogarth’s *The Reward of Cruelty* (1751), the final plate in *The Four Stages of Cruelty*. A dog is positioned directly under the dissection table picking at the entrails of the criminal Tom Nero, who was sentenced to death and dissection for murdering his mistress. For a description of the Hogarth image and its analysis in regards to criminal punishment and public anatomy, see Haslam, Fiona. *From Hogarth to Rowlandson: Medicine in Art and Eighteenth Century Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 256-262.

⁹⁷ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977. Reprint, 24). 34.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 34



Figure 13.

Titian (Tiziano Vecelli), *The Flaying of Marsyas* c.1575.

Oil on canvas, 212 cm x 207 cm.

Collection, Olomouc Museum of Art, Kroměříž Archdiocesan Museum, Czech Republic.



Figure 14.

Giulio Romano, *Apollo Flaying Marsyas* 1527.

Design for a detail of the frieze in the Sala di Ovidio, Palazzo Te. Pen, ink and wash over chalk.

Collection of the Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques.

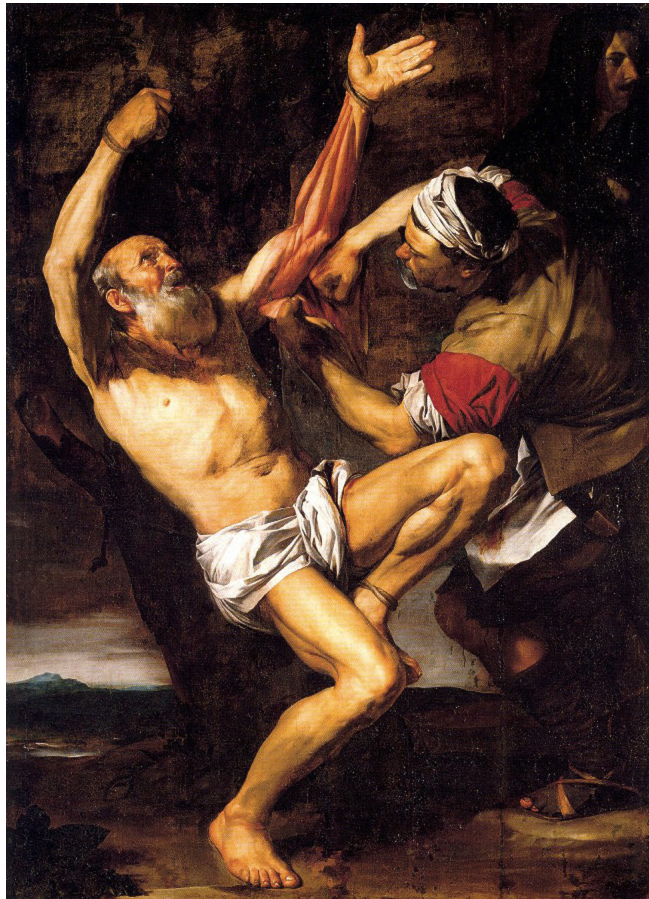


Figure 15.

Jusepe de Ribera, *The Martyrdom of St Bartholomew* c.1618-1619.
Oil on canvas. Collection, Colegiata de Santa Maria Church, Osuna, Spain.

his skin by the hands of a hatchet man. Ribera depicts the gruesome cutting of the saint's forearm, which in turn reveals the detailed musculature and tendons below the surface of the skin. Rather than gazing in horror at the torturous wounds being inflicted by his executioner, Bartholomew's gaze (like that of the Vesalian *écorché*) is longingly to the heavens; as a martyr St Bartholomew's faith in God was to be demonstrated by his suffering. Within broader Christian iconography, St Bartholomew is often represented holding the skin that was brutally ripped from his body. Standing ominously in the Duomo di Milano since 1562 is a meticulously modelled sculpture of St Bartholomew (fig. 16 and fig. 17). In this marble work by Marco d'Agate (c.1504 – c.1574) every inch of the skinless figure appears to reveal the body interior as a webbing of muscles, tendons and fibrous sinew. More disturbing than the sculpture's meticulous pathological detail is the draped stole casually wrapped around the figure. From a frontal view it appears like cloth, however from the side and rear one views the sheath not as cloth but as the removed skin stripped from the body; the details of his face and feet remain imprinted on the pelt. The flayed and martyred body of Bartholomew stands with stoicism, strangely accepting of his skinless state. D'Agate's saintly *écorché* is presented as a willing and concurring body, one that also reflects the complicit self-sacrificing nature of the corpse in the anatomy theatre.

In his 1869 travel compendium, American author Mark Twain describes his tour of the Milan Cathedral and his reaction upon viewing the sculpture of St Bartholomew:

The guide showed us a coffee-coloured piece of sculpture which he said was considered to have come from the hand of Phidias, since it is not possible that any other artist, of any epoch, could have copied nature with such faultless accuracy. The figure was that of a man without a skin; with every vein, artery, muscle, every fibre and tendon and tissue of the human frame, represented in minute detail. It looked natural, because somehow it looked as if it were in pain. A skinned man would be likely to look that way, unless his attention were occupied with some other matter. It was a hideous thing, and yet there was a fascination about it some where. I am very sorry I saw it, now. I shall dream of it, sometimes. I shall dream that it is resting its corded arms on the bed's head and looking down on me with its dead eyes ; I shall dream that it is stretched between the sheets with me and touching me with its exposed muscles and stringy cold legs. It is hard to forget repulsive things.⁹⁹

Twain's response to the flayed body is one of horror, but notably also one of menace and haunting. He is adamant that the *écorché* will come to him in his dreams and visit his bed; most significantly, much of his anxiety seems to stem from making physical contact with the sinewy corpse, its 'corded arms' and 'stringy cold legs'. Here we can return to Freud's reasoning that the uncanny is "something repressed which recurs" and assert that Twain's emotive reaction is the experience of the uncanny brought about by confronting the body in a skinless state.¹⁰⁰ Twain's encounter encapsulates that class of frightening described by Freud and that which is induced

⁹⁹ Twain, Mark. *The Innocents Abroad or the New Pilgrims' Progress* (Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Co., 1869), 175.

¹⁰⁰ Op. cit. Freud. 217



Figure 16.

Marco d'Agrate, marble statue of St Bartholomew with his own skin (front view) c.1562.
Duomo di Milano, Italy.



Figure 17.

Marco d'Agrate, marble statue of St Bartholomew with his own skin (side view revealing robe of skin) c.1562.
Duomo di Milano, Italy.



Figure 18.

Standing male écorché, showing musculature. From *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano*.
 Juan Valverde de Hamusco, 1556. Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.

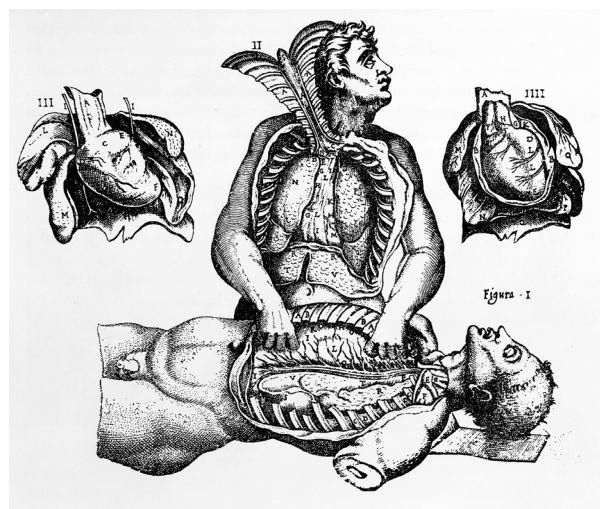


Figure 19.

Dissected cadaver dissecting another. From *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano*.
 Juan Valverde de Hamusco, 1556. Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.

firstly by bringing the body interior into light and secondly by the stark realisation that the body interior one looks upon bares a disembodied resemblance to their own internal being.

Experiencing sensations of repulsion or horror at the thought of making physical contact with the flayed body is interesting to consider in regards to images of the *écorché*, where the body is not only complicit but represented as self sacrificing. In an image published in Valverde's 1556 anatomical text, the flayed body grasps his own skin in a strikingly reminiscent stance to St Bartholomew (fig. 18). The male *écorché* wields a knife in his left hand, inciting the notion that he has indeed skinned himself. Charging the figure with the knife can be understood as a visual strategy that imposes agency onto the anatomised body. The corpse is presented as willing and self-sacrificing; actively engaged in his own dissection he becomes his own anatomist. This 'cadaver anatomist' embodies the clinical exactitude and surgical precision of the barber-surgeon, whilst his gaze towards the flaccid skin that retains the characteristics of his face also reveals a potent metaphor; the self-flaying *écorché* as the embodiment of the anatomical edict *nosce te ipsum* (know thyself). The self-flaying body guaranteed what Sawday has described as "a literal interpretation of the searching inward gaze recommended by philosophical self-examination."¹⁰¹ In another image from Valverde's text, the role of surgeon-anatomist is once again occupied by the anatomised body, which is now charged with the dissection of another corpse (fig. 19). In her analysis on embodiment in anatomical manuals, Cregan states that "as the body is dissected it both becomes an 'anatomy' and reveals Anatomy."¹⁰² These states of becoming and revealing are visually manifest in this image; the body interior of the horizontal corpse is reflected back onto the upright cadaver, demonstrating a direct application of anatomical knowledge gained through the practice of dissection. Touch is also a crucial and metaphoric gesture to be considered, one which recalls Vesalius positioning his hand and the knife on the open abdomen of the corpse, demonstrating man as both explicator and demonstrator of anatomy. David L. Martin asserts, "the slippage that is generated between anatomist and corpse, animate and inanimate, agent and patient, produces a gaze that marks the living body as a potential corpse, at the same time it codifies the dead body as a potential body-of-knowledge."¹⁰³ It is significant to note that the flayed cadaver whose hands rest within the chest and abdominal cavity of the horizontal corpse does not gaze inwards, in wonder or in horror, at the caverns of the body, rather his eyes are averted to the sky. One again we see an explicit reference to theological sanctification regarding the practice of dissection in order to allow the knowledge held within the unknown body interior of the dead to be mapped, demarcated and in turn, provide an anatomical blueprint for the living.

ORLAN: carnal lacerations

The image of the flayed body represents an exceptionally uncanny body, one that bares resemblance to, but remains a body not of our own. As demonstrated through this discussion of

¹⁰¹ Op. cit. Sawday. 117

¹⁰² Op. cit. Cregan. 72

¹⁰³ Op. cit..Martin. 82

historical source material the *écorché* is an image of the anatomised body, however one entrenched within both artistic aesthetics and religious modes of representation. The anatomised body having been coded to operate as an implicitly sanctified site carries this through into images that carefully craft it as a familiar yet unfamiliar territory of preordained corporeal knowledge. Martin argues that it is through the process of bodily division that the body's sacrality is made manifest, and as such, "It is the partitioned and mutilated body, whether criminal or saintly, that becomes associated with a register of sanctity."¹⁰⁴ As we have seen, through an analysis of images of the body where its interior is rendered unveiled or exposed, its sanctity appears to be implicitly connected to gestures of sacrifice. In this instance what the source material that has been examined reveals is that this sacrifice can be of one's own body in the name of furthering anatomical knowledge, or in the name of one's faith in God. In both instances sacrifice is invested with the sacred and it is made apparent by a transgression of the body's border and reliant on a cutting spectacle.

Whether by taking a knife, scissors or scalpel to flesh, entering into and opening up the body interior for view is always a precarious act. ORLAN was discussed in the introduction to this chapter with regards to her work *Suture/Secularism* (fig. 3), firstly as the work makes explicit cutting as a performative gesture, and secondly for its potent metaphor that recalls incisions made through the boundary of skin and into flesh. For ORLAN, the act of cutting presents itself as a crucial methodology of practice operating across the artist's oeuvre.¹⁰⁵ ORLAN's examination of the surgical metaphor and of performing anatomy draws on histories of the sacred, the uncanny and the abject body engrained within the dissective culture of the early modern period. Her practice recalls the public dissection theatres of early anatomical study, animating incisions into her own flesh as a spectacle that has both captivated and horrified audiences. In the context of this study, ORLAN's practice can be considered a contemporaneous enactment of sacred anatomy activated through her own decisive cutting spectacle.

Following the adoption of her character 'Saint ORLAN' in 1971, the artist's physical body has functioned as her primary material and her performances have juxtaposed potent Christian iconography with grotesque realism. ORLAN's artistic notoriety is predominantly recalled in her live cosmetic surgeries. These dramatic performances graphically demonstrate the cutting open, displaying and remaking of the artist's own body. Though the images that document her surgical operations can appear bloody and nihilistic, ORLAN adamantly distinguishes her practice from explorations of brutality or masochism. She emphasises that her performances are not intended for testing the thresholds of pain, rather that her 'Carnal Art' is more concerned "with the relationship between flesh and the word." negotiating the materiality of the body across the

¹⁰⁴ Martin goes on to state, "What is remarkable about this account of the conflation of Christian imagery with judicial torture is the manner in which the discourses of the saintly body intersect with that of the criminal through the process of their bodily partition." Ibid. 100

¹⁰⁵ Throughout this paper 'ORLAN' is written in capital letters, as stipulated by the artist. Across a number of scholarly texts both 'ORLAN' and 'Orlan' have been employed without explanation, however I have chosen to adhere to the artist's preference in this instance. Published on her website, the artist describes the intention and meaning invested in the chosen identity *ORLAN*: "To change your name means to invent yourself. After a session of psychoanalysis, I realized that I was forgetting some letters of my family name as I signed my name "morte" (dead) on my checks. I wanted to reuse the syllables which produce a positive connotation while keeping the word "or" (gold), I then added "lan" and from that time I called myself ORLAN." ORLAN, NetAgence, accessed July 19, 2013. www.orlan.eu.

discourses of art, medicine, science and biology.¹⁰⁶ ORLAN's explorations of flesh contextually located within a surgical-come-artistic theatre, can be understood to embody Artaud's aesthetic emphasis on visceral experience and taking hold of the whole anatomy, as proposed in *The Theatre and its Double*. It is not the horror or revulsion evoked by cutting into the flesh that aligns ORLAN's work with Artaud's explication of cruelty, rather this connection is better formed by understanding the degree of diligence, decisiveness, determination and irreversibility expressed throughout the artist's surgical performances.

Beginning in 1990, the series of eight performances that comprise *The Reincarnation of St ORLAN* reveal the artist's directorial control over the surgical spectacle. Each operation focused on remaking a physical feature of the artist's face. The plan was for each section of the artist's face to be remade in order to mirror a specifically isolated attribute selected from various iconic female representations within the history of western art. In what can be understood as a clear feminist critique of the male gaze imposed on the female form, ORLAN's surgeries would include acquiring the chin of Botticelli's *Venus* and the forehead of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*.¹⁰⁷ It is here that the symbolic cutting gesture is enacted with a double-edged blade, ORLAN fragments the idolised bodies synonymous with classical femininity and the representation of Western beauty. In doing so she extracts and isolates singular physiognomic characteristics, creating a series of uncanny fractured parts now decontextualised and rendered alien from the whole. It is then upon ORLAN's face where the cutting gesture is enacted into flesh, thus revealing its doubled edge. Over the course of her surgical performances this cacophony of disconnected parts becomes disjointedly hinged together; the objective of each performed surgery is to transform her visage through an invasive cut and suture technique.

Throughout these operations ORLAN reads aloud selected texts by French philosopher Michel Serres and the Lacanian psychoanalyst Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni; text and flesh are once again intertwined through the anatomised body in the context of theatre. General anaesthetic is forgone, allowing ORLAN to continue her recital of texts whilst surgeons cut through skin and into the visceral fascia of her face. The cuts applied to her body can be considered as acute, controlled and decisive, reflecting Artaud's understanding of cruelty as strictness, as opposed to a cutting gesture that can be repressively inflicted or intentionally sadistic. Unlike Marina Abramovic's infamous surrender of her own body in *Rhythm 0* (1974), ORLAN, though she does not literally handle the scalpel, remains in control of the knife applied to her flesh. This agency over the knife recalls both the anatomist who prioritised tactile interaction, as well as the self-flaying *écorchés* examined earlier in this chapter. The artist is complicit and willing in her own dissection: throughout the performances it's as if ORLAN's body becomes the animate corpse.

¹⁰⁶ Orlan quoted in 'Psychic Weight' by Dominic Johnson. See Simon Donger, Simon Shepard and ORLAN, ed. *Orlan: A Hybrid of Body Artworks* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 90. Dominic Johnson understands Orlan's rejection of pain within the context of her performances as a metaphor for the "lived relation between pleasure and pain", suggesting that the desire for pleasure is often to deny or derail the affect of pain. Johnson quotes Orlan: "I affirm it again today, I refuse pain. My work is about pleasure and sensuousness, it does not leave any place to suffering. The reincarnation of St ORLAN is not the story of a martyr but of a character that dissolves." Ibid. 85

¹⁰⁷ Other surgical operations were intended to realise the following facial attributes: the nose of *Diana the Huntress* (Unknown sculptor c. 16th century, School of Fontainebleau); the mouth of Europa from François Boucher's *The Rape of Europa* (c.1732-1734); the eyes of Psyche from François Gérard's *Cupid and Psyche* (1798). See Ince, Kate. *Orlan: Millennial Female*. Edited by Joanne B. Eicher, Dress, Body, Culture (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 6.

In this respect one can recall the previous discussion of Martin's scholarship, who proposed that the presence of an anatomising gaze that occurs through the visual coding of the body, in turn rendering it as a site for the production of knowledge. Martin's notion of the anatomising gaze offered up by the Vesalian *écorchés* is palpably applicable to ORLAN, "the corpse, in an act of animated compliance that marks it also as an agent, seems to not only sanction its own destruction, but also to actually desire it".¹⁰⁸

This is no better demonstrated than in the work *Omnipresence* (fig. 20), the title given to the seventh surgery of the performances staged as part of *The Reincarnation of St ORLAN*. It is of particular interest given that the entire surgical procedure was broadcast live via satellite to galleries and art institutions across North America, Canada and Europe. These included Sandra Gering gallery, New York; the Centre George Pompidou, Paris; and the Banff Centre, Calgary.¹⁰⁹ Throughout the surgical procedure the artist remains lucid, responsive and able to reply to questions posed by viewers at the various live feed locations. In *Omnipresence* there is a notable absence of any reference to a lifeless body or the passive supine corpse. The titling of the surgery alone suggests an occupation, a presence exerted in which ORLAN remains a willing and active participant in the manipulation of her own flesh. This consciousness achieved through localised anaesthetic reflects the active control ORLAN asserts over her own body under the knife.¹¹⁰ Within the surgical space, like that of the anatomy theatre, exists a power dynamic where control is exerted by the surgeon or anatomist over the submissive body subject. ORLAN's inversion of this power dynamic recalls the self-flaying image of the *écorché* in which the body is represented as a complicit and willing participant in its own dissection. Through ORLAN's governance of the cutting gesture applied to her own body, she evokes the slippage previously discussed and expressed by Martin between anatomist and corpse, agent and patient. A series of dual embodiments emblematic of life and death.

Throughout the period of ORLAN's surgical performances, the operating room is presented as a dramatic pastiche of the Baroque and carnival. This aesthetic has played an important role in denying her surgical works any sense of clinical neutrality. Recalling the earlier analysis of the Bolognese Archiginnasio theatre, it became apparent that every architectural facet was ornamentally encoded with celestial and theological meaning. ORLAN carries this currency of decorative symbolism into her own operating room. There are opulent marble urns filled with fruits that appear as excessive classical finishes, but also as ripened offerings gifted to a deity or placed at a sacred site. ORLAN and her team of surgeons and videographers have also worn costumes designed by contemporary fashion designers Paco Rabanne, Issey Miyake and Walter

¹⁰⁸ Op. cit. Martin. 83

¹⁰⁹ ORLAN. "This Is My Body... This Is My Software." In *Orlan: A Hybrid Body of Artworks*, edited by Simon Shepard and ORLAN Simon Donger (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 42.

¹¹⁰ Reviewing the film documentation from *Omnipresence*, it is assumed that the series of injections given to ORLAN in various parts of her head to be local anaesthetic, allowing the artist to continue talking and interacting during the surgical procedure. In other surgical performances, such as *Successful Operation* (1990) in which ORLAN undergoes liposuction, she is given spinal injections and other types of local anesthesia. See also Op. Cit. O'Bryan. 174



Figure 20.

ORLAN, *7th Surgery—Performance Titled Omnipresence*. New York, 1993.
Cibachrome Diasec mount, 165 x 110 cm.

Van Beirendonck.¹¹¹ The excessively ornate aesthetic employed in ORLAN's theatre echoes the artistry of the anatomical image that positioned the anatomised body amongst arcadian ruins, within a domestic setting or a pastoral landscape. The strategy at play can be thought of not in a sense that ORLAN is attempting to veil the horrific reality of the body sliced and flayed open, rather that she appears to authenticate the act of cutting as a gesture that was and remains a spectacle inherent to theatre, one imbued with dramaturgy and hagiographic resonance. ORLAN thus challenges the sanctity of flesh by contrasting the palpable and explicit act of cutting into the living body, against an environment where the aesthetic attributes of concealment are those that characterise representations of 'sacred anatomy' previously examined.

ORLAN's renouncement of pain coupled with her use of local anaesthesia minimises the artist's physical suffering during the operation. The pain we associate with cutting the body becomes the pain experienced by the viewer who bares witness to the image of shockingly palpable lacerations made into the artist's flesh. Curator Michelle Hirschhorn has described viewing a woman's face being cut open as a "profoundly destabilizing" encounter, one which oscillates somewhere "between fascination and repulsion."¹¹² As Kristeva has asserted in her theorising of abjection, "repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself."¹¹³ We experience a sense of repulsion at the exposure of another body's veiled interior, at the sight of blood and the slicing open of skin. According to Kristeva, "The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to the I."¹¹⁴ This 'othering' effect is inherent to viewing the body interior and any corporeal matter that has become detached from ourselves. ORLAN's face becomes a site of seeping fluids, bodily excretions and the expulsion of blood and viscous substances. The sensation of abject repulsion occurs when the viewer identifies with being made of the same bodily material. Captured within the moving and still images of ORLAN's surgery, the 'I' that the Kristevian abject exists in opposition to becomes rendered as the 'it'; a separate, uncanny and incarnate bodily object that evokes the destabilising affect, described by Hirschhorn, that occurs when one witnesses the body cut open. By making an incision into matter we know that one both creates space and reveals depth. At the precipice of this incision made into flesh, we are forced to acknowledge a specific point in our existence, aptly described by Kristeva – "There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being".¹¹⁵ Once that boundary is breached, cut into and cleaved open, it reveals a cavernous space of uncanny matter; a chasm of horror.

Hirschhorn has drawn on Kristeva's reading of the maternal body as abject and the vagina imagined as a monstrous cavity, describing the incisions made into skin as the making of a new orifice, the creation of a "black hole."¹¹⁶ It is at this point that the image of ORLAN's body as a

¹¹¹ Donger, Simon. "Carnal Vertigos." In *ORLAN: A Hybrid of Body Artworks*, edited by Simon Shepard, Simon Donger and ORLAN (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 169.

¹¹² Hirschhorn, Michelle. "Orlan: Artist in the Post-Human Age of Mechanical Reincarnation: Body as Ready (to Be Re-) Made." In *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, edited by Griselda Pollock, 110-34 (London: Routledge, 1996), 112.

¹¹³ Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 1

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 3

¹¹⁶ Hirschhorn argues, "In this sense, perhaps the sight of a surgical incision into a woman's face can also be perceived within patriarchal culture as a primeval 'black hole', another metonymic reminder of the hole which is opened up by the

whole becomes punctured; it now exists outside (exterior) to any totalising sense of whole body unity. ORLAN becomes a body we can associate with the Bakhtinian grotesque – a body that is unclosed, unfastened and in a state of transgression.¹¹⁷ Bakhtin understood grotesque realism as a coming down to earth; his explication of the grotesque body was a return to flesh, activated through processes of degradation and regeneration.¹¹⁸ Bakhtin relates the degrading/regenerating paradigm of the grotesque to the physical bodily functions of defecation, copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth.¹¹⁹ Each of these bodily acts involves a transitioning orifice, a space that is created between the body interior and exterior. The ‘black hole’ of surgical incision (cutting into the body) can be seen to replicate the biological orifices that exist at the various thresholds of the body’s interior/exterior boundary. The surgical incision therefore creates *another* uncanny space, an additional breach in the body’s border, thus rendering it repulsively abject to witness.

The broadcast of *Omnipresence* allowed for ORLAN’s surgery to be viewed in real time, and the filmic image of the artist being cut and invasively opened can still today be re-watched multiple times over.¹²⁰ Alongside the broadcast and existing video of the surgical procedure is a series of still image panels that warrant analysis in relation to ORLAN’s surgical performance (fig. 21). Each panel comprises of two portraits of the artist; one is a computer-generated hybridisation of ORLAN’s face morphed with faces from classical female archetypes within western art history. The second is a photographic image that documents the transformation of her face as it begins to heal post-operation. These images were taken every morning, every day for 40 +1 days, this specific period becomes analogous with not only the Catholic period of lent, but also the traditional length of time that the ill would be kept in quarantine.¹²¹ Separating the digitally created portrait from the post-operation image was the text ‘*entre-deux*’ (‘between two’ or ‘in-between’) followed by the date; allowing each panel to become a temporal barometer, acting as a visual measuring device for ORLAN’s metamorphosis. The panel series documents ORLAN’s transitional state of becoming; in this case the evolution of her visage appears as an infinite array of possible transformations. ORLAN engages in a feminist critique of the historical legacy in which Western art and medicine has colonised and territorially configured the image of the female body. She reveals herself as body that is “always in process, it is always becoming, it is a mobile and hybrid creature, disproportionate, exorbitant, outgrowing all limits, obscenely de-centered and off balance, a figural and symbolic resource for parodied exaggeration and

absence of the penis; the horrifying site of the mother’s genitals – proof that castration can occur.” Op. cit. Hirschhorn. 128

¹¹⁷ In describing the grotesque image, Bakhtin asserts, “They remain ambivalent and contradictory; they are ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of “classic” aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed. The new historic sense that penetrates them gives these images a new meaning but keeps in tact their traditional contents: copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, old age, disintegration, dismemberment. All these in their direct material aspect are the main element in the system of grotesque images. They are contrary to the classic images of the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development.” Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. First Midland Book ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 25.

¹¹⁸ Bakhtin sees degradation as the “essential principle” of grotesque realism; he considers degradation not from the perspective of total or absolute destruction, rather its ability to allow for rebirth and regeneration. It is “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal and abstract; it is a transfer to a material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.” Ibid. 19-22

¹¹⁹ “To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body. The life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth, it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one.” Ibid. 21

¹²⁰ A 22-minute film documenting *Omnipresence* is available for viewing on Vimeo and the artist’s website. Accessed on June 30, 2013, <http://www.orlan.eu/works/videos-dorlan-2/>

¹²¹ Op. cit. Hirschhorn. 118

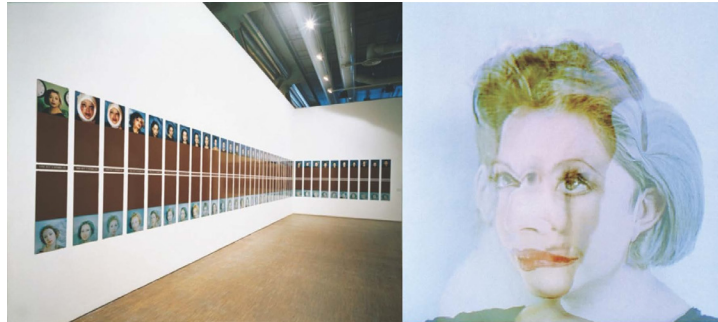


Figure 21.

ORLAN, *Omnipresence No. 2* 1994.
(Installation view and detail). Variable dimensions, approximately 160 x 1700 cm, forty diptychs of metal and eighty colour photographs. Pictured during the *Hors Limites* exhibition, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, November 1994– February 1995.



Figure 22.

ORLAN, *4th Surgery Performance Titled Successful Operation*, December 8, 1991, Paris.
Cibachrome diasec mount, 165 x 110 cm.

inversion.”¹²² In this respect, ORLAN rejects the mythical totalising ideal of the whole or complete body, subverting the conventions of sacred anatomy by emphasising the possibilities of hybridisation and transformation.

Haptic visuality and the textural grotesque

Looking at a still image from ORLAN’s fourth surgical performance *Successful Operation* (fig. 22), the savage incision being made into the artist’s face is explicitly bloody and confronting. The textural density of the close up image allows for what Gianna Bouchard describes as the collapsing of spectatorial distance.¹²³ Considering that the *Successful Operation* image has then been enlarged to a proportion on par with a whole body suggests that such an image, both graphic and with the contribution of its scale, could literally envelop the viewer inciting an experience that activates the multi-sensory. Media theorist Laura Marks asserts that the haptic image has the ability to “refuse visual plenitude”.¹²⁴ According to Marks the capacity for the haptic image to be perceived as a whole body or whole object lies in its ability to be reduced to a material or textural surface. Thus according to the author, “the engagement of haptic visuality occurs not simply in psychic registers but in the sensorium.”¹²⁵ The textures alone in the still image from *Successful Operation* speak of the haptic – alongside the bloodstained skin and fleshy disfigured lips is the sight of fibrous cotton wadding, ripened grapes, and the shimmering drapery of costumes worn by both surgeon and artist. This richly textural landscape becomes a site of ambiguous boundaries; surgeon, patient, fascia and cloth are confusedly intertwined. C. Jill O’Bryan expands on the trauma which can be experienced through a confundity of boundaries:

The merging of outward and inner features into one offers an impossibility of viewing the other except as the monstrous other, that which is boundless chaotic, uncontained, and therefore unrecognisable. In this respect, even when exposed, the interior of the body resounds with the essence of invisibility.¹²⁶

One may recall British artist Mat Collishaw’s seminal work *Bullet Hole* (fig. 23), which employs similar tropes of scale to incite a haptic sensation within the viewer. The work is confronting, explicitly framing a monstrously grotesque and seeping wound. Like the close-up images of ORLAN’s body in theatre, the viewer’s response is one of visceral repulsion and recoil. This surge of abjection can be understood as a corollary to cutting into the skin, splitting the corporeal boundary and therefore rupturing any sense of the body as a comprehensible whole. Performance theorist Gianna Bouchard describes this type of encounter as the “autoptic moment of performance,” where our collective senses engage in a surveillance of what is both physical and

¹²² Hirschhorn quoting Peter Stallybrass and Allan White. *The Politics of Transgression*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1986. Ibid. 131

¹²³ Bouchard, Gianna. "Orlan Anatomised." In *Orlan: A Hybrid Body of Artworks*, edited by Simon Shepard, Simon Donger, ORLAN 62-73 (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 70.

¹²⁴ Marks, Laura U. *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 177.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 188

¹²⁶ Op. cit. O’Bryan. 40

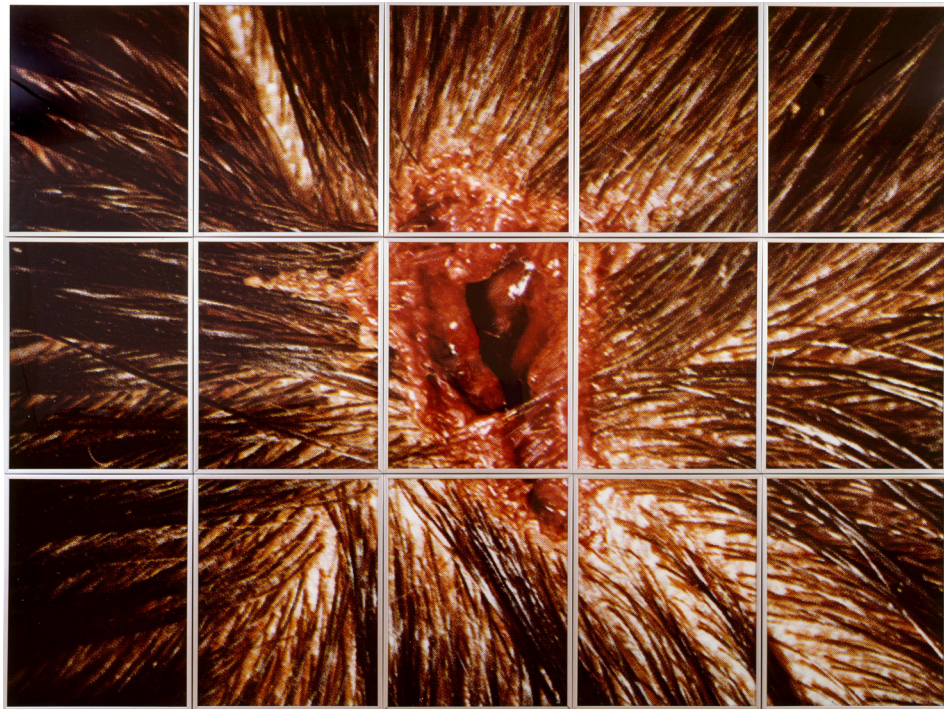


Figure 23.

Mat Collishaw, *Bullet Hole* 1998

Cibachrome mounted on fifteen light boxes, 243.8 x 365.8 cm.

Image courtesy and copyright the artist and Blain|Southern, London.

material. Encountering the image of a cropped and framed gaping wound, or viewing with acute focus the split created by the scalpel's incision, is to witness a black hole, an unspeakable opening. Psychoanalytic theorist Parveen Adams describes this affect as, "Something flies off, this something is the security of the relation between inside and outside. It ceases to exist. There is, suddenly, no inside and no outside. There is an emptying out of the object."¹²⁷

Teresa Margolles: bodies and borderlines

Through the act of cutting into and opening the body a boundary is breached, and that sense of security that Adams identifies becomes ruptured and undermined. British anthropologist Mary Douglas, whose seminal scholarship analyses the concepts of pollution and taboo asserts, "the body is a model which can stand for a bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious."¹²⁸ Through the haptic affects of ORLAN's surgical performance documentation and the textural grotesque of Collishaw's *Bullet Hole*, the emptying out of the body as a container of veiled material evidently remains fecund territory for contemporary artists negotiating the complexities of the culturally constructed body. Teresa Margolles is an artist who works with the materiality of the body to explore the social, political and economic textures of death. In regards to the parameters of this research, she engages in an examination of the dead body and the rituals and relics that derive from interactions with the corpse. Margolles's approach to working with the materiality of the cadaver can be described as a dissection, in which she instigates a continual dismantling of the taboos associated with the dead body, remembrance, repulsion and purification. Her art practice is accompanied by qualifications in forensic medicine and her works regularly employ both mortuary and crime scene detritus, as well as post-mortem bodily refuse such as blood, soiled cloth and water.¹²⁹

In the photographic series *Linea* (fig. 24) Margolles directly explores the contestation of boundaries, both those in relation to the body and those external, which demarcate geographical space. The images focus on the abdominal areas of unidentified corpses following post-mortem examination. Each body having been cut open for autopsy has been sutured back together from the sternum to pubis region, acts of repair which create ridge-like braids and delicate taut folds on the surface of the lifeless skins. The images were taken by Margolles in the mortuaries of Guadalajara and Ciudad Juárez and have been described by Rebecca Scott Bray as "deathscapes."¹³⁰ One looks at these images as if interrogating topographical terrain, the stitching becomes a sewn up divide, marking the point of transgression between internal and external

¹²⁷ Adams, Parveen. *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* (Oxon: Routledge, 1996), 154. Quoted by Bouchard. Op. cit. Bouchard. 71

¹²⁸ Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge Classics ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 142.

¹²⁹ Margolles was a founding member of the artist collective SEMEFO—an acronym for the Mexican coroner and forensic medical service— which stationed artists in laboratories, mortuaries and other state medical services across Mexico City from 1990-1999. See Bray, Rebecca Scott. "Teresa Margolles's Crime Scene Aesthetics " *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 4 (2011): 933-48. 934

¹³⁰ Through correspondence with the artist's representing gallery in Zurich, Bray confirms the images to have been taken at morgues in both cities. She goes on to identify both cities as being located in the north of Mexico, however this is only true of Ciudad Juárez, which is located on the border between Mexico and the U.S states of New Mexico and Texas. Guadalajara is located in central Mexico to the north-west of Mexico City. Ibid. 946



Figure 24.

Teresa Margolles, *Linea* 2005.

Triptych, 3 color photographs. Ed. of 6 + 1 AP + 1 EP. 33.5 x 103.5 cm, framed.

Images courtesy the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich.

bodily space. Simultaneously they also evoke a sense of aerial surveillance across a landscape. Site is a poignant signifier in the work; Ciudad Juárez is located on the international border that divides Mexico and the U.S. This is contested geographical terrain; Ciudad Juárez is considered one of the most violent cities in the world, heavily dominated by murderous crime and violence inflicted by burgeoning drug cartels. In framing her focus on the post-autoptic incision, it is as if Margolles has imagined the suturing and re-joining of human flesh as the ominous dividing fence between nations. Margolles reminds us that it is at the border or boundary line where the economic, political and social divide is at its most perilously embodied. In revealing the stitched up corpses of those who have fallen victim to violence and crime, Margolles equates the danger of breaching the body's borders with those associated with hazardous border crossings between neighbouring sovereign states.

According to Douglas, "Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state or the next, it is undefinable."¹³¹ Occupying an empty gallery space, Margolles's work *Vaporización* (fig. 25) is a fog-like watery mist that permeates throughout the interior architecture. The vapour, on the cusp of its own transition between its gaseous and liquid state, is unnervingly horrifying to experience when it becomes known that it is generated with water that has been used to wash corpses in a mortuary. The absence of any visual image or pictorial representation of death means that its acknowledgment is most significantly a palpable and tangible experience. Like the lack of distance that is engrained in the close up images of ORLAN's surgical performances, spectatorial distance is again forgone for sensorial immersion and haptic engagement, one that art critic Pascal Beausse describes as "shocking and disquieting" to experience.¹³² As spectators move through the mist, it lightly dampens their skin, leaving a thin membranous residue; the viewer is coerced into making direct bodily contact with the dead. Beausse has likened the work to the reimagining of a funerary ritual, one that operates a "translation from the sacred to the profane."¹³³ The ethereal atmosphere of *Vaporización* is absent of blood, and any fleshy bodily matter, yet the presence of death is no less palpable. The work recalls Artaud's emphasis on the ability for the theatre of cruelty to take hold of the spectator's body and seize it by its whole anatomy. There is blood and fleshy bodily matter present in *Vaporización* – it belongs to the spectator, and it is here and within this body that the overwhelming presence of death and life reverberate and coalesce.

Coming back to Margolles's engagement with the materiality of the corpse through a type of dissective enquiry, the artist has continued her explorations in the form of venerating bodily remains. *Pintura de Sangre I* (fig. 26) saw the artist attend to a crime scene following a murder, where she then pressed and crumpled a large piece of canvas into a pool of blood left in the wake of the violence.¹³⁴ Once stretched, the canvas appears as a horrifying frottage, the dried and coagulated blood takes on a rusty brown colour which has seeped into the grain and crumpled

¹³¹ Op. cit. Douglas. 119

¹³² In describing the work, Beausse notes "the atmospheric dimension of the fog doesn't permit any distance: insinuating itself everywhere... This invitation to immerse oneself in the space of these anonymous deaths has both an evocative and an immediately physical, sensorial dimension." See Beausse, Pascal. "Teresa Margolles: Primordial Substances." *Flash Art: Milan*, no. 243 (2005): 106-09. 108

¹³³ Ibid. 108

¹³⁴ Op. cit. Bray. 943



Figure 25.

Teresa Margolles, *Vaporización* 2001.

Installation with 1-2 smoking machines, dimensions variable. Ed. of 4 + 1 AP.

Exhibition view, "Mexico City: An Exhibition about the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values"

MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY, US, 2002.

Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich.



Figure 26.

Teresa Margolles, *Pintura de Sangre I* 2008.

Blood on canvas, 133.5 x 130 cm. Photo: A. Burger.

Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich.

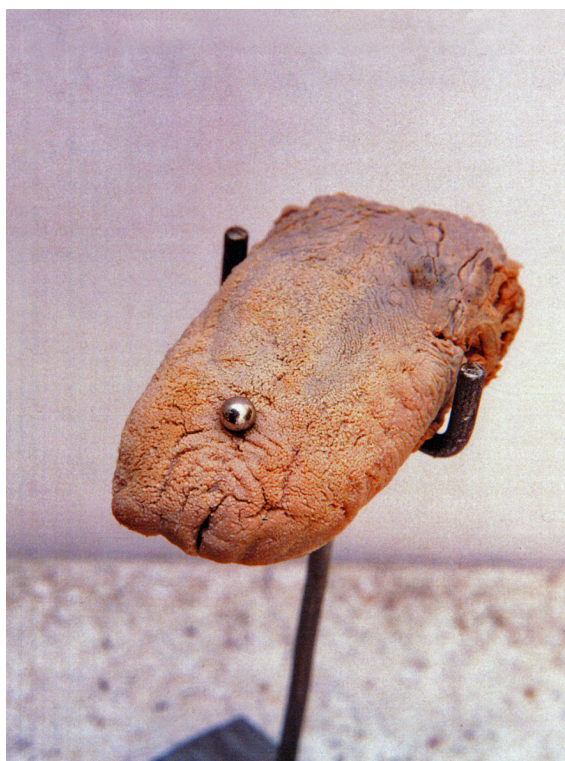


Figure 27.

Teresa Margolles, *Lengua* 2000.

Object, human tongue.

Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich.

folds of the cloth, creating a resist-like dyed surface. The painting exists as an imprint of death, a harrowingly abject reminder of mortality. We also see here another example of the haptic image described by Marks, where death has been reduced to a material and textural surface, one that alludes a totalizing image of the body and replaces it with delicate gestural markings made by its most significant fluid. It is apparent that for Margolles the body is a material—matter to be carved into and dismantled. However where ORLAN's cuts were inflicted onto her own body, much of the ethical contestation surrounding Margolles's work can be attributed to the agency afforded by the artist over a body that is not her own.

Lengua (fig. 27) is a potent example of the problematic ideas raised by Margolles's provocative cutting spectacle. The work is a severed human tongue, which can be thought to operate within the visual economy of the anatomical specimen, however it denies any association with the dusty cabinets of the medical museum by the contemporary metal tongue piercing protruding through its flesh. The tongue belongs to a Mexican teenager who was killed in a street fight, and was procured by the artist who offered to cover the deceased's burial expenses in exchange for the tongue.¹³⁵ Margolles's work draws attention to the desolate economic circumstances endemic throughout many Mexican communities. *Lengua* also speaks to the confronting economic value of body parts; the artist intentionally acquiring this bodily fragment through an act of trade. This gesture recalls something that cannot be thoroughly unpacked within the scope of this thesis—that of the corpse as a commodity—yet it raises a line of questioning that can apply to earlier discussions concerning the anatomy theatre, specifically how and where bodies were procured as objects for pedagogical analysis and demonstration. The cultural context and the socio-economic poverty for which Margolles's practice directly responds, leads Beausse to stipulate,

...with its daily reminders of the low cost of human life constantly falling prey to processes of reification and merchandizing, the artist cannot allow herself to produce forms intended to fulfil a latent demand for aesthetic delight or moral comfort.¹³⁶

There is a sacrality to the work of Margolles, but as Beausse goes on to suggest, “the sacred is articulated outside of the religious.” Recalling the earlier discussion surrounding the sanctity of the corpse, for Ruth Richardson it is the physicality of the deceased, the dead body that is demanding of attention and the actual proof that a death has occurred.¹³⁷ By confronting and critiquing the taboo surrounding the dead body as something that must be veiled, kept out of sight and aesthetically sanitised, Margolles is proposing another form of sacred anatomy. It is one that acknowledges the stark reality of the deceased body, but a form of sacred anatomy that is once again evocative of a disembodied resemblance, an uncanny representation of the real that activates upon encounter.

¹³⁵ The account of Margolles's exchange of burial and casket costs for the tongue of the murder victim is cited in the following: Juaregui, Gabriela, “Necropolis: Exhuming the works of Teresa Margolles” *Muerte sin fin*, ed. Udo Kittelmann and Klaus Görner. (2004): 174-190. Medina, Cuauhtémoc, “Zones of Tolerance: Teresa Margolles, SEMEFO and Beyond” *Parachute* 104, no. 10-12 (2001): 32-52. Bray, Rebecca Scott. “Teresa Margolles's Crime Scene Aesthetics” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 4 (2011): 933-48.

¹³⁶ Op. cit. Beausse. 109

¹³⁷ Op. cit. Richardson. 26-27

At the conclusion of this chapter it is poignant to once again consider what it means for the body to go 'under the knife'. The performative implications of the cutting gesture have been examined through a return to theatre that reflects on Artaud's understanding of cruelty as diligent, decisive, determined and irreversible. An analysis of historical source material has been undertaken to demonstrate the power of ritual and the significance of histrionic ceremony inherent to the study of anatomy and the explication of bodily knowledge. Most significantly, understanding how modes of the sacred and the theatrical coalesce within visual representations of the body cut open has afforded a dense and complex historical underpinning from which to continue the pursuit of identifying and acknowledging a contemporary culture of dissection in visual arts practice. ORLAN and Margolles are seminal practitioners who enact their own distinct cutting spectacles by breaching the body's boundary and transgressing the interior and exterior spaces it affords. What is now known is that the cutting spectacle employed to open the body does so in a way that invites the uncanny, the abject and the grotesque to intertwine. Each affect can also be considered transgressive as it moves between the body object in theatre and the anatomised or flayed body as an image. Important foundations have been laid for further enquiry into the nature of the cutting spectacle and the forms of representation it has the ability to generate. What then of the cutting spectacle when it is not enacted with the intention to cleave *open* the body, but rather *cut off* a body part or *cut out* its countenance? The implications of such incisions require examination and analysis. The oceanic tide is upon us.

Chapter 2
**Cutting Acts: the Scaffold, the Silhouette
and the Severed Head**

To look in order to know, to show in order to teach, is not this a tacit form of violence, all the more abusive for its silence, upon a sick body that demands to be comforted, not displayed? Can pain be a spectacle? Not only can it be, but it must be, by virtue of the subtle right that resides in the fact that no one is alone.

– Michel Foucault ¹³⁸

In 1998 Julia Kristeva curated the exhibition *Visions Capitales (Capital Visions)* for the Louvre in Paris, as part of the *Parti Pris* series organised by the Department of Graphic Arts.¹³⁹ The exhibition broadly traced the significance and diverse iconographic representations of the severed head in western visual culture. In her subsequent theoretical publication that followed the exhibition, Kristeva describes the decapitating cut as generative of a particular way of seeing, which leads her to dwell further on the multi faceted implications of this act:

How interesting it is to cut, how obvious, how amusing... And since political life is full of massacres of all kinds, let us wed historical or contemporary subjects with this way of seeing the established horror, increasingly conformist, affected, theatrical, museumized.¹⁴⁰

The exhibition traversed a range of ancient, historic and twentieth century artefacts, including images from mythology, to the religious, biblical, and those with political resonance that responded to capital punishment and the practice of death by decapitation. Within the beheaded image is where Kristeva suggests that sacrificial terror and seduction have the ability to coexist, with “the artist and the viewer alternately playing the roles of the wound and the knife.”¹⁴¹ Kristeva’s intended anthropological approach towards curating the exhibition was in order to examine the role of representation, the image of the severed head and its ability to generate an affect of the sacred.¹⁴² For Kristeva, the sacred is not to be found in the sacrifice, but rather in its “capacity for representation.”¹⁴³ Her proposal is to consider the image as the sole remaining link

¹³⁸ Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*. Translated by A.M Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, Random House Inc., 1994), 148.

¹³⁹ *Visions Capitales* informed Kristeva’s subsequent theoretical publication *The Severed Head: Capital Visions* (2011). The publication builds on the exhibition’s comprehensive catalogue essays that were previously only available in French.

¹⁴⁰ Kristeva, Julia. *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*. Translated by Jody Gladding. Edited by Lawrence D. Krizman, *European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultrual Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 84.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 84

¹⁴² Kristeva discusses her curatorial approach to the exhibition and the theoretical underpinnings of key concepts examined in *Visions Capitales*. See Louppe, Laurence. "Julia Kristeva: Capital Visions." *Art Press* (1998): 20-27.

¹⁴³ “Because the sacred, or the nostalgia for it that remains, turns out to reside not in sacrifice after all, or in some aesthetic or religious tradition, but in that specifically human, unique, and bitter experience that is the capacity for representation.” *Op. cit.* Kristeva, *The Severed head: Capital Visions*. 130

to the sacred, yet the concept of sacred must not be defined or confined by religious systems of belief. Kristeva states:

As for the sacred, on the contrary, let us say that it is the emergence of representation, that alchemy that leads the pleased and suffering body to symbolize, beyond and because of its confrontation with an impossibility of which separation is the everyday figure and death the absolute figure.¹⁴⁴

Thinking about the severed head and its capacity to generate an affect of the sacred or a sense of the divine warrants further exploration in the context of this thesis, as it is only through the cut or act of cutting that the head can become severed from the body and come to exist as a synecdoche of the body whole. The image of the severed head conjures a number of associations, however it is first and foremost the resulting object of a truncating act. It can recall the visual language of classical portraiture, the lens of physiognomic surveillance, and exist as a poignant–albeit macabre–reminder of the barbarism of capital punishment. It is a form of representation that has long been inscribed in how we see the body and how governing systems exert power over the body politic.

In chapter 1 we undertook a return to theatre to examine cutting open the body for anatomical enquiry and how this has been subsequently represented. Looking at historical and contemporary sources, the enactment of a cutting spectacle came to be identified as a key characteristic contributing to past and present cultures of dissection. The sacred, the uncanny and the grotesque are also in the process of being revealed as coalescing affects that result when the cutting spectacle is applied to the body and its image. At this point in the thesis, my research has led me to examine and analyse another series of cuts–truncations, decapitations–that have been inflicted on the body outside of the context of the anatomy theatre. My aim is to establish an awareness of alternate cutting spectacles imposed on the body, those that carry with them dissective modes of visual representation and that have the ability to evoke the partitioned body as an uncanny and sanctified site. The objective of this second chapter is then to demonstrate how the cutting spectacle employed to anatomise, dissect and examine the body *interior*, has the ability to transgress between other forms of incision; those employed to detach, demarcate and delineate the body *exterior*. Put simply, I intend to make explicit a relationship between cutting open and cutting out the body, how representations of the body’s fractured exterior remain significantly connected to modes of anatomical enquiry and the practice of dissection.

To briefly recall the introduction of this thesis, I responded to Foucault’s insistence that any knowledge of history should not be purposely constructed with the intent of establishing origins and continuity, instead it should be about identifying what he describes as its “oscillating reign.”¹⁴⁵ In keeping with the overarching methodology of this study–cutting, as a way of taking apart, dismantling and piecing together–I have taken a genealogical approach towards examining what I have identified as significant historical cutting spectacles imposed on the body exterior:

¹⁴⁴ Op. cit. Louppe. 25

¹⁴⁵ Op. cit. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and interviews*. 153

the guillotine employed during the French Revolution and the silhouette used in the eighteenth century pseudo-scientific practice of physiognomy. Foucault approached genealogy with the idea that this study of descent exists within the explication of body and history; the body being the surface in which inscriptions of events occur and are made.¹⁴⁶ According to Foucault, the task of genealogy “is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body.”¹⁴⁷ Inscribing and imprinting onto the body operate as gestures that can be considered closely akin to the act of cutting. Cutting into the physical body does not necessarily result in a severing or the removal of organs and limbs; if one considers that cutting has the ability to mark the body, then those marks make alterations to that body, ranging from the delicately subtle to the severe. Considering then how representational incisions are also made into the image of the body, these too generate permanent markings that recall Kristeva’s proposition, that the cut has the ability to generate alternate ways of seeing.

Beginning at the scaffold, the guillotine during the French Revolution will be examined for its significance as a cutting spectacle. Alongside the scaffold, the genre of guillotine portraits will be analysed for their ability to charge the severed head as an emblematic signifier for the whole body, operating within what Kristeva has described as an ‘icon economy.’ It is then my intention to look towards another cutting spectacle—the silhouette—which had also been coming into consciousness parallel to the guillotine’s presence in the political sphere of revolutionary France. The practice of silhouette cutting produced another kind of severed head, one rendered as a popular bourgeois pastime but also one affixed to the neo-classical physiognomic discourse promoted by Johann Caspar Lavater (1742-1801). In both instances the cutting spectacle will be revealed as a gesture of political significance. Both the guillotine and eighteenth century physiognomy operated a type of mechanised decapitation that had the ability to render the severed head as a facialised object. These cutting gestures therefore contributed to imprinting, engraving or inscribing onto the body past occurrences that have become indelible characteristics of being, knowing and seeing the body in the current context. Turning to contemporary visual artists, I will examine key works by Kara Walker, Sally Smart and Deborah Kelly; artists who employ dissective strategies through the use of silhouettes, cut-outs and collage. I will consider the physical and metaphorical implications of their cutting gestures in the context of art practice and how they operate as methods to excavate, critique and subvert historically engrained representations of the body and body politic.

The guillotine: an act of erasure

In October 2012 I began a three-month residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, my intention being to examine the guillotine as a type of cutting spectacle and to begin comprehending the significance of this ominous symbol of capital punishment at the time of the

¹⁴⁶ Foucault states, “The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history.” See Op. cit. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. 148

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 148

French Revolution. What remaining evidence I discovered of its existence in the French capital could be described as veiled and ghostly, its presence in Paris has been all but obliterated apart from a handful of discrete references. A small plaque marks its previous position in what is now known as Place de la Concorde; at the Musée Carnavalet, a collection of eighteenth century miniatures and games are a reminder of the guillotine's currency as a desirable trinket model, which today could be comparable to the diminutive Eiffel Tower replicas hawked at various tourist traps across the city. At the Musée de la Prefecture de Police, one can see a 1:3 scaled model of the guillotine, and at La Conciergerie a single guillotine blade is on display in the government building where Marie Antoinette was imprisoned prior to her execution. Most surprisingly if not unexpected, there is an authentic guillotine in the small underground jazz bar *Le Caveau des Oubliettes* on the left bank. In 2010 the guillotine was recontextualised as a museum artefact in the exhibition *Crime et Châtiment (Crime and Punishment)* at the Musée D'Orsay. An original 14-foot high guillotine designed by Léon Alphonse Berger in 1872 flanked the exhibition entrance that examined the aesthetics of violence and judicial penalty from 1791 to the abolition of capital punishment in 1981.¹⁴⁸ This particular guillotine had been pulled from obscurity having been found forgotten in a military bunker in Ecouen, north of the capital.¹⁴⁹ Presented in an exhibition context the guillotine came to embody a relic, a static sculptural object to be looked upon. It does however remain the most potent symbol of capital punishment as demonstrated by its dominant positioning in the entryway to the museum. Its terror is thus arguably engrained in the cultural psyche.

The destructive and effacing image of the guillotine was considered most prominent during the Reign of Terror (1793-1794) and its horror most profound during Robespierre's autocratic governance, where 1,373 heads were cut off between June 10 and July 27 1794.¹⁵⁰ A statuesque killing machine, *la guillotine* is gendered feminine in the French language, though it was a man, Dr Joseph-Ignace Guillotin (1738-1814) who was responsible for marrying the mechanism to capital punishment. Historian Philip Smith has described the guillotine as a "scientific" instrument, identifying its emergence from discourses prominent during the Enlightenment that built on accrued knowledge of the body acquired through studies in medicine and anatomy.¹⁵¹ It was in fact a French surgeon, Antoine Louis, who consulted on the design of the machine, the intention being to democratise death with minimal pain and maximum efficiency. *La guillotine* or *Sainte Guillotine* was introduced to sever the head with one swift cut of the blade. Smith's argument is one that extends further, suggesting the idea of the guillotine as a secular killing machine was in fact interlaced within a spiritual context, being that the object operated as a totem, a "sacred thing."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ "Crime and Punishment", Musée D'Orsay, accessed May 12, 2013.

http://www.museeorsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions/archives/archives/browse/1/article/crime-et-chatiment23387.html?tx_ttnews%5BarcY%5D=2010&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=252&cHash=cdf4733eb.

¹⁴⁹ Referred to as a "resurrection" in the Guardian newspaper, exhibition curator Jean Clair and former Justice Minister Robert Badinter conducted a nationwide search to locate the guillotine designed by Berger. See Davies, Lizzy. "French Guillotine Exhibition Opens 33 Years after the Last Head Fell." *The Guardian UK*, March 17, 2010, accessed November 28, 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/mar/16/guillotine-museum-france-paris>

¹⁵⁰ Op cit. Kristeva, *The Severed head: Captial Visions*. 92

¹⁵¹ Smith, Phillip. *Punishment and Culture* (London: University of Chicago Press Ltd., 2008), 127.

¹⁵² *Ibid*. 126

Art historian Richard Taws suggests that the guillotine can be considered a prominent example of eighteenth century sculpture in the expanded field.¹⁵³ Taws's position is supported by a rather symbolic event that occurred in 1793 – the removal of a public commemorative statue in honour of Louis XV from Place du Louis XV. At the same site to be renamed Place de la Revolution, the public monument that would be erected was the guillotine. Referring to the guillotine as a “sculptural prosthesis,” Taws suggests that the cutting machine was not only a substitute for the public sculpture of the king, but also that it pertained the qualities of a surrogate body or body part that would symbolically replace the defective monarchical limb.¹⁵⁴ According to Taws its role in both a sculptural and prosthetic sense was to instigate “the act of erasure.”¹⁵⁵ This erasure by way of the guillotine involved severing the accused criminal's head from their body, an annihilating gesture that symbolised how the old regime must be done away with, cut off from the body politic in order for a new French republic to rise. Whilst annihilating any trace of life with its cutting blow, the guillotine's enactment of erasure reveals an alternate paradoxical function, that of bestowing visibility to the severed head. The guillotine embodied both the characteristics of eraser and producer by way of the cutting spectacle; in cutting off the head it increased and proliferated the presence of the severed head as a truncated portrait.

Behold the head: the *Portraits des Guillotinés*

In *The Guillotine and the Terror* art historian Daniel Arasse approaches the guillotine as an object steeped in imagination, one that has accrued symbolic values beyond that of its intended function. In what he describes as one last surprise resulting from the decapitating act, he infers the guillotine became a type of ‘portraitist’, most significantly a portrait-making machine.¹⁵⁶ One can consider this a viable proposition, the bodily separation brought about by the guillotine blade renders the attention not towards the lifeless body, but rather focuses attention on the part to have been struck *from* the body. Building on this idea, the severed head as a potent symbol of revolutionary punishment lead Taws to describe the guillotine as “both image and producer of images”¹⁵⁷ as well as “a mechanism that rendered the body sculptural.”¹⁵⁸ Given its ability to repetitiously perform and re-perform the capital act, the guillotine was essentially a producer of multiple severing images. The first image produced by the blade is the actual truncated head, picked up by the executioner as a symbolic gesture and thrust out toward the crowd of spectators. Imbued by this gesture, the severed head acts as a revered sculptural object, a death mask capturing the final moment of the condemned. Regularly documented in revolutionary engravings

¹⁵³ Taws notes, “Adapting the conventions of eighteenth-century decorative display, theatre and ephemeral royal and religious spectacle to a new political situation, particularly in the context of festivals, commemorations and other public rituals, sculpture acquired a new political and cultural significance.” See Taws, R. “The Guillotine as Anti-Monument.” *Sculpture Journal* 19, no. 1 (2010): 33-48. 34

¹⁵⁴ “The removal of Bouchardon's statue and its replacement by Lemot's Liberty operated in tandem with the construction of the guillotine as a sculptural prosthesis, a three-dimensional monument that articulated sharply the act of erasure.” *Ibid.* 41

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 41

¹⁵⁶ Arasse states, “by removing the head from the body to set it before the spectator's eyes, the guillotine springs one last surprise. It becomes a sort of portraitist, a veritable, indeed a terrifying, portrait machine.” See Arasse, Daniel. *The Guillotine and the Terror*. Translated by Christopher Miller (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1989), 134.

¹⁵⁷ *Op. cit.* Taws. 34

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 42

of the scaffold, the presentation of the head marked the symbolic closure of what was a well-choreographed performance and public ceremony.

In what could be referred to as the secondary image generated by the guillotine, the *portrait de guillotiné* belongs to a very specific genre of portraiture. Arasse insists these particular images were not produced as a form of documentation of the capital act, rather they were intended specifically to exist as a portrait capturing the essence of the guillotined person through the representation of their severed head.¹⁵⁹ After the historic execution of Louis XVI on the 21 January 1793, a *portrait de guillotiné* was produced (fig. 28). Appearing as though it has been thrust into the frame by an anonymous outstretched arm, the royal severed head is represented in profile held up by hair and scalp. The body is absent in these images; its brutal division implied by the droplets of blood that fall from the sliced neck of the former king. The *portrait de guillotiné* became an iconographic image of the criminalised by casting aside (or cutting away) the whole body of the executed for a truncated rendering of their head and facial features. Regularly published in the evening newspapers, the guillotine portraits inevitably took on a politicised role in recording the day's executions. There was often the implication that the portrait images were produced at the event, given that the date and the exact time in which the sentence was carried out was documented at the foot of the page. By anchoring the image of the severed head to a specific time and place, it reinforced their reading as authentic and official documents, which in turn imbued each portrait as a truthful representation of the executed individual. In the *portrait de guillotiné* of Louis XVI (fig. 28), the head exists as a mimetic symbol for the sovereign body. The guillotine responsible for producing the head to be looked upon and scrutinized by spectators was also accountable for enacting the erasure of the French monarchy. In this sense one can consider the *portrait de guillotiné* to be underpinned by an element of the sacrificial. As images that profiled the heads of the fallen aristocracy they memorialise each execution as a political act implying martyrdom. At the guillotine scaffold the suffering of each victim was performed, their punishment sanctioned by a public audience. A tacit connection to the torturous flaying of Marsyas and Saint Bartholomew discussed in Chapter 1 is apparent.

One of the most remarkable *portrait de guillotiné* was produced following the execution of French General Adam Philippe, Comte de Custine in 1793 (fig. 29). Similar to Louis XVI's portrait, Custine's head is grasped by the hair and pushed forth into the frame by an anonymous arm, his face appearing to bare the subtle cracks of a wry smile. What is most striking is the phrase *ECCE CUSTINE* centred above the severed head— its immediate connection is to the Christian images *ECCE HOMO*, where Christ is presented crowned with thorns prior to the crucifixion. The English translation of this phrase is often understood as *behold the man*, the message in the case of the French General's posthumous portrait becomes, *behold the head of Custine*. Acknowledging the effect of this biblical reference, Arasse concurs that this image reveals,

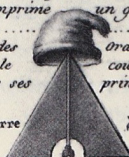
¹⁵⁹ Arasse demonstrates the significance of the *portrait de guillotiné*, drawing short comparison with two key examples from the genre, he states, "The consistency of the genre is demonstrated by the fact that the portrait 'Robespierre guillotiné' receives the same iconographic treatment as the portrait of 'Louis XVI guillotiné'. The political use of the machine gave rise to a type of image whose various connotations repay close analysis." Op. cit. Arasse 135

MATIERE A REFLECTION POUR LES JONGLEURS COURONNES.



qu'un sang impur ^{ne} abreuve nos sillons.

Lundi 21 Janvier 1793 à 10 heures un quart du matin sur la place de la révolution, ci devant appelé Louis XV. Le Tiran est tombé sous le glaive des Loix. ce grand acte de justice a consterné l'Aristocratie ancienne la superstition Royale, et créé la république. Il imprime un grand caractère à la convention nationale et la rend digne de la confiance des Français. ce fut en vain qu'une faction audacieuse et des la calomnie, du charlatanisme et de la chicane, le de la convention demoura inébranlable dans ses de la Liberté et à l'Occident de la vertu.



Extrait de la 3^e Lettre de Maximilien Robespierre à ses commetans.

A Paris chez Villeneuve graveur rue Zacharie 51 Severin Maison du passage N^o 4.

Figure 28.

Severed head of Louis XVI, Paris, 1793.
Collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

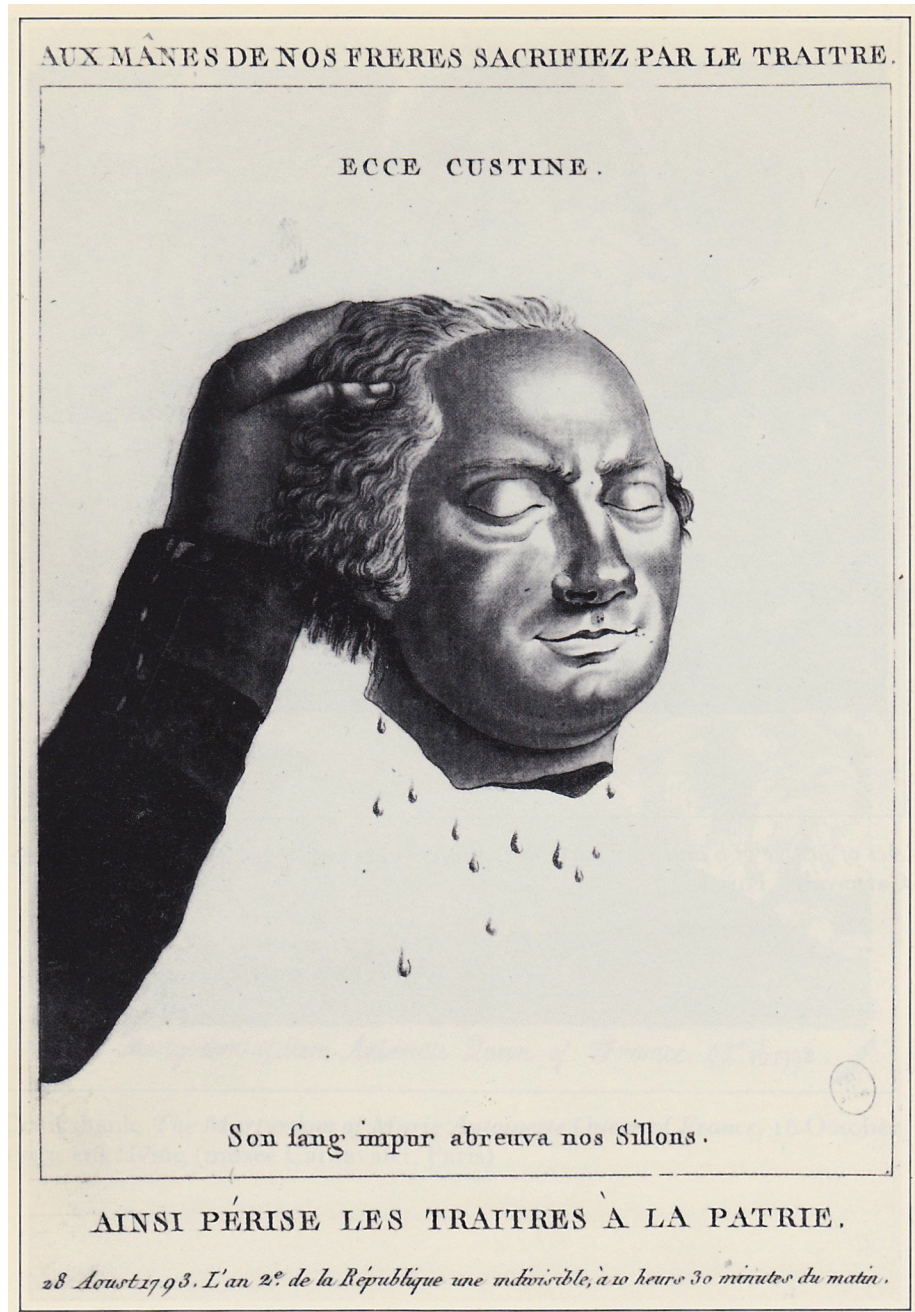


Figure 29.

Ecce Custine, Paris, 1793.

Musée Carnavalet, Collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

the triumph of the secular (but none the less sacred) law and makes use of the ostensive evangelical formula to depict and demonstrate the treachery of the traitor by exhibiting his head.¹⁶⁰

The portrait of Custine's severed head evokes the sacred by implying the passion of Christ through a human sacrifice made in the name of civil justice and retribution. The *portrait de guillotiné* personifies Custine as a reluctant martyr for the Republic, one whose sacrality is only made manifest through the separation of his body and head. Remembering Martin's words discussed in Chapter 1 with regards to the flayed body, "It is the partitioned and mutilated body, whether criminal or saintly, that becomes associated with a register of sanctity."¹⁶¹ Sanctity is thus not confined to the physical body, it is a state or register that is also generated by the image of the body in a divided state. This echoes Kristeva's assertion that the sacred is not to be found in the sacrifice, but in its transgressive ability to exist as a representation.

In the guillotine portraits of Louis XVI and Custine, the ambiguous arm that holds forth the head prompts numerous inferences. Its anonymity is suggestive of the hand of God or a divine power delivering punishment. It could also be read as the collective body politic of France, offering the head as a symbol of new found civic justice. The act of presenting the severed head is imbued not just with religious but also mythological connotations, as it pointedly recalls Perseus presenting the severed head of Medusa. Consider Benvenuto Cellini's imposing marble sculpture *Perseus with the head of Medusa* (c.1554) that remains standing today in the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence (fig. 30). Cellini's work pays tribute to a defiant Perseus and the capital punishment he inflicts on the gorgon. Standing atop her trampled body, Cellini's Perseus thrusts the head of Medusa forward, his right hand grips the sword responsible for the decapitating act. His left arm is stretched outward with a firm grip on her snake-like hair, echoing the outstretched arm and defiant fist that clutches the severed head of Custine. This gesture forms part of a broader iconographic economy in which the body is cut away and the head as a *part* is substituted for the body *whole*. Thinking about the guillotine as a cutting spectacle and the representations of the severed head that were generated to reflect its decapitating act, the aesthetic and metaphysical implications of the Medusa myth entice further investigation. According to Kristeva, the Medusa myth is generated and sustained by "mirror work," a reflecting and doubling brought about through the process of the gorgon's decapitation.¹⁶² She argues that the Medusan head is a particular body fragment that "prefigures an aesthetic of incarnation," suggesting then that the image of the severed head has the innate ability to embody the human being that it represents.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Op. cit. Arasse. 136

¹⁶¹ Martin goes on to state, "What is remarkable about this account of the conflation of Christian imagery with judicial torture is the manner in which the discourses of the saintly body intersect with that of the criminal through the process of their bodily partition." Op. Cit. Martin 100

¹⁶² Op. cit. Kristeva. 36

¹⁶³ Ibid. 36



Figure 30.

Benvenuto Cellini, Perseus with the head of Medusa c.1554.
Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence. Photograph: Kate Scardifield 2011

The Medusan image: a bearable sight

At its most climactic point the Medusa myth can be thought about as the theatrical enactment of a cutting spectacle; characterised by the act of decapitation it is also arguably one of the earliest images of capital punishment. Examined through visual source material in *Visions Capitales* and theoretically unpacked in her publication *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*, Kristeva cites the significance of the Medusan image as being underpinned by simulacra, reflection and the generation of a double image.¹⁶⁴ In Greek mythology the most terrifying of the feminine apologues were personified by the Gorgons, the most infamous being Medusa and her power to turn to stone those who met her gaze. It was Perseus who dealt Medusa her undoing blow, cutting off her head by tactfully avoiding her stare through the reflective surface of his shield. It was this reflection of Medusa (a representation of her image) that guided Perseus's sword and delivered the severed head of the monstrous female. For Kristeva, the issue of representation has hence been inextricably linked to the image of the severed head.

Feminist theorist Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux has identified Medusa as a maker of images, suggesting a paradigm exists between her ability to be *iconopoetic*—producing static images by way of the petrified bodies that result from meeting her gaze—whilst also rendered *iconopoesis*, meaning that the only way in which to make visible and look upon the face of the gorgon was by way of her image.¹⁶⁵ According to Frontisi-Ducroux,

This new sequence means that sight of the invisible is possible when a simulacrum replaces it. What Perseus contemplates is only a duplicate of the original purged of its poison, an eikon. It becomes a bearable sight because it is an eikon, and it is the iconicity of the Medusa which the reflection sequence reveals, both in the narrative version which situates the scene at the moment of decapitation, as well as in the figurative version which places it afterwards...¹⁶⁶

It is plausible to suggest that looking upon the *portrait de guillotiné* and the image of Custine's severed head is to look upon a simulacrum of Custine himself. The Medusan characteristics imbedded in the image are not to be found in wild snake-like hair or a frightful gaze. Rather, its Medusan characteristics are identifiable by the visibility afforded to the severed head rendered a bearable sight. The figurative version of Custine's severed head replaces the actual head itself, and through this doubling it can be gazed upon, scrutinized and looked over. In affording this visibility what remains invisible is the moment of severing, the faithful cut that would separate body from head – a moment that could not be contained.

We know that the mirror and the knife exist as mutually intertwined symbols of anatomical enquiry, in the introduction to this thesis their significance was identified as having been derived from the story of Perseus and Medusa. Previously considered, the knife embodies any cutting

¹⁶⁴ See *Who is Medusa?* Op. cit. Kristeva, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*. 28-36

¹⁶⁵ Frontisi-Ducroux, Françoise. "The Gorgon, Paradigm of Image Creation." In *The Medusa Reader*, edited by Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers (New York: Routledge, 2003), 262.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 264

implement with the ability to carve, delineate and separate form; the mirror, whilst having the ability to generate a double, is also the symbolic splitting point between subject and object. Hence both the knife and the mirror have the ability to bring about rupture. Frontisi-Ducroux's stipulation of the Medusan image as *eikon* or of iconographic countenance leads one to also recall Blanchot, who asked why the reflection is understood and deemed more spiritual than the object which it reflects.

A moment of invisibility

At this point, a brief return to the scaffold is necessary in order to consider the invisibility afforded to the guillotine's cutting act. The use of the guillotine during the French Revolution caused a substantial shift in the theatrical impetus engrained within capital punishment, particularly in regard to the role of the executioner whose primary purpose was to carry out torturous sentences that involved cutting and severing the criminalised body in a public judicial display. Dr Guillotin desired a mechanism that would render a quick and clean death in order to forgo the drawn out cruelty that had long formed part of the capital act. As opposed to the sword or knife wielded by a headsman, execution was to be delivered by a machine. The role of the executioner had been drastically altered as he no longer dealt the final blow. Instead, the executioner became responsible for securing the victim, his role reduced to overseeing the efficient transition from condemned body to headless corpse.¹⁶⁷ It is therefore not a coincidence that the executioner retained one performative action – that of presenting the head to the crowd of spectators. This is a gesture with theistic and mythological origins, one that would be performed at the scaffold and subsequently illustrated in the *portraits des guillotines*.¹⁶⁸

If by employing the guillotine the intention was to curb the brutality of capital punishment and deliver death with swift efficiency, the question then arises 'what was the need in presenting the severed head and why raise it for display following the decapitating act?' The answer is implicitly inferred by the ceremonial buildup that surrounded the cutting spectacle, and what parts of the execution ritual were actually observable. Firstly there was the victim's procession from the site of imprisonment to the site of punishment, the victim mounting the scaffold to receive sentence, and in conclusion the presentation of the victim's severed head to the viewing audience. Put simply, one had the ability to witness the *before* and *after* rituals that formed part of guillotine performance, but most likely not the cutting act of the guillotine itself. Though the falling blade and its severing gesture are imbued as the climatic point of each execution, the speed and efficiency of the machine virtually rendered the cut imperceptible, paradoxically concealing its presence from view. Foucault alludes to the imperceptible nature of the guillotine's cut in his writing on degrees of punishment and their relationship to pain: "decapitation (which

¹⁶⁷ Death by guillotine was by no means a seamless act. Horrific stories prevail that attest to botched executions where the machine or even its operators would malfunction, drawing out the process and arguably reverting back to a torturous death. See Arasse, Kristeva and Taws.

¹⁶⁸ Arasse notes that by the executioner presenting the head, "This was a gesture by which, momentarily restored to his leading role, he showed the victim's head to the people. Here his profession obliged him to soak his hands in the blood of his fellow man and again become that 'unimaginable' being, the need for whose existence the machine had been intended to eliminate." Op. cit. Arasse. 126

reduces all pain to a single gesture, performed in a single moment – the zero degree of torture).”¹⁶⁹ Arasse expands on this idea of the guillotine’s cut as a single effacing gesture, citing that this mechanised spectacle had indeed a “blind spot” and noting that, “The guillotine ‘strikes off heads faster than the eye can see’, and the theatre of the guillotine culminated in a moment of invisibility.”¹⁷⁰

The irony evoked by this invisibility lay in the public staging of the guillotine’s capital act. The solemn pageantry of the victim’s procession encouraged spectatorship. Once the victim arrived at the site of their deliverance they ascended a stage-like structure, climbing the stairs onto an elevated scaffold to join the guillotine. The condemned were required to meet their death atop a platform, the moment of beheading could then be observed by the crowd who had gathered to watch. The scaffold upon which the guillotine was positioned allowed for maximised observation and as much visibility as could possibly be afforded to the split-second act. In this respect the capital act becomes implicated in Cregan’s assertion discussed earlier in chapter 1 – that theatres or theatrical spaces are intended as sites for ‘mass viewing.’ Once again the body is located centre stage, however where one might perceive the individual sentenced to death as the sole protagonist in the guillotine’s performance, Foucault has advocated that it is the spectating public who represent the crucial main character in an execution performance.¹⁷¹ Describing public execution as a form of “penal liturgy” Foucault asserts the body’s centrality in the performance as both victim and spectator.¹⁷² He states, “The public execution is to be understood not only as a judicial, but also as a political ritual. It belongs, even in minor cases, to the ceremonies by which power is manifested.”¹⁷³

The sacred cut and the icon economy

The invisibility of the guillotine’s cutting moment is made apparent in the *portraits des guillotines* (fig. 28 and fig. 29). In each image the severed head not only acts as a signifier of the capital act but also as a corollary object imbued with the status of having been cut. In the introduction to this thesis brief attention was drawn to Baudry’s understanding of reduction as the only mode in which the creation of an object comes to pass. It is an incising or cutting process that has the ability to render a singular form, though given its status as something that remains the cut becomes localised in the past. Elaine Françoise DalMolin extends on Baudry’s idea and describes the cut as a “concrete disappearance (leaving no apparent trace of its passage) when it

¹⁶⁹ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977. Reprint, 24), 33.

¹⁷⁰ Op. cit. Arasse. 35

¹⁷¹ In his reasoning for identifying the observing crowd as the main character in the public execution performances, Foucault states, “An execution that was known to be taking place, but which did so in secret, would scarcely have had any meaning. The aim was to make an example, not only by making people aware that the slightest offence was likely to be punished, but by arousing feelings of terror by the spectacle of power letting its anger fall upon the guilty person.” Op. cit. Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison*. 57

¹⁷² Ibid. 47

¹⁷³ Foucault continued on to cite the importance of ceremony and ritual in relation to the scaffold: “the punishment is carried out in such a way as to give a spectacle not of measure, but of imbalance and excess; in this liturgy of punishment, there must be an emphatic affirmation of power and its intrinsic superiority.” Ibid. 47-49

engenders the line.”¹⁷⁴ Drawing further reflection on Baudry’s psychoanalytic approach to the line or the cut as an ‘articulation’, DalMolin states, “the cut is always already past and thus can only be signified as a fantasy: a fantasy of cutting says nothing about the implementation of the cut itself.”¹⁷⁵

The cutting moment is evoked in the guillotine portrait, though it remains unseen and elusive. What is seen is a representation of the cut object—the severed head—and it is here where there are grounds to lay claim for a sacred quality embodied in the cutting spectacle of the guillotine. Arasse, having examined the idea of sacrality in relation to the symbolic execution of Louis XVI, states,

The instant of the guillotine had created what we might call the ‘syncope of the sacred’; the annihilation of the previously sacred had consecrated the instrument of destruction. The reversal is the more striking in that the instant was scarcely visible. The secrecy essential to the sacred had been preserved.¹⁷⁶

The guillotine’s ability to conceal its severing blow by way of its speed and efficiency veiled the cutting moment, keeping it secret and thereby allowing it to be characterised as a moment of imaginable fantasy. For those spectators close enough to the scaffold the sacred cut would have still remained virtually imperceptible; the accelerating blade which dropped from fourteen feet has been described as equivalent to the “speed of lightning.”¹⁷⁷ The guillotine was in a sense a uniformed cutting machine, ideally re-performing its sacred act in repetitive succession. The cutting gesture it enacts can be described as an invisible fantasy, where the concealed and veiled moment of decapitation is what allows the mysticism associated with the sacred to penetrate the cutting spectacle.

Kristeva notes that it is “an imprint, a bloody infiltration, an inscription” that implicitly calls back to “the action of cutting, to the slash that severs”.¹⁷⁸ Using the example of the mandylion or veronica, a holy relic said to be *acheiropoieta*¹⁷⁹, Kristeva argues that the image of Christ inscribed onto cloth and representations of the severed head of Medusa, are implicit signifiers or exemplars of what she describes as the “sacrificial cut.”¹⁸⁰ As iconographic representations, both are imbued with the ability to make visible the invisible. In *Sainte Face* (fig. 31), the vernicle image of Christ’s head with crown of thorns is impressed onto the surface of the sacred cloth. It

¹⁷⁴ Op. cit. DalMolin. 5

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 5

¹⁷⁶ Op. cit. Arasse. 56

¹⁷⁷ Arasse recounts René-Georges Gastellier’s description of speed: “the ‘plummeting acceleration; of the guillotine’s axe-head was no less than ‘the speed of lightening’. It was such that from the first point of contact to the last, there is no distance; there is only a indivisible point: the axe falls and the victim has died.” In this respect, one can consider what was most likely able to be witnessed was the guillotine’s gruesome aftermath. The thick blood that poured and pooled over the cutting bed and onto the timber scaffold floor. For those not within immediate view, coupled with the fact the guillotine was often painted red to counteract the overwhelming amount of blood, this visceral horror could have been partially suppressed. Ibid. 36.

¹⁷⁸ Op. cit. Kristeva, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*. 49

¹⁷⁹ *Acheiropoieta* can be understood as an image not made by human hands. In the case of the mandylion or veronica, an image of the head of Christ was captured when wiping his face it transferred onto cloth. See Kristeva, Chapter 4 *The True image*. Ibid. 37-46

¹⁸⁰ Kristeva states, “To be a relay with the divine, the space of iconic representation must be devoted to inscribing this void, giving it birth in the visible. If kenose is the equivalent of sacrifice, the iconic void is nothing other than the sign of the sacrificial cut.” Ibid. 55



Figure 31.

Sainte Face. The Sudarium of St Veronica, after Domenico Fetti; lettered state.
 Print from etching and engraving. 1728 (before). 21.2 x 16.8 cm.
 Image courtesy Department of Prints and Drawings, The British Museum, London.



Figure 32.

The Head of Medusa. Print on paper, c.1700. Italy. Artist/printmaker unknown.
 Image courtesy Prints & Drawings Department, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

is as if the head is floating, frontally composed so one is able to regard Christ's divine visage. Looking to the seventeenth century representation of Medusa's severed head (fig. 32), one can observe striking parallels. Both Christ and Medusa exist as bodiless icons. Christ's hair is even reminiscent of Medusa's snake-like locks, though significantly more controlled. From a Christian perspective, God is made flesh and visible through the body of Christ; Medusa's face, with its ability to turn to stone anyone that meets her gaze, is only able to be looked upon by Perseus as a reflection, or once it has been severed to become a representation. According to Kristeva these icons exist in parallel, where each effigy is brought into being through a sacrificial act that continuously maintains "the desire to see without satisfying it once and for all."¹⁸¹ The argument is then drawn for the guillotine to be considered a type of sacred cutting device, one with the ability to capture the true face of the traitor at the exact moment of death. The severed head produced by way of the guillotine's severing blow can also be considered *acheiropoieta* – it is the machine as opposed to the executioner who acts as the primary portraitist. The severed head now known to oscillate within an existing iconographic economy suggests that the guillotine's iconoclasm is not only found in the bodiless form it creates or makes visible. It is the guillotine's proficiency to conceal the cutting act within a moment of invisibility that renders it sacred.

Making visible the invisible

The transgression between states of visibility and invisibility inferred by the guillotine's cutting spectacle brings one back to thinking about what is seen and what is unseen in relation to the body's interior and exterior. In her examination of gender and identity construction, feminist theorist Judith Butler considered the notion of the interior and exterior as a correlative binary, one reliant on a stable, mediating boundary.¹⁸² For Butler, "What constitutes through division the "inner" and "outer" worlds of the subject is a border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control."¹⁸³ To extrapolate this idea further, Butler turns to Foucault's conception of the soul. For Foucault, the soul is non-corporeal, however it is not to be understood through the terms of Christian theology, but rather as something produced and signified *around, on* and *within* the body "out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint."¹⁸⁴ Butler's response is to first understand that the soul is internalised, to be found *within* a body that is inherently signified as a "vital and sacred enclosure."¹⁸⁵ Secondly, that the soul then has the ability to become signified through its inscription onto that body, via the means of power, surveillance and control that render the body an object of knowledge.¹⁸⁶ Foucault's apt

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 50

¹⁸² According to Butler, stability is determined by the "cultural orders that sanction the subject." Butler suggests that the inner and outer body is regulated within a framework of social and political power that in turn, exerts control over the body's interior and exterior, which can be understood as what is of *me* and what is *other*. See Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2 ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 181-182.

¹⁸³ Ibid. 182

¹⁸⁴ Op. cit. Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison*. 29

¹⁸⁵ Op. cit. Butler. 184

¹⁸⁶ To reiterate, Foucault's understanding of the soul is not as a tangible substance, but rather as *non-corporeal* matter, yet within this non-corporeal substance "are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power." See Op.cit. Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison*. 29

description of the soul is “the effect and instrument of a political anatomy” leading him to assert not that the body is the constrictive container of the soul, but rather that “the soul is the prison of the body.”¹⁸⁷

For Butler this poses another series of questions that relate to the internalisation of identity, questions that can perhaps poignantly frame the next section of this chapter, which considers the cutting spectacle enacted through physiognomic study and the visual language of silhouette portraiture it engendered Butler asks,

From what strategic position in public discourse and for what reasons has the trope of interiority and the disjunctive binary of inner/outer taken hold? In what language is “inner space” figured? What kind of figuration is it, and through what figure of the body is it signified? How does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?¹⁸⁸

Physiognomy and the silhouette: another way to sever heads

At this point I have examined the truncating and implicitly sacred cut of the guillotine during the Reign of Terror and the subsequent *portrait des guillotiné* images that proliferated. It is time to look towards another cutting spectacle and its delivery of another form of capital act. The study of physiognomy by way of silhouettes and shades was absent of blood, entrails and visceral matter, however the practice was one that anatomised the body, rendering it as a series of fragments and specimens for scrutinised study and analysis. The silhouette and its use in physiognomic study can be considered to operate within the ‘culture of dissection’ identified by Sawday, however it is a particular dissective act that is not addressed within the parameters of his scholarship. It is my intention to make explicit the significance of silhouettes as a type of cutting spectacle whilst understanding how these representative truncations form an important part of a broader iconographic economy of severed heads.

Barbara Stafford has drawn attention to the practice of comparative anatomy as a seminal cornerstone in the development of eighteenth century physiognomic study, subsequently identifying an anatomical metaphor operating within this discourse.¹⁸⁹ Regarding the key premise of physiognomy—that the outer body reflects its inner spiritual characteristics—Stafford notes that in relation to the corporeal, “Cutting through density was, literally and metaphorically, a way of piercing any opaque morphology, of achieving transparent self-knowledge and the knowledge of others.”¹⁹⁰ Her work has provided a thorough analysis of physiognomics in antiquity and the empirical methods that pertained to studying the external surfaces of the body in order to extract

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 30

¹⁸⁸ Op. cit. Butler. 183

¹⁸⁹ Stafford, Barbara Maria. *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 84.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 84

knowledge of the inner spirit.¹⁹¹ Stafford charts the work of the Cartesian physician to Louis XIV, Marin Cureau de la Chambre (1594-1669), and the influence of Descartes' New Method on the theorising of a *mean* or *centre* in relation to an external analysis of the body. This in turn laid the foundation for a mathematical principle of measurement that would be applied to readings of the body's external physicality. Stafford is clear to note that the principle of a mean or centrepoint indicated that this measurement scale was composed of binary states of being, "order and disorder, shapeliness and unshapeliness, beauty and ugliness, truth and falsehood, good and evil."¹⁹² These binary ways of seeing were synthesised within a framework that prescribed to a reading of the relationship between the body's physiological binary, the 'inner' and 'outer' spaces.

The objective of physiognomy was thus to extract knowledge of the psyche or the soul considered to be located within the body of an individual, by interpreting the body's exterior as a schematic surface and deciphering its topology in a diagnostic manner in order to acquire knowledge of its internalised virtues.¹⁹³ Stafford notes that with the burgeoning quantification of natural history, chemistry and anatomy during the second half of the eighteenth century, there was a "concurrent change in physiognomic theory" and a more acute focus on the face and facial features to reveal internal moral characteristics.¹⁹⁴ Though eighteenth century physiognomy retained its objective of measuring moral or spiritual qualities, new theoretical developments within the discourse meant that one's "inner" characteristics had instead become "contingent on the calculus of beauty."¹⁹⁵

Lavater and the *Physiognomische Fragmente*

In 1775 Lutheran Pastor Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801) published the *Physiognomische Fragmente* in Leipzig. Lavater's treatise was subsequently translated and expanded into both French and English. Its popularity clearly evident, by 1810 there had been fifty-five editions published of his physiognomy reader "priced to accommodate every purse."¹⁹⁶ Lavater dedicated a chapter of his book to the semiotics of beauty understood through the lens of physiognomic analysis. In his text "On the harmony between moral and corporeal beauty," Lavater asserts, "The passions of the mind produce their accordant effects on the countenance."¹⁹⁷ His focus was directed at the correlation between inner and outer beauty, and the contrary state of inner and outer ugliness, to which Lavater believed this dialectic "has its peculiar expression on the

¹⁹¹ See '*Physiognomics, or Corporeal Connoisseurship*' Ibid. 84-121

¹⁹² Ibid. 84-85

¹⁹³ It seems pertinent to note that the 'soul' being searched for was not the non-corporeal substance characterised by Foucault, rather it was the "virtuous spirit" prescriptive of theological conservatism that was desired to be unveiled. Paradoxically, it is through this process that Foucault's description of the soul as a prison for the body is brought to light and made apparent through the conversion of power, surveillance and control that is inscribed onto the body.

¹⁹⁴ Op. cit. Stafford. 216

¹⁹⁵ Stafford, Barbara. "One Face of Beauty, One Picture of Health: The Hidden Aesthetic of Medical Practice." *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 14 (1989): 213-30. 216

¹⁹⁶ Op cit. Stafford, "*Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen*". 91

¹⁹⁷ Lavater, John Caspar. *Essays on Physiognomy*. Translated by Thomas Holcroft. 14 ed. (London: William Tegg, 1869), 97.

face.”¹⁹⁸ This theory to which Lavater continues to muse over throughout *Physiognomische Fragmente* is indicative of his approach to a literal reading of facial aesthetics and the devising of a system of measurement that graded appearance to determine morals and intellect. Lavater claims,

The beauty and deformity of the countenance is in a just and determinate proportion to the moral beauty and deformity of the man.

The morally best, the most beautiful.

The morally worse, the most deformed.¹⁹⁹

Lavater’s preoccupation with external beauty as a barometer for interior resplendence is evident across two image plates that specifically chart a twenty-four stage metamorphosis from the head of a frog to the head of Apollo (fig. 33 and fig. 34). Published in Lavater’s treatise, each truncated specimen exists as part of a degrading scale demonstrating Lavater’s “lines of the countenance,” a system of angular measurement applied to the facial profile based on its measured degrees of deviance.²⁰⁰ For Lavater it is the frog that personifies and represents “disgusting bestiality.”²⁰¹ At the opposite end of the spectrum is the head of a God – more accurately it was the image of the Pythian sculpture of the Apollo Belvedere, considered by Lavater to represent a most harmonious, beautiful and hence morally pure countenance.²⁰² Lavater’s physiognomy employed a comparative method of analysing body fragments and a system of ranking moral goodness through the reading of the facial profile based on the shape, tone, and weight of its exterior line. Throughout Lavater’s treatise he anchors the image of Christ as the most moral and hence the most beautiful countenance. On the desire to reach a resemblance closer to the divine, Lavater postulates,

It is possible that an eye less penetrating than that of an angel may read the image of the Creator in the countenance of a truly pious person. He who languishes after Christ, the more lively, the more distinctly, the more sublimely, he represents to himself the very presence and image of Christ, the greater resemblance with his own countenance take of this image.²⁰³

The variances of Christ’s face in profile considered in Lavater’s treatise are notably delineated shades with a white interior, as opposed to the black on white convention that was adopted across the other silhouette illustrations within the compendium (fig.35). Significantly, both exemplars

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 96

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. 99

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 494

²⁰¹ Ibid. 496

²⁰² Lavater acknowledges the ‘lines of the countenance’ in relation to Pieter (or Petrus) Camper’s study of the “facial line” or “facial angle” that became a formula for classifying racial groups. (See *ibid.* 494-495). Like Lavater, Camper considered the Apollo Belvedere as the quintessential profile in which harmonious beauty could be witnessed. He was a practicing physician and anatomist who prescribed links between the science of anatomy and the arts of drawing. His scholarship in comparative anatomy and morphology can be considered to have increased the credibility of his prejudiced theories. Camper was said to have peddled illustrative lectures on the subject of the facial angle and the classification of race across the European continent in the late 18th century. See Elizabeth Ewen, Stuart Ewen. "Camper's Angle." In *Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Equality*, 109-22. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006.

²⁰³ Op. cit. Lavater. 374



Figure 33.

Twelve stages in the sequence from the head of a frog to the head of a primitive man.

Coloured etchings by Christian von Mechel after Lavater, 1797.

Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.



Figure 34.

Twelve stages in the sequence from the head of a primitive man to the head of the Apollo Belvedere.

Coloured etchings by Christian von Mechel after Lavater, 1797.

Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.

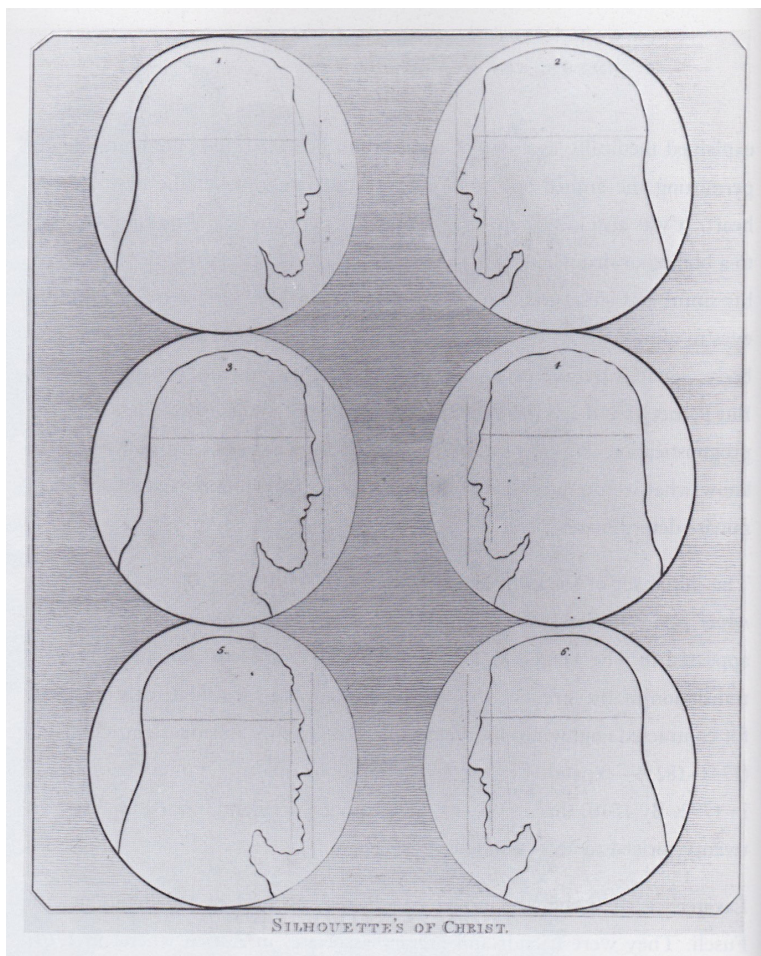


Figure 35.

Silhouettes of Christ. Published in *Essays on physiognomy*, 1792, II, part 1, page 212.

Engraving by Thomas Holloway et al. after J.H Fuseli.

deemed by Lavater as the epitome of internal and external beauty were not actually representations of living persons. Both Christ and the Apollo Belvedere existed as images or imagined iconographic effigies as opposed to beings of flesh.

The Apollo Belvedere was a classical Greek sculpture recalled from antiquity and praised for its ideal proportion and measurements.²⁰⁴ Its anglicised athletic male body pointedly recalls the *Doryphoros*, the classical sculpture considered by Vesalius to be the ideal ‘natural’ body for anatomical study. Again, one sees the image of a real body disregarded for the image of an ideal or divine form. In the second volume of his physiognomic compendium, Lavater poses the question,

Must it be madness to say... that one forehead announces more capacity than the other, that the forehead of Apollo indicates more wisdom, reflection, spirit, energy and sentiment than the flat nose of a Negro?²⁰⁵

By determining a scale of measurement based on an object of classical art, it allowed Lavater to propagate racial prejudice exalted and masked as a scientific method. By analysing the body through degrees of deviance afforded by the facial profile, it is evident that the study of physiognomy was one based purely on the aesthetics of physical difference.

Scaffolds for severing: the guillotine and Lavater’s silhouette drawing machine

According to Lavater’s treatise, the most accurate way to attain a physiognomic reading was by taking a ‘shade’ of a persons face, most specifically their face in profile. This shade had the ability to remove all distracting features, from hair and jewellery to skin tone and eye colour, rendering the profile in monochromatic positive and negative space. So important was it not to be “inaccurately or too prominently drawn”, that Lavater developed a silhouette drawing apparatus that would position the sitter in such a way as to allow the drawer or tracer to comfortably and accurately capture their profile.²⁰⁶

Illustrated in Lavater’s *Essays on Physiognomy*, the machine incorporated a chair designed to hold the sitter steadily in place (fig. 36). Adjoining the chair was a rectangular support scaffold on which a glass plate was mounted in a sliding frame that “may be raised, or lowered, according to the height of the person.”²⁰⁷ According to Lavater’s description, the arched groove at the base of the plate is designed so that it may rest on the sitter’s shoulder. This mechanism allowed the

²⁰⁴ Art historian and anthropologist Johann Winklemann (1717-1768) had praised the Apollo Belvedere in an essay citing perfection in the figure’s proportional characteristics. Lavater, who acknowledges Winklemann multiple times throughout the *Physiognomische Fragmente*, arguably draws influence from the author’s praise of sculpture. See Brauer, Fae. “The Transparent Body: Biocultures of Evolution, Eugenics and Scientific Racism.” In *A History of Visual Culture: Western Civilization from the 18th to the 21st Century*, edited by Susan Benforado Bakewell Jane Kromm, 89-103. Oxford, New York: Berg, 2010.

²⁰⁵ Lavater quoted by Brauer. Ibid. 91-94

²⁰⁶ Op. cit. Lavater. 191

²⁰⁷ Lavater, John Caspar. *Essays on Physiognomy*. Translated by Thomas Holcroft. 14 ed. London: William Tegg, 1869. See pages 189-190

torso to be held in a rigid position whilst framing the left side of the face within a viewing window. This positioning of the face in profile removed any trace of the body from the neck down. Without a sitter (fig. 37), Lavater's apparatus bears a striking resemblance to the structural and functional design of the guillotine (fig.38). The structural and functional similarities between these two machines warrant examining, given that both objects were primarily designed to decapitate.²⁰⁸ It is obvious that Lavater's silhouette machine didn't offer the same visceral horror as the guillotine or that inherent within dissection in the anatomy theatre. However, I argue that the act of taking a person's silhouette was comparable to that of the anatomist or even the executioner, due firstly to the cutting impetus, and secondly due to the physiognomic analysis that was imposed on the cut object.

Although the design of the guillotine was altered numerous times over its period of use in France, the basic structural principles remained consistent for over 300 years. The predominantly timber construction stood approximately four and a half metres high, a height needed to achieve the accurate speed and velocity for the *couperet* and *mouton* (the blade and its carriage) to cut clean through the neck. The lofty rectangular frame then meets an intersecting perpendicular plane where the victim, head clasped between the *lunette*, would lay awaiting their fate. Lavater's silhouette machine had a similar perpendicular meeting point, where the chair and the rectangular support frame intersect. Rather than a blade which travelled the vertical, Lavater's apparatus contained an adjustable window frame with a vertical range of motion in order to capture the profile. Having examined the decapitating act of the guillotine we know its severing cut is both an act of erasure and the producer of a severed body object. Like the guillotine, Lavater's silhouette drawing machine negotiates the roles of both eraser and producer: first by tracing the shadow, then by way of scissors, the limbs and torso are cut away; the silhouette of the body as whole was dismissed for an outline of its truncated head. Arasse notes that as early as 1793 the guillotine had been described as a painter's easel.²⁰⁹ Like the easel, the guillotine is an apparatus made of basic geometrical forms that allows the executioner to frame the head.²¹⁰ The elongated and rectangular vertical plane of the guillotine and Lavater's silhouette drawing machine both act as thresholds that frame the head in order for each to perform a decapitating act. Both objects can be understood as scaffolds where the cutting spectacle was activated, and dismemberment followed for the part of the body held rigid in its trusses.

²⁰⁸ To my knowledge, there is only minimal acknowledgement of this connection between the guillotine and Lavater's silhouette drawing machine. It is briefly addressed by Wendy Bellion in her essay "Heads of State: Profiles and Politics in Jeffersonian America." Lavater's machine is drawn upon by the author to contextualise the physiognotrace acquired by Charles Wilson Peale for the Philadelphia Museum in 1802. Bellion offers a brief account of what she terms the "French connection" in which she mentions visual and functional similarities exist between the two machines. See Bellion, Wendy. "Heads of State: Profiles and Politics in Jeffersonian America." In *New Media 1740-1915*, edited by Geoffrey B. Pingree Lisa Gitelman, 31-59. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003.

²⁰⁹ Op. cit. Arasse. 134

²¹⁰ Arasse discusses the simplicity of the guillotine's aesthetic and the basic geometric principles of its design. He notes that "The decapitating machine made public execution a celebration of the mechanical and geometrical, and so ensured the spectacular triumph of these forms of 'just' and 'reasonable' thought." Ibid. 55



Figure 36.

Silhouette drawing machine with sitter. Published in *Essays on physiognomy*.

London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1789.

Image courtesy National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Md.

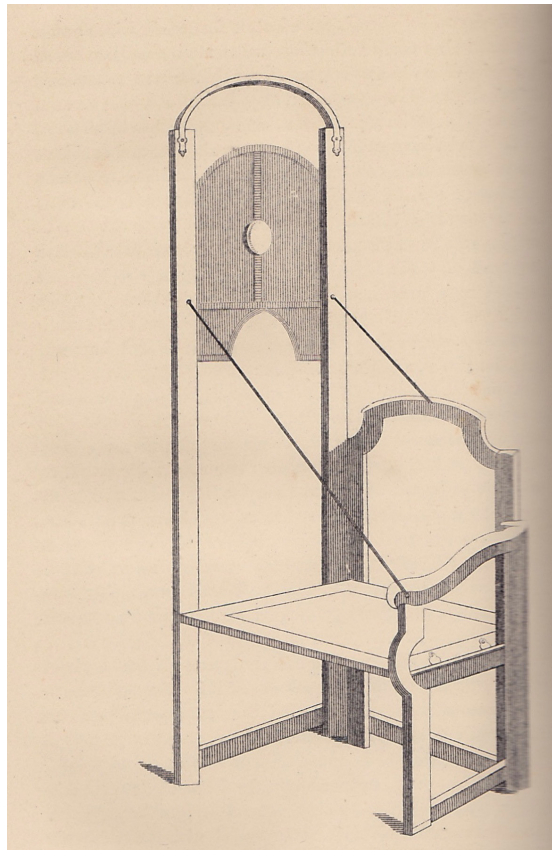


Figure 37.

Silhouette drawing machine without sitter. Published in *Essays on physiognomy*.
Translated by Thomas Holcroft. 14 ed. London: William Tegg, 1869.

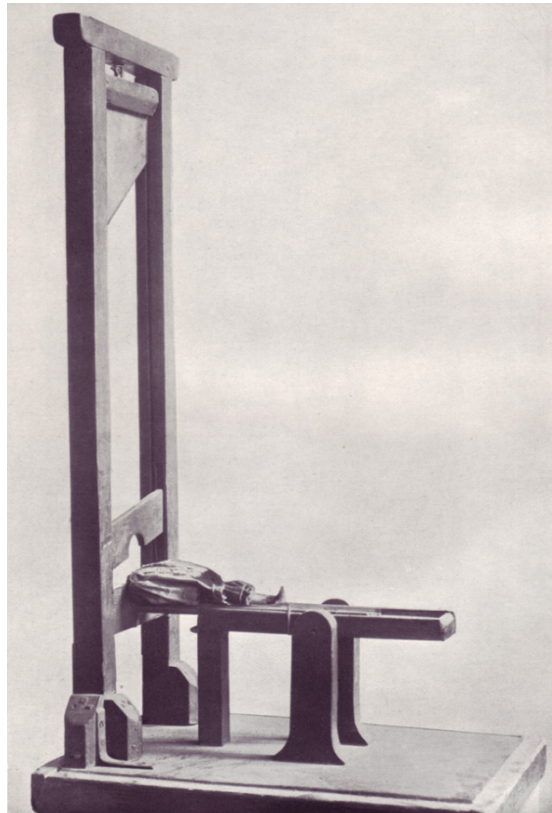


Figure 38.

Guillotine model, c.1794.

Arresting gesture and suspending time: Lavater's 'cadaverous ideal'

Like the decapitating cut of the guillotine, the outcome of the silhouette drawing machine was to produce a cut object. A facial portrait rendered as a silhouette or shade is conventionally reduced to a monochromatic schema, where a delineation that produces positive and negative spaces creates the image. The dark, blank space resting on the inside of this delineating line replaces the small and minute defining features or markings that Lavater insists would detract from an accurate physiognomic reading.²¹¹ This monochromatic reduction lends itself to a diagrammatic aesthetic; that in order to read and decipher for physiognomic understanding, one must be knowledgeable and learned in the language and semiotics of physiognomic discourse. Stafford insists that physiognomy was "human connoisseurship," but that it was also about a schematic mapping of character in which the foundation of this connection was "an underlying anatomical method."²¹² The necessary dismantling of the body as a whole in order to study, scrutinise and build knowledge of its parts was the methodological imperative of the anatomy theatre. Correspondingly, physiognomy practiced a form of dissection where the body's *image* was dismantled and made fragmentary for observation, examination and comparative analysis. Historian Robert E. Norton describes this physiognomic methodology as a practice of "philosophical dissection, an abstract anatomical dismemberment."²¹³

The act of reading the body's external signs in order to speculate on its inner virtues, along with other origins of physiognomic practice, is traceable throughout antiquity, however it was Lavater who argued for physiognomy to be acknowledged as an astute science.²¹⁴ The Swiss pastor was distinct in his approach to the discourse, placing a strong emphasis on the art of drawing and affording much importance to the ability to read and decipher a silhouette or shade.²¹⁵ Stafford, who identified drawing as the physiognomist's chief tool, also argues this practice is inherently anatomical in nature.²¹⁶ Lavater attested that the shade be articulated through one line that marks the facial features. The implications of this singular line can be seen in the image *Twelve outlines of idiots* published in Lavater's treatise (Fig. 39). The series of marks reads as both a collection of abstract line work and as a grouping of figurative profiles. Uniformly positioned, the facial outlines entice comparative analysis like the taxonomic ordering of tissue or organ specimens found in an anatomy museum. Describing the practice of drawing shades as decisively significant and superior to other forms of representation, Lavater insists that, "no art can attain to the truth of

²¹¹ Describing the importance of shades to physiognomic knowledge, Lavater states, "Shades collect the distracted attention, confine it to an outline, and thus render the observation more simple, easy and precise." Op. cit. Lavater. 189

²¹² Op. cit. Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen*. 96

²¹³ Norton, Robert E. *The Beautiful Soul: Aesthetic Morality in the 18th Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 179.

²¹⁴ Norton cites the ancient treatise *Physiognomonica* previously attributed to Aristotle as the earliest account of scholarly discourse surrounding the description and analysis of human physical traits. He asserts that although physiognomy had relatively "uninterrupted popularity" from Galen's death until the 17th century, it was still closely associated and regularly grouped with the black arts including divination, astrology and magic. Ibid. 177-178

²¹⁵ In his writing which addresses the qualities required of the physiognomist, Lavater asserts, "The art of drawing is indispensable, if he would be precise in his definitions, and accurate in his decisions. Drawing is the first, most natural, and most unequivocal language of physiognomy; the best aid of the imagination, the only means of preserving and communicating numberless peculiarities, shades, and expressions, which are not by words, or any other mode to be described." Op. cit. Lavater. 66

²¹⁶ Ibid. 96

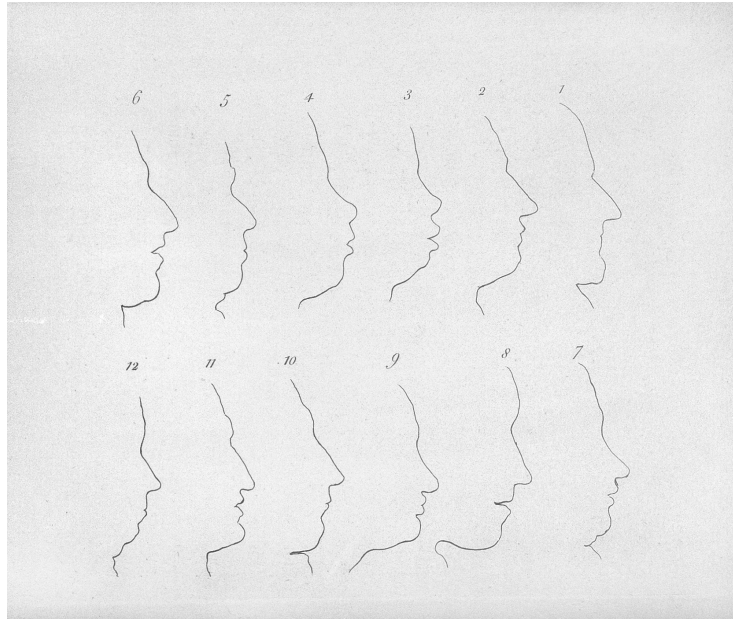


Figure 39.

Twelve outlines of idiots. Published in *Essays on Physiognomy*.
Translated by Thomas Holcroft. William Tegg London, 1789. Volume II, Page 280, Plate 1.
Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.



Figure 40.

A silhouette bisected proportionally, c.1793.
Drawing after Johann Caspar Lavater and Thomas Holloway.
Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.

the shade, taken with precision.”²¹⁷ The emphasis on precision and the implied dexterity needed to capture the facial profile recalls the technical precision required of the surgeon, the anatomist and the printmaker discussed in chapter 1. The relationship between the eye, the hand and the knife needed to perform articulate handiwork is crucial to practices of dissection and the rendering of the anatomical images. Lavater stresses the physiognomist must exercise themselves in the drawing of shades, emphasising the need for a dedicated practice in order to ascertain the precise dexterity of hand needed for the craft. Lavater goes on to state,

When we have acquired some proficiency in observation, to double black paper, and cut out two countenances; and, afterwards, by cutting with the scissors, to make slight alterations... We shall be astonished, by such experiments, to perceive what great effects are produced by slight alterations.²¹⁸

In this statement, Lavater engages the scissors with that same agency and ability as the knife or scalpel grasped by the surgeon or anatomist charged with making incisions into the body. The scissors employed by the physiognomist operate as a surgical apparatus, cutting into matter and delicately extracting a form. By encouraging artistry in the physiognomist’s cutting gesture and by “making alterations” through such cuts, it suggests that the cutter not only has the ability but should purposely emphasise, if not create, difference by incision.

In her analysis of the aesthetic implications of shades, Stafford argues, “compartmentalisation and antithesis were essential to the black and white silhouette technique.”²¹⁹ This is evident in the image of a male bust in silhouette (fig. 40): bisected horizontally and vertically, it demonstrates that further partitioning was applied to the facial profile, a schematic sectioning and division of surface that could then be mapped. Lavater’s argument was that the truncated head and facial profile needed further dismantling, a reflection on the physiognomist’s belief that man’s physiological, intellectual and moral being all resided in separate sections of the facial structure.²²⁰ The face, standing in for the entire body, was where the physiological, intellectual and moral beings of a person would coexist. These beings or ‘lives’ according to Lavater, “by their combination form one whole.”²²¹

Using shades or silhouettes to capture the essence of an individual by rendering an image of their profile is what Stafford describes as a “simple method for arresting gesture and suspending time.”²²² For Lavater, the most ideal face on which to perform a physiognomic reading was to be found on a lifeless body. It was the shade of a still and resting corpse that offered the truest account of a person’s character.²²³ The shade is emblematic of what Stafford describes as

²¹⁷ Ibid. 188

²¹⁸ Ibid. 189

²¹⁹ Op. cit. Stafford. *Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen*. 94

²²⁰ Lavater states, “If we take the countenance as the representative and epitome of the three divisions, then will the forehead, to the eye-brows, be the mirror, or image of the understanding ; the nose and cheeks the image of the moral and sensitive life ; and the mouth and chin the image of the animal life ; while the eye will be to the whole as its summary and centre.” Op. cit. 10

²²¹ Ibid. 9

²²² Op. cit. Stafford. *Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen*. 98

²²³ Op. cit. Lavater. 370-371

Lavater's "cadaverous ideal."²²⁴ The process of capturing a silhouette is reliant on the projection of light onto a person in order to generate that person's shadow. Therefore the shadow in its very essence is a double, an image that has the ability to embody the presence of an individual through their absence. The cadaverous implications of the silhouette recall Blanchot's assertion that the reflection of an object can often appear more spiritual than the object that it reflects. I previously drew on this idea in chapter 1 with regards to the anatomised body double and considered how both the mirror and the knife have the ability to produce a rupture, a splitting point between subject and object. The silhouette, like the image of the flayed body or *écorché*, can be thought to exist as a disembodied resemblance from the original body object, in that it is considered to be imbued with the essence of the body it represents. Speaking to the idea of the cadaverous object and addressing the image it generates in death, Blanchot asserts,

Yes, it is really he, the dear living one; but all the same it is more than him, he is more beautiful, more imposing, already monumental and so absolutely himself that he is in some sense *doubled* by himself.²²⁵

Blanchot is describing an uncanny point of realisation that is the product of death, brought about by seeing the body in a lifeless state. Upon gazing at the corpse there is a poignant awareness that "an interhuman relationship is broken."²²⁶ Blanchot proposes that it is at this moment that the cadaver becomes its own image and begins to "resemble himself."²²⁷ For Lavater, both the cadaver and plaster impressions taken of the dead were regarded as ideal specimens for physiognomic study.²²⁸ His description of looking upon the faces of the corpses echoes the phenomenon of the spirit-infused double proposed by Blanchot. Lavater states,

Of the many dead persons I have seen, I have uniformly observed that sixteen, eighteen, or twenty-four hours after death (according to the disease), they have had a more beautiful form, better defined, more proportionate, harmonized, homogenous, more noble, more exalted, than they ever had during life.²²⁹

Implicit in Lavater's description is the elevation of the cadaverous object to its spiritual existence as an image. The significance of the shade or silhouette within the context of physiognomic discourse is its ability to evoke the absent body's presence. For Blanchot it is the reflection, the double created by way of the image, that is imbued with more spirit, beauty and composure than the object reflected itself. The connection I am proposing here is with Kristeva's insistence that the sacred is not found in the sacrifice, but rather in the *capacity for its representation*. For

²²⁴ Op. cit. Stafford. *Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen*. 97

²²⁵ Op. cit. Blanchot. 420

²²⁶ Ibid. 420

²²⁷ Looking upon the dead, Blanchot states, "The striking thing, when the moment comes, is that though the remains appear in the strangeness of their solitude, as something disdainfully withdrawn from us, just when the sense of an interhuman relationship is broken, when our mourning, our care and the prerogative of our former passions, no longer able to know their object, fall back on us, come back towards us – at this moment, when the presence of the cadaver before us is the presence of the unknown, it is also now that the lamented dead person begins to resemble himself." Ibid. 420

²²⁸ Lavater asserts that the dead and impressions of the dead remain worthy of physiognomic observation. He states, "Their settled features are much more prominent than in the living, and the sleeping. What life makes fugitive, death arrests; what was indefinable is defined. All is reduced to its proper level; each trait is in its true proportion, unless excruciating disease, or accident, have preceded death." Op. cit. Lavater. 149

²²⁹ Ibid. 370-371

Kristeva, “the icon/economy becomes a term of a passage of the transfiguration of the invisible and the visible that places the eyes of the flesh in a position to regard the spirit.”²³⁰ The silhouette or shade can therefore be considered to exist within the icon economy, as it is an image engrained within interior and exterior representational semiotics. As an emblematic signifier for the body whole, its spiritual resonance is created through the dual state of absence and presence it evokes. Stafford proposed that by arresting the shadow and making still the facial image, the silhouette acts as the “the immediate impress of nature,” describing the image as a type of frottage or “archeipoietic body print.”²³¹ We are reminded of Christ’s vernicle image and the Medusan head, also considered *archieropoieta* and brought about by what Kristeva describes as a sacrificial cut.

The body facialised

Through Lavater’s postulation, the silhouette or shade became an image where the invisible was made visible and the body was able to be dissected by proxy. In the image of fourteen silhouette profiles Lavater presents a comparative taxonomy of appearances, slicing away the shadowed bodies each head is emblematic of a swift decapitating cut (fig. 41). Each silhouette created what could be described as a sharply delineated black hole; a pictorial space in which meaning was to be imposed and interiority inscribed. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari make the assertion that it is the face that is posited at the intersection between significance and subjectification. According to the authors faciality exists within “the white wall/black hole system.”²³² it is not a pre-existing state, rather it is one that is brought into effect by an ‘abstract machine,’ which they consider emblematic of the powers that influence and generate social production.²³³ As argued by the authors, it is this machine that is responsible for presenting the signifier as the white wall and subjectivity the black hole, hence the face generated is always political.²³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari affirm “the face is produced only when the head ceases to be part of the body” – in a sense they describe truncation as a necessary act imposed on the facialised subject.

Having unpacked the historical significance of the guillotine and Lavater’s silhouette drawing machine, there is arguable material evidence of an historically engrained practice of facialisation and actual tangible ‘abstract machines’ that have significantly contributed to the facialisation of the body and its image. The mechanised cutting spectacle inflicted by the guillotine and silhouette drawing machine demonstrate that by severing the head from the body, they also served to foster a visual language in which the face becomes scrutinised for the ethical and moral

²³⁰ Op. cit. Kristeva, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*. 53

²³¹ Op. cit. Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen*. 98

²³² Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 167.

²³³ Ibid. 168

²³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari’s suggestion that the decoding of the body can only be undertaken through the overcoding of the face is described in succinct relation to the mapping and charting of landscape. The authors touch on the way we indentify and colonise space by suggesting the entire body can, and has, been facialised. They assert then that the structures of power that facialise mean “the face is a politics.” See *ibid.* 180-181

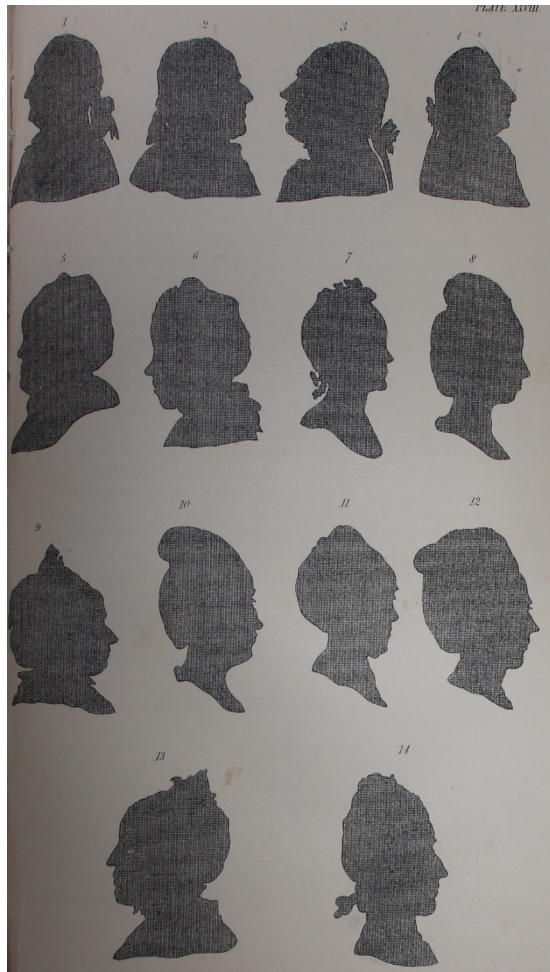


Figure 41.

Plate XXVIII. 14 silhouette profiles. Published in *Essays on physiognomy*.

Translated by Thomas Holcroft. 14 ed. London: William Tegg, 1869.

attributes of an individual, based purely on an aesthetic surface reading, the mapping and colonising of their facial features. At this point a foundation has now been laid to consider contemporary artists whose practices engage with the visual language of silhouettes and cutouts. Through the analysis of significant works I will attempt to make explicit the way in which each artist enacts a distinct cutting practice as a strategy to sever, dismantle and reconstruct representations of the body or body politic. In fact, it is through process of severing, decoding and overcoding that Deleuze and Guattari argue that the body has the ability to become entirely facialised:

When the mouth and nose, but first the eyes, become a holey surface, all the other volumes and cavities of the body follow. An operation worthy of Doctor Moreau: horrible and magnificent.²³⁵

The invocation of Dr Moreau, the infamous antagonist from H.G Wells's nineteenth century science fiction novel, reveals the implicit acknowledgment of a dissective metaphor embodied within Deleuze and Guattari's concept of faciality. Dr Moreau was a disgraced physiologist who fled to an exotic island, where he performed experimental vivisection on wild animals in a quest to construct human-like hybrid beings. Throughout the novel there is an emphasis on the deconstruction of morality and what it means to fracture identity in order to re-hinge and re-imagine it in all its grotesque wonder. Deleuze and Guattari's contemplation of faciality as what occurs through the "overcoding of all the decoded parts" is what is so horrible and magnificent about Dr Moreau's experiments; the dismantling, dissection and reimaging of who we are and what we know is also to destabilise how one sees themselves and the world.²³⁶

Kara Walker: dissecting histories and dismantling the slave body

Kara Walker is contemporary artist whose practice can be described as a politically driven dissection of historical narratives. Employing silhouette cutting as the primary visual language in her work allows Walker to carve new pictorial bodyscapes that, like the disturbing chimeras of Dr Moreau, embody both the horrific and the magnificent. Walker engages in her own distinct cutting spectacle as a deconstructive and rupturing strategy, allowing her to re-visit the antebellum slave narrative and challenge the romantically anglicised memory of this period in American history. Through life-size silhouette tableaux that embody a literal black and white power play, Walker's theatrical assemblages present a re-visioning of the American deep South using the medium of cut paper.

Philippe Vergne, Deputy Director and Chief Curator of the Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, argues that there is nothing innocent in Walker's cutting gesture, suggesting that it is an act

²³⁵ Ibid. 170

²³⁶ Ibid. 170

imbued with subversive violence.²³⁷ Having previously examined the historical significance of this profiling medium we know that in the very means of generating a silhouette both a positive and negative space is created, which hinges on the drawn or cut line. When one encounters Walker's silhouettes there is an optical tracing and charting of the cut line to delineate form, one which can be understood as an activation of the white wall/black hole system, a facialised mapping of body and space. Walker's figurative examinations of racial stereotypes are often posited as active participants in raucous and debauched mis-en-scenes, each image revealed in painstaking detail through a series of cuts and incisions. However, what is occurring through Walker's cutting spectacle—the black silhouette adhered to the white gallery wall—becomes an intended reversal of the positive/negative spatial binary of the medium. To elaborate, it is as if Walker's emphasis is centred on creating a black chasm defined by negative space around it. According to Vergne, "this would make her work a negative space of representation, of all representations – an anti-image, a black hole."²³⁸

In *Restraint* (fig. 42) Walker critiques the nostalgic sentiment and romanticism often associated with eighteenth and early nineteenth century silhouettes. As a precursor to photography, the silhouette was a popular medium used to capture the appearance of a loved one. Its classical origins recall Pliny and the fabled story of the origin of painting, where a lamenting woman traces the shadow of her departing lover directly onto the wall in their last moments together.²³⁹ Having previously examined the antiquarian underpinnings that informed Lavater's eighteenth century physiognomic discourse, we know that the medium recalls an engrained belief that the silhouette or shade can hold and contain the essence of an individual. In *Restraint*, Walker imagines the truncated profile of a brutally incarcerated African-American slave. Shackled at the neck and confined to a vice-like bridle, the image recalls the reprehensible iron masks used by slave owners to punish, humiliate and oppress. An encounter with this image is graphic and harrowing, it makes an unabashed acknowledgment of the legacy of the Atlantic slave trade and the demeaning of human beings bought and sold as property. The image is undoubtedly one that is facialised; it is within the "surface holes, holy surface system"²⁴⁰ described by Deleuze and Guattari that the spectator witnesses the absent presence of the African-American slave. Through the artist's staging of her own cutting spectacle, Walker intricately subverts this archetype of classical portraiture, using the silhouette in a way that decodes the racialised slave body in order to render it as a facial profile, an overcoded physiognomic landscape. Deleuze and Guattari considered that in severing the head from the body the face generated would have a direct correlation with the landscape, suggesting that they shared mutual and complementing lines and traits. This becomes evident in the way in which one reads Walker's silhouette image, tracing the contours of the line that separates positive and negative to discern recognisable features. By

²³⁷ Vergne, Philippe. "The Black Saint Is the Sinner Lady." In *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*, edited by Michelle Piranio, 7-25 (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 2007), 14.

²³⁸ Ibid. 14

²³⁹ A comprehensive study on the historical and theoretical implications of the shadow has been produced by Victor I. Stoichita. See Stoichita, Victor I. *A Short History of the Shadow*, Essays in Art and Culture. London: Reaktion Books, 1997. Where the concern in the research is specifically focused on silhouettes as a visual language as opposed to the shadow, the author acknowledges the inextricable connection between the shadow as the ethereal substance that is transformed into an physicalised object through a process of tracing and cutting.

²⁴⁰ Op. cit. Deleuze and Guattari. 170



Figure 42.

Kara Walker, *Restraint* 2009

Etching with aquatint and sugarlift, 78.7 x 60.6 cm.

Edition of 35, +10 AP. Published by Ilene Kurtz-Kretschmar for Hammer Editions, © 2009 Kara Walker.

Image courtesy Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.

charting and examining the black and white surface as landscape, a face—a male, African, slave—is made apparent to the viewer.

Vergne's suggestion that Walker's silhouettes present the spectator with an anti-image or a black hole warrants further unpacking. The image expressed is through a figurative shadow, that in turn invests the silhouette to imply a poignant absence, a void or a negative space. Reflecting on her use of silhouettes, Walker has described the medium as a "blank space that you could project your desires into. It can be positive or negative. It's just a hole in a piece of paper, and it's the inside of that hole."²⁴¹ In this sense Walker actively undermines the figurative and decorative implication of her chosen medium to reveal what is in essence, an abstraction. Described by art historian Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw as "spaces of blank, yet readable, negative interiority," it is through the process of cutting that Walker creates such a space for the projection of ideas, where historically engrained beliefs come into to play and can be questioned.²⁴²

To recall an earlier discussion in the introduction of this thesis, I drew comparison between closely aligned methodologies of cutting that occur in both art and anatomy in order to generate and analyse space. In both fields there has been an ongoing interest in exhuming knowledge from within three-dimensional space, be it the human body or the material body of the canvas. Deleuze and Guattari speak to this charting of space in a way that identifies the significance of the cut as both maker of space and the point of entry made into matter:

Even when painting becomes abstract, all it does is rediscover the black hole and white wall, the great composition of the white canvas and black slash. Tearing, but also stretching of the canvas along the axis of escape (*fuite*), at a vanishing point (*point de fuite*), along a diagonal, by a knife slice, slash, or hole: the machine is already in place that always functions to produce faces and landscapes, however abstract.²⁴³

The white canvas with black slash is a clear reference towards Fontana's cuts made into canvas. The authors suggest that the cut has the potential to create as *axis of escape*, which could also be described in the case of Walker's work, as a rupture made into the surface of memory. It is by the knife—creating slices, slashes and holes—that the artist is able to visit and readdress historical stereotypes and the ethnographic profiling that remain entrenched in the racial politics of the contemporary cultural landscape. Specifically, when Walker uses the knife to carve historicised and racially encoded caricatures, the artist reflects and critiques the inherently prejudiced belief that the African-American body exists as a lesser divergent of the white man body-archetype.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Kara Walker is quoted in "Cut It Out!", Sheets, Hilarie M. ARTnews, accessed June 18, 2013. <http://www.artnews.com/2002/04/01/cut-it-out/>.

²⁴² Shaw, Gwendolyn Dubois. *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 21.

²⁴³ Op cit. Deleuze and Guattari 172-173

²⁴⁴ Thomas McEvelley has discussed Walker's parodies of the "black mammy", the "piccaninny" and the "sambo" in relation to the polarised critical reception her work has received. Considered by the artist and a collection of critics to be about deconstructing African-American stereotypes, Walker's work has also received an extremely negative response from a number of prominent individuals in the African-American art community who claim the work perpetuates these stereotypes and caters for a white audience and white art establishments. See McEvelley, Thomas. "Primitivism in the Works of an Emancipated Negress." In *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Opressor, My Enemy, My Love*, edited by Michelle Piranio, 53-61. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 2007), 53-61.

This state of racism imposed on the fascialised subject echoes Deleuze and Guattari's explicit point that the face is not to be considered universal, rather the face is Christ, "your average ordinary white man."²⁴⁵ For the authors, racism exists through an awareness and recognition of the "degrees of deviance" from the Christ or white man face.²⁴⁶ There is a direct correlation here to the eighteenth century physiognomic practices previously examined in this chapter. One will recall Lavater, whose ideal model was Christ's face, on which he sought to demonstrate the most desirable interior and exterior bodily harmony. Lavater's advocacy for facial angles that worked in degrees of descending order from the Apollo Belvedere to the facial profile of a frog also demonstrates the degrees of deviance that are inherently imposed onto the body in order to render it fascialised.

In critiquing the canons of American history through a visual language of racially charged silhouettes, Walker's work delves into the complexities and quandaries of ongoing racial politics, or as Hal Foster states in his essay "The Artist as Ethnographer," "a strategic sense of complex imbrication is more pertinent to our postcolonial situation than a romantic proposal of simple opposition."²⁴⁷ We are reminded of the use of the silhouette profile as a site of comparative anatomical enquiry, one that affirmed racial prejudice through a study based purely on the aesthetics of physical difference. Far from a binary rereading of the antebellum slave narrative, Walker confronts and destabilises the viewer through a medium that incites nostalgia for the past, revealing history as a murky landscape where truth becomes artifice and are both at play; where a knowledge of interiority is assumed and understood only through an encounter with the exterior line.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* lays the scene for Walker's work, *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* (fig. 43). Originally presented at the 1997 Whitney Biennial, the cut paper installation reaches over ten metres in length and is intended to wrap across the gallery wall in the style of a nineteenth century cyclorama.²⁴⁸ Upon first encounter, it is evident that Walker's work challenges the antiquarian heritage of silhouettes and shades by transforming the medium from a miniature keepsake or popular bourgeois parlour game, into confronting figurative shadows that mirror the size of one's own body. This forces the spectator into direct negotiation with a past more sinister than most like to contemplate. Taking place across the epic length of the gallery, the cut-outs are brought to life, each performing a part within an immersive theatrical shadow play. The viewer's own body becomes part of the unfolding melodrama that draws the audience into a retelling of history.

²⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari state, "'Primitives' may have the most human of heads, the most beautiful and most spiritual, but they have no face and need none. The reason is simple. The face is not a universal. It is not even that of the white man; it is the White Man himself, with his broad white cheeks and the black hole of his eyes. The face is Christ." Ibid. 176

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 178

²⁴⁷ Foster, Hal. "The Artist as Ethnographer?" In *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* edited by George E. Marcus & Fred R. Myers, 302-309 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 304.

²⁴⁸ Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw quotes Walker discussing her intentions behind referencing the grand cyclorama format in her work. In an interview with Alexander Alberro for *Index 1* Walker states, "from the moment I got started on these things I imagined that someday they would be put together in a kind of cyclorama. I mean, just like the cyclorama in Atlanta that goes around in an endless cycle of history locked up in a room, I thought it would be possible to arrange the silhouettes in such a way that they would make a kind of history painting encompassing the whole room." Op. cit. Shaw.

Scale becomes a strategy as the spectator is confronted with figurative happenings in a size that is proportionate to their own.

Walker's use of the silhouette has the reflexive ability to delineate her characters as clear representations of racial stereotypes, however at the same time and upon closer inspection, there is often a rupture occurring within the figure through the removal of limbs, the addition of body parts and the semblance of multiple figures within the one silhouette. Walker's work often requires a second viewing to identify these ruptures, which once made apparent heighten the malice and horror that is occurring in front of the viewer. Focusing on two detailed vignettes (fig. 44 and fig. 45) from *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* illustrates the uncanny semblance of black and white/ slave and master body archetypes which occur in Walker's work. In the first detail (fig. 44), these historical bodies cut to profile could be the delicate daughters of a white plantation owner, peering around the bushes to peek at the malevolent acts occurring around them. From under the young maiden's skirt a head appears, mouth open, the profile of a slave girl seems to stare alongside her mistress. In the second detail (fig. 45), the spectator must decide whose leg is buckling under the weight of the obese amputee – is it the amputee himself, or is it the leg of the young slave girl being sodomised and forced to bear his physical burden? Each silhouette exists in a nightmarish state of becoming, their perception is as a black hole in which a multiplicity of barbaric acts could possibly be at play. In the characters that result from each of Walker's incisions, there is an evidence of the Kristevian abject and the Bakhtinian grotesque; it is as if each figure is intentionally rendered unclosed and unfastened. Discussed in chapter 1, Bakhtin's characterisation of the grotesque is understood as a return to flesh via the degradation and regeneration of the body. The author cites defecation, copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth – all bodily functions that involve an orifice, a space of transition between the interior and exterior. For Kristeva, the abject lay at the point where interior and exterior boundaries can be breached, making it inevitably tied to the maternal body and the vagina existing as its frightful chasm.

By activating a tension between the abject and grotesque in *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* Walker coalesces both fascination and repulsion in the spectator who is made to witness a disturbing array of these acts that become a retelling of antebellum history. One sees a group of women who suckle and nurse each other approached by a defecating child who leaves a trail of faeces. A man (presumed to be Uncle Tom) has given birth, the infant has dropped to the floor trailing from the umbilical cord, all whilst a peg-legged plantation master thrusts a sword into a helpless child as he appears to rape a young slave girl. It is the visual language of silhouettes that allow for the slow reveal of these horrific acts, the tension between graphic violence and the negative (black) image implicate the viewer into imaging the unimaginable, or as Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw suggests, “boldly visualizing the discourse of the unspeakable, the unknowable trauma of slavery.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Ibid. 42



Figure 43.

Kara Walker, *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* 1995.

Cut paper on wall. Installation dimensions variable; approximately 396.2 x 1066.8 cm.

Installation view: *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*.

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2008. Photo: Joshua White, © 1995 Kara Walker.

Image courtesy Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.



Figure 44.

Kara Walker, *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* 1995 (Detail)
Cut paper on wall. Installation dimensions variable.



Figure 45.

Kara Walker, *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* 1995 (Detail)
Cut paper on wall. Installation dimensions variable.

The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven can be described as a critique of the historical romanticisation of the antebellum plantation, specifically given its direct reference to Stowe's novel. This piece of famed literature at first received significant praise, having been considered an attempted homily towards the abolitionist movement. The novel however, underpinned by puritan Christian ideals, also served to reinforce racist African-American stereotypes, presenting its black characters as condescendingly subservient, unintelligent and submissive.²⁵⁰ Walker's work seeks to re-remember the broader nineteenth century narrative that contextualises Stowe's novel in a way that destabilises any sense of rose-coloured nostalgia towards this period of American history. It is as if the artist seeks to open up a void in which the trauma of slavery can begin to be exhumed and what has remained vastly hidden from collective historical consciousness can be brought into light. In the essay *Narrative, Memory and Slavery* W.J.T Mitchell asks,

What if the materials of memory are overwhelming, so traumatic the remembering of them threatens identity rather than reconstituting it? What if identity had to be reconstituted out of strategic amnesia, a selective remembering, and thus a selective dis(re)membering of experience? What if the technology of memory, the composite visual-verbal architecture of the memory palace becomes a haunted house?²⁵¹

If one considers Walker's *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* as a memory palace turned haunted house, then Walker's silhouettes embody the ghosts at the underbelly of American history. Mitchell speaks to the idea of negative memory, a type of memory so seeped in trauma that it has the ability to generate "the need to forget whilst remembering."²⁵² Mitchell identifies the Holocaust and American slavery as inducers of such negative memory: the horrors of these events remain largely unspeakable, hence their reality exists as a repressed memory, they remain culturally obscured and veiled. Within Walker's haunted house, the antebellum ghosts that occupy the silhouetted scene walk a delicate line between the alien and the nervously familiar.

There is something innately unsettling about Walker's silhouettes, an uncanny effect that recalls Freud's belief that "the uncanny is that class of frightening which leads us back to what is known of old and long familiar."²⁵³ In the case of Walker's work it is about creating space for what has been forgotten or repressed by history, the horrors and traumas of slavery that have been previously forced out of collective (white) memory. The haunted house analogy is reminiscent of Freud's insistence that the womb (body interior) becomes *unheimlich* or unhomely once we have

²⁵⁰ In his analysis of the racial stereotypes and characterisation present in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Richard Yarborough argues "Stowe's work played a major role of establishing the level of discourse for the majority of fictional treatments of the Afro-American that were to follow... Although Stow unquestionably sympathized with the slaves, her commitment to challenging the claim of black inferiority was frequently undermined by her own endorsement of racial stereotypes." Page 46-47. See Yarborough, Richard. "Strategies of Black Characterization in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Early Afro-American Novel." In *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*, edited by Eric J. Sundquist, 45-84. New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1986.

²⁵¹ Mitchell, W. J. T. "Narrative, Memory, Slavery." In *Cultural Artifacts and the Production of Meaning: The Page, the Image and the Body*, edited by Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe Margaret J. T. Ezell, 199-222 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 212.

²⁵² Ibid. 212-213

²⁵³ Op. cit. Freud. 195

left our intra-uterine state. It recalls Freud's notion that the effect of the uncanny exists in relation to a state of repressed anxiety, hence the uncanny is that something "which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light."²⁵⁴ In *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* Walker teases at our cultural anxieties by coalescing truth, fiction, fairytale and nightmare to imagine a historical re-reading of nineteenth century America. It is Freud who reminded us that the uncanny is "nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression."²⁵⁵

Sally Smart: uncanny assemblages and phantom (female) limbs

The connection Freud proposed between the sensation of the uncanny and the anxiety induced via the castration complex led him to identify images of "dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist" as emblematic signifiers of something *unheimlich*.²⁵⁶ These fragmented bodily objects each allude to a dismantling process, a forced separation needed to be enacted or carried out through an act of dismembering, severing or cutting. Australian artist Sally Smart's use of a dissective methodology when making work is a way for the artist to negotiate both material and conceptual territories, the artist having described her own process as an intentional "dismantling" of matter and ideas.²⁵⁷ In *The Anatomy Lesson* (fig. 46) one can see how Smart's examination of dissection as both subject matter and method is revealed through a cacophony of bodily fragments that explicitly recall the severed body objects proposed by Freud, acting to signify the presence of the uncanny.

Like Walker, Smart's large scale assemblages challenge the diminutive nature of historical silhouette portraiture. Imagined through layerings of cut paper and textured fabric, Smart's fractured bodies participate in a scene reminiscent of the dissection theatre; the body that was once the subject of early modern anatomical enquiry has been re-visioned by the artist to also play a collective trope of curiously anatomised onlookers. As in much of Smart's work, gender is implied through references to colonial or nineteenth century clothing in silhouette; the nip of the waist dropping down into a full skirt immediately denotes that this is a female's anatomical theatre. Smart's implications of dress in silhouette act as a crucial signifier of the medium's ability to induce a state of absent presence. Dwelling further on the image it reveals that in a number of parts there is no actual body to be seen, what is viewed instead are hollowed references to the body; a stiff-collared neckline in place of a neck, or the pulled up sleeve whose arm has been removed from its socket. It is the implicit acknowledgment of the female body in silhouette, the opaque surface and exterior line used to delineate forms familiar and recognisable, where one bears witness to Smart's intentional ruptures; there are women's legs becoming table legs, as well as arms that appear active yet amputated. Smart's assemblages hinge on this idea of

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 217

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 217

²⁵⁶ Ibid. 220

²⁵⁷ Craven, Owen. "Sally Smart: A Cut Above." *Artist Profile*, no. 19 (2012): 64-71. 65



Figure 46.

Sally Smart, *The Anatomy Lesson* 1995.

Synthetic polymer paint on fabric with collage elements, 244 x 335 cm.

Vizard Foundation Collection, The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne.

Image courtesy the artist.

the familiar and the unfamiliar coerced into a theatrical space where identity, gender, the historicised and contemporary body exist in a fluid state of disassembly.

Across the breadth of Smart's practice there is evidence of a cutting spectacle where material and conceptual points of entry are marked by incision and a confounding of boundaries occurs. The physical and psychological spaces the body occupies are intentionally cleaved open; through a bricolage of silhouettes and bodily fragments, compositions appear joined and undone, hinged and at the same time separated. In *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Elizabeth Grosz offers an insightful analysis of the complexities surrounding the body as both an object of perception and a subject of lived reality or experience, in response to propositions made by French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty.²⁵⁸ When considering the notion that the body is unable to be reduced to either a biological or a psychological entity, Grosz recalls two opposing disorders: the phantom limb and agnosia. The phantom limb is caused by the absence of an actual limb or body part, yet at the location of that absence is an innate visceral sensation of its persisting presence. In *The Anatomy Lesson* the absent presence of the body is rendered through silhouettes and the illusory suggestion of the body in fragments (even in the uncanny absence of such parts), recalling Grosz's assertion that,

The phantom limb is not a memory or an image (of something now absent). It is "quasi-present." It is the refusal of an experience to enter into the past; it illustrates the tenacity of a present that remains immutable.²⁵⁹

For Smart, that immutable presence manifests in material investigations that explore the body's interiority in relationship to its exterior. In the catalogue essay that accompanied Smart's 1996 exhibition at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, aptly titled *The Unhomely Body*, Helen McDonald draws attention to the ability for Smart's work to traverse states of the visible and invisible: "what is normally seen becomes hidden, and what is normally hidden is brought to light and hung up for display."²⁶⁰ Smart's approach to display is one that is fluid, changeable and adaptable, reflecting the ability for her large scale assemblages to remain in a state that is constantly unfolding. Smart's approach to allowing her compositions to evolve directly on the gallery wall, inhabiting and hinging themselves to the architecture of a particular site, echoes Grosz's assertion that the body doesn't merely occupy space, rather "it inhabits or haunts space."²⁶¹

Working with, across and *through* combinations of textured cloth, found objects, cut paper and photomontage, the artist's choice of media reveals an innate sensitivity to materiality. Each work is the result of a process driven investigation activated through rigorous enactments of cutting,

²⁵⁸ Grosz writes, "For Merleau-Ponty, although the body is both object (for others) and a lived reality (for the subject), it is never simply object nor simply subject. It is defined by its relations with objects and in turn defines these objects as such— it is "sense-bestowing" and "form-giving," providing a structure, organisation, and ground within which objects are to be situated and against which the body-subject is positioned." See Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994), 87.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 89

²⁶⁰ McDonald, Helen. "The Unhomely Body : 4-28 April 1996." edited by Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia. Parkside, South Australia: Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, 1996.

²⁶¹ *Op. cit.* Grosz. 90

pinning and stitching. There is an acknowledged correlation between Smart's work and the practice of *Femmage*, identified in the 1970s as a way of working with craft materials and applied techniques in order to challenge their association as inherently female practices confined only to the realm of the domestic.²⁶² Thinking about Smart's ability to dislodge fixed meaning through a considered and decisive cut and stitch technique also locates her practice within the historical lineage of modernist collage.²⁶³ Smart's disjointed figurations can recall the aesthetic lexicon of the Surrealist exquisite corpse; in both instances there are disparities in scale and the body's interior can be brought to the exterior. In her analysis of Surrealist collage across image and text, Elza Adamowicz observes,

There is an incomplete interweaving of parts, which are held in suspension because of their existence within an ambivalent space: formally, they depart from the familiar body, semantically they approach the other body. The oscillation between the known and the unknown in this ambivalent space triggers in the reader/viewer the poetic emotion of *dépaysement* when confronted with a mode of production where the completely other resides so close to the known²⁶⁴

In this respect Smart's practice appears in an ongoing dialogue with the uncanny; castration manifests in a multiplicity of metaphorical severings. The proliferation of truncated and cut up body fragments that characterise her oeuvre confirm that achieving wholeness was never the intention in the first place. Instead, by employing a dissective methodology to dismantle and dismember, Smart chooses to deliver agency to the body as a multiplicity of disparate parts rather than as a homogenised whole.

Deborah Kelly: Cut ups, cutouts and chimeras

In Deborah Kelly's collage works the artist isolates and extracts fragments of the human body that are then afforded inter-biological hinge points with other species. The hybrid creatures that result pointedly recall the earlier discussion of Dr Moreau and his surgical experimentations, described by Deleuze and Guattari as generative of both the horrible and the magnificent. Kelly, like Smart and Walker, employs the knife or scalpel and enacts a politically driven cutting gesture into a material that substitutes for the physical body. In doing so, the fractures of bodily

²⁶² Deborah Hart comments on Smart's work in relation to *Femmage*, see Hart, Deborah. "Daughter Architect." *Art & Australia* 42, no. 2 (2004): 238-44. Smart also produced a body of work titled *Femmage, Shadows and Symptoms* between 1998-2004. With regards to the history of *Femmage*, Thalia Gouma-Peterson acknowledges Canadian artist Miriam Schapiro as the primary oeuvre and instigator of this movement and Norma Broude has thoroughly analysed the artist's work in relation to her intentional use of feminised materials and craft techniques. See Gouma-Peterson, Thalia. *Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments of Art and Life*. New York: Abrams Publishers, 1999; Broude, Norma. "Miriam Schapiro and *Femmage*: Reflections on the Conflict between Decoration and Abstraction in 20th Century Art." *Arts Magazine* 54, no. 6 (1980): 83-90.

²⁶³ For further contextualisation of Smart's dissective practice, the early 20th century work of Hannah Höch is particularly significant. Höch's approach to collage, whilst anchored within a Dada philosophy, actively sought the fragmentation of the body in a way that reflected the socio-cultural changes underway during the years of the Weimar Republic (1919-33). In a period that saw the social roles of women significantly transformed, Höch addressed these dislocating ruptures within cultural and gender identity by slicing and dissecting the printed image. See 'Representing the new woman'. Lavin, Maud. *Cut With a Kitchen Knife: the Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993.

²⁶⁴ Adamowicz, Elza. *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 86.

matter isolated, delineated, excised and extracted by Kelly are decoded from their original context in order to be reimagined and rearranged. For Kelly this terrain covers the glossy pages of scientific periodicals, contemporary fashion magazines and beauty advertisements. Speaking about what she refers to as the ‘time-machine’ capabilities of the cutting, hinging and joining through collage, Kelly describes “the violent collapse of histories as images from one era are forced in proximity with another” and how she is invested in examining ways in which fragmented and excised material can be “made to mate and mutate, to be hybrid and haunted by awkward ancestries.”²⁶⁵

In her exhibition *Tender Cuts* at Gallery Barry Keldoulis in Sydney (2010), Kelly presented a whimsical, yet somewhat anxious array of chimeric feminine creatures. Each unique collage intertwined cut-up body parts with images of flora and fauna, as well as glossy magazine fragments of textural cloth and hair that echo the visceral appearance of silky skins and rippled flesh. By cutting and recomposing feminine forms from disparate yet recognisable wholes, Kelly’s creation of uncanny body composites can be thought about as a strategy to unhinge and unfix the existing forms of surveillance and control that have been imposed on the body and its image as a way of rendering it an object of knowledge. In this instance, Kelly’s incisions are a reminder of Kristeva’s notion that the cut has the ability to afford new ways of seeing.

In *Dream of a common language in the disintegrating circuit (with thanks to Donna Haraway)* #7 (fig. 47), Kelly draws on the politics of evolution and post-human discourse to present a feminist rereading of the unsettling possibilities for fractured, inter-special organisms. The human head is replaced by an exotic looking—possibly marine—organism; all facial features are omitted apart from an open and teeth-baring mouth. There is a Medusan quality present in this image, the head’s soft pink and porous tentacles are perhaps a nod to the gorgon’s snake-like hair; the mouth is a monstrous chasm, an orifice or black hole that signifies the point of transition between the interior and exterior. Kelly’s creation appears to afford a certain amount of tension through its intersection of past and (possible) future histories. Kneeling on a plush and textured surface that alludes to skin and flesh, the classic feminine pin-up body seems to insist on exerting its historical primacy. One is reminded of Adamowicz’s assertion of the affect *dépaysment*: described by the author as experience of disorientation or ambivalence when the “completely other resides so closely to the known.”²⁶⁶ For curator Bec Dean, Kelly’s interspecies creations exist as “ancient chimeras”; significantly she notes their ability to transgress across the cultural and the temporal.²⁶⁷ Extending on this idea, I would suggest that Kelly’s cuts can be thought about as a way of looking to the future body done via an excavation of images from the body’s past. Employing the knife as an image-making tool, Kelly *remakes* using considered combinations of incision, extraction and juxtaposition.

²⁶⁵ Kelly is quoted in the catalogue essay that accompanied her exhibition *Tender Cuts* in 2010. See– Barkley, Glenn. “The Rough and the Smooth.” Sydney: Gallery Barry Keldoulis, 2011.

²⁶⁶ Op. cit. Adamowicz. 86

²⁶⁷ Dean, Bec. “A Rampaging Party of God-Heads, Animal People, Hairy Sexy Women, Gestating Spaceships and Interspecies Otherness: The Collage Works.” In *Deborah Kelly &*, edited by Mark Feary Blair French (Sydney: Artspace Visual Arts Centre Ltd., 2012), 47.



Figure 47.

Deborah Kelly,

Dream of a common language in the disintegrating circuit (with thanks to Donna Haraway) #7 2011.

Paper collage on Arches paper, 67 x 54 cm.

Image courtesy the artist and Gallery Barry Keldoulis.



Figure 48.

Deborah Kelly, *A Whistling Woman...And a Crowing Hen* 2008-2010.
From the Hairpiece series, paper collage on Stonehenge paper. 77 x 98 cm.
Image courtesy the artist and Gallery Barry Keldoulis.

In *A Whistling Woman...And a Crowing Hen* (fig. 48) Kelly employs the cutting gesture to create two uncanny portraits that can be interpreted as a subversive critique of western ideas surrounding feminine beauty. Two disembodied heads are intricately pieced together using fragmented images of blond and brunette hair; each face is entirely obscured except for a pair of gazing eyes and ruby coloured lips.²⁶⁸ The cultural politics that surround the presence and absence of hair on the female body are brought into question. On one hand, certain hair is thought about as being a glossy, luscious and a desirable feminine quality; on the other hand, when it becomes separated or detached from the body, it is considered a type of corporeal waste or refuse that incites a state of abjection upon its encounter in isolation. In this instance, Kelly's process of enacting incisions and cumulative extractions allows the artist to transform advertisements for the desirable hair that one would wish to have growing on their head into an uncanny, fur-like veil that obscures and blankets each visage. Each truncated head then is forced to exist as a facialised object, not to be understood in the literal sense that the viewer is gazing at a face, but rather through the innate process of charting the textural qualities—the tone, line and countenance of each portrait—to actually determine that it is a face one is viewing. This speaks to the idea discussed earlier of undertaking physiognomic surveillance the way one would chart the textures and terrain of the landscape. Each of the facial collages appear to levitate on the page in a similar manner to the bodiless icons of Christ's vernicle image and the Medusa head previously discussed. Floating detached and absent of any body, the work's implicit iconographic status recalls Kristeva's assertion that it is the image that embodies the remaining link to the sacred. This image as one will recall, is signified through a type of sacrificial cut; making visible something that was previously invisible or unseen. For Kelly, the attention she affords to the material and fetishised qualities of hair is only made manifest through a process of cutting away or cleaving apart these body fragments from their original context. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, it is through enactments of severing, decoding and overcoding the parts that the body reveals itself as a holey surface.

The cutting acts that have been examined throughout this chapter have attempted to chart alternate cutting spectacles imposed onto the body outside the confines of the anatomical theatre. What has become apparent is that historical acts of decapitation and truncation can be thought about congruous modes of dissective enquiry that have contributed to representations of the partitioned body as an uncanny and sanctified site. Looking at the decapitating cut of the guillotine and its brutal role in inflicting judicial punishment has led to an understanding of the cutting gesture as an act of political significance. In turn, the eighteenth century study of physiognomy wielded its own type of truncating cut; Lavater's attempt to quantify the silhouette's utility in physiognomic study was done under an anatomical guise and promoted as a scientific practice. Through the analysis of historical source material the decapitating cut has been shown to bring focus not to the body that remains, but rather to the image of the severed head. Considered then to exist as a facialised object, the contemporary artists discussed in this

²⁶⁸ In a conversation with Kelly in 2012, she informed me that underneath the faces covered with hair were heads of celebrities Uma Thurman and Beyoncé Knowles. Her decision to veil the faces of women that are conventionally recognisable with ease and considered immensely desirable within the cultural psyche brings another layer of implication to the work.

chapter who employ silhouettes and cutouts as a visual language, in turn make visible and affirm Deleuze and Guattari's suggestion that the whole body can become facialised terrain.

Through the preceding analysis of works by Kara Walker, Sally Smart and Deborah Kelly what is continuing to be revealed is the significance of cutting as methodology for artists, a way of working to dismantle, critique and subvert both materials and ideas. In turn, the work of Walker, Smart and Kelly can be thought about as being in dialogue through their cutting practices, a further indication that there is an operative culture of dissection in contemporary art. The exploration must continue— thinking about the body and its image broken down or fractured into parts presents another tier of implication in which to consider the cutting spectacle, modes of anatomical enquiry and their relationship to art practice.

Chapter 3
**Museological Incisions:
Exhuming and Constructing Imaginary Anatomies**

Imagine that your body is coming apart. Not falling apart, but separating slowly and purposefully into its constituent elements. Let each part, each limb, achieve a separate status, easily, even gracefully. There is no rush. Try to imagine that your arm, for instance, exists apart from the trunk of your body.

– Julie Ewington ²⁶⁹

A history of the poetics of the fragment is yet to be written, for fragments are not simply a necessity of which we make virtue, a vicissitude of history, or a response to limitations on our ability to being the world indoors. We make fragments.

– Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett ²⁷⁰

It is quite a bizarre sensation to be in one's own body whilst looking upon a vast arrangement of anonymous body parts. Within obscure cloudy jars of liquid, uncanny objects float motionless. Bodily viscera can appear alien and almost unrecognisable, like pieces of dry shrivelled parchment. There are alternate specimens of course, slightly less macabre though still curiously unsettling. These models, traditionally made from wax, plaster or paper maché, are now more likely to be constructed from a seamless plastic polymer. The ability for anatomical specimens to resemble, embody and represent the parts concealed and kept hidden within our own body interior, whether human tissue or material substitute, involves a level of artistry in their preservation and construction that can be described as remarkable.

In September 2011 I spent a month visiting anatomical museums in Italy and the UK. Undertaking this field research was in response to a series of separate visits to the anatomical collection at Musée Fragonard on the outskirts of Paris one year earlier. From my first hand experiences of these specimen collections I began to recognise that the museums and institutions which house these body artefacts and present them to the public perform another kind of cutting spectacle; they display knowledge of the body as a whole garnered through its dismantling into a series of fractured or fragmented parts. What also became apparent to me was that the body parts or fragments in these collections were never of an arbitrary existence, they were always cleaved

²⁶⁹ Ewington, Julie. "Catherine Truman: Invisible Places to Be." In *Seppelt Contemporary Art Awards: Catalogue*, edited by Linda Michael, 43-45. (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 43.

²⁷⁰ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 19.

from the whole with strategic intent. Each specimen contributed to a mapping of bodily knowledge and the construction of such knowledge was displayed through a methodical ordering, classifying and connecting of parts. Organisation theorist Karen Dale speaks to the idea of dismantling and systematisation that characterises anatomical enquiry:

It is not simply the divisions and differences which anatomy creates that are significant. What is important is where the cuts and incisions are made, and how the resulting parts are reorganised and reordered. Power, discipline and hierarchy play major roles in the ‘culture of dissection.’²⁷¹

In the introduction to this thesis I drew attention to Sawday’s understanding of bodily division as the centralised and predominant practice that laid the foundations for a culture of dissection to prosper throughout Renaissance Europe. Sawday has argued that dissecting the body interior became the overarching pattern for the partitioning and division of the exterior world. Dale has echoed this idea, citing anatomy as the dominant model used in western knowledge production. According to Dale, the construction of knowledge is characterised by the ‘anatomising urge’ (a term the author has borrowed from Sawday) that she uses to describe the “impetus to split the body into its component parts and a desire to classify and define their structure and function in the minutest detail.”²⁷² For David Hillman and Carla Mazziio the relationship between the body in parts and external organisational systems endows the corporeal fragment with a “remarkable density of implication.”²⁷³

The intention of this chapter is to think about anatomical enquiry as a type of excavation, a process of uncovering and hollowing out. It is about the dismantling of matter and the making of fragments in order to piece together and construct systems of knowledge. Excavating the human body is always undertaken in the pursuit of knowing and inevitably this leads to the proliferation of body fragments and cut up body parts. The underpinning of this chapter’s enquiry is theoretically informed by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s proposition of the body in pieces, the *corps morcelé*, and its relationship to the body whole. The eighteenth century anatomy museum will be analysed for its significance as a site in which the tensions between the body part and the whole are teased out using theatrical tropes that operate within and amongst modes of classification and display.

Throughout this paper my aim has been to make explicit a culture of dissection in contemporary art practice. In this regard I will examine the work of Catherine Truman and Christine Borland, both artists whose practices can be thought about as types of bodily excavation and as active modes of anatomical enquiry. In their own distinct ways, Truman and Borland imagine new and alternate anatomies by revisiting how the body is constructed and represented as a way to critically engage in the politics and ethics of the body’s display. To frame the following

²⁷¹ Dale, Karen. *Anatomising Embodiment and Organisation Theory*. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 27.

²⁷² Ibid. 25

²⁷³ David Hillman, Carla Mazziio, ed. *The Body in Parts : Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*. (New York: Routledge, 1997), xii.

discussion of anatomical enquiry as a type of excavating practice, I will begin by analysing two sources that reveal variant subjects to have been dissected, dismantled and reconstructed. Each reveals itself as a systematised representation of knowledge owing to a process of uncovering, hollowing out and excising matter that characterises each as a type of excavation. Nearly 400 years separates the illustrative plate from Johann Remmelin's *Catoptrum Microcosmicum* (1616) and Mark Dion's *Theatrum Mundi: Armarium* (2001). However, what I wish to make apparent through an analysis of both images is the presence of a cutting spectacle undertaken in order to systemically display the organisation of knowledge. Most significantly, I wish to draw attention to how such knowledge is built on exhuming the relationship between part to part and part to whole.

Microcosm and macrocosm: excavating fragments

Johann Remmelin's *Catoptrum Microcosmicum* is a comprehensive anatomical atlas complete with flap-anatomies, what are essentially interactive illustrations that enabled readers to lift up hinged paper folds to reveal concealed images of the body's layered interior. The striking frontispiece of this anatomical compendium (fig. 49) depicts classical male and female figures positioned atop two opposing pedestals holding one another's mutually reflective gaze. Both bodies are imbricated within a complex constellation of distinct and disparate body parts. The human eye, the ear canal, the heart, larynx, teeth, bones and a foetus (amongst others) all appear to float around the bodies on the page, with none of the fractured parts conforming to any sense of a figurative scale. When this ornamental collection of bodies and body pieces are regarded together there is a sense of balance and equilibrium within the composition that becomes apparent. The use of relational oppositions acts to stabilise any sense of disorder: anterior male and posterior female, internal and external, divine and monstrous.²⁷⁴ Hillman and Mazzio believe that the image intentionally deters any sense of corporeal dissolution or dismemberment, instead suggesting, "what begins to surface out of the spectre of bodily disorganisation is a totalizing system of categorical order."²⁷⁵

Remmelin's image of the body (or bodies) in pieces suggests a meticulously restructured amalgamation and an ornate celebration of the knowledge derived from the body's severed parts. The image is one of considered and systematic fragmentation; the cutting spectacle employed to dismember and deconstruct the body, in turn facilitates and structures the bodily knowledge derived from its dismantling. As a flap anatomy the sectioning and planing of the illustrated body into discoverable parts becomes a cartographic strategy to document and display distinct systems of flesh, sinew, organ and bone. The male and female figures and their relationship to the dismembered bodily parts presents dissection as poignant symbol for the dismantling, dividing and deconstruction of matter necessary to bring about the construction and comprehension of its

²⁷⁴ Hillman and Mazzio have also drawn attention to the use of relational opposition in the Remmelin image. They also draw attention to the Medusa's head positioned to represent the female genitals. The significance of this symbolism will be discussed at a later point in this chapter. See *ibid.* xii

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.* xvi



Figure 49.

Plate headed 'Visio Prima': male and female anatomy. From an exact survey of the microcosmos or little world.

Uniform title: *Catoptrum microcosmicum* by Johann Remmelin (1583-1632).

Printed by Joseph Moxon, and sold at his shop, London 1670.

Rare books collection. Image courtesy Wellcom Library, London.

totality. One is reminded that each body fragment has a particular function that contributes to the body whole. In this sense the image clearly positions the body as a microcosmic entity that orders and configures an ensemble of interdependent biological systems. The idea that the body is its own 'little world' suggests that it is only through its division and partitioning that it can be understood, hence each fragment becomes implicated with both autonomous, relational and collective significance. Hillman and Mazzio argue,

The elevation of the fragment to a position of central significance is, indeed, very much a topical matter in contemporary culture; the rejection of all forms of totality, including the corporeal, is one of the defining characteristics of postmodernism.²⁷⁶

Mark Dion is a contemporary artist who stages diverse examinations into classificatory systems, and his works explore how objects are presented and articulated to form a constructed history of the natural and man-made world. In *Theatrum Mundi: Armarium* (fig. 50), Dion collaborates with artist Robert Williams and scholars at Cambridge University to imagine a three-part cabinet of curiosity. *Theatrum Mundi – Armarium* is what its Latin name suggests, a microcosmic theatre of the world. It is composed from objects and artefacts that specifically recall the scholarship of Ramon Llull (b. 1232–1315) and Robert Fludd (1574–1637). These two seminal cosmologists studied the origins of the universe and postulated theories on the evolution and structure of its complex parts. The objects are bifurcated into two cabinets, these parallel taxonomies based on nature and culture are in response to each of the scholar's diverging approaches towards accounting for the structure of the world.²⁷⁷ They remain joined or hinged together by a central cabinet containing a full human skeleton. Books, fossils, skulls, primitive artefacts, taxidermy, instruments and pieces of defunct technology are methodically arranged and categorically ordered to flank the skeleton.²⁷⁸

Renowned for large scale site-specific projects such as the *Tate Thames Dig* (1999) and *Dredging the Venice Canal* (1997), Dion regularly employs excavating methods to analyse and categorise found objects, often rejecting conventional systems of value and opting instead to organise and display objects based on formal resemblance.²⁷⁹ Through the process of observation and selection Dion performs a type of dissective excision, carving into a speculative world of objects and extracting pieces considered to oscillate around the theories of Llull and Fludd. By categorising each fragment based on varying degrees of resemblance, Dion enacts a gesture akin to

²⁷⁶ Ibid. xii

²⁷⁷ Susan Thompson expands of the classificatory distinctions occurring in the cabinet, noting that it was Llull who orientated the structuring of the universe around nature and the natural environment, where as Fludd's approach was from the perspective of cultural discourses constructed by man. See Thompson, Susan. "The Luminous Interval: The D. Daskalopoulos Collection." edited by Stephen Hoban & Helena Winston, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao. (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2011), 77.

²⁷⁸ Eric Mangion describes the cabinets and the objects contained, stating "the ensemble seems like the display cabinets of a collector particularly fond of frequenting flea markets, driven by a longing for the kind of old things that can still be found in our grandparent's attic." See Mangion, Eric. "Digging the Museum: Mark Dion's Exhibits." *Art Press*, no. 332 (2007): 46-51. 49

²⁷⁹ Alex Coles understands Dion's approach to classification "in terms of the laws of formal resemblance". The author also emphasises Dion's classificatory aesthetic as reflective of the performative process of digging or collecting needed to acquire the grouping of objects before classification can begin. Coles states, "The design of the cabinet not only reflects this critique of scientific laws of organisation (through spacing and shelving according to size of specimen) but also carries over the interactive quality characteristic of the earlier scenes of the project." See Alex Coles, Mark Dion, ed. *Mark Dion: Archeology* (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd, 1999), 30.



Figure 50.

Mark Dion and Robert Williams, *Theatrum Mundi: Armarium*, 2001.

Wood cabinet and assorted objects, 281 x 280.5 x 63 cm.

Installation view: In Situ/Fabienne Leclerc, Paris, October 27 – December 1, 2001.

comparative anatomical study, one based on degrees of aesthetic similarity and difference. Creating systematic order through the composition of fragments and the grouping of extracted parts anthropomorphises the cabinet as a transparent body of knowledge. It demonstrates how knowledge is constructed via systems of extraction, analysis and relational hierarchies. Dion has described the process of making the work as “creating an encyclopaedia of the methodologies of how one arranges things to make meaning.”²⁸⁰ At the same time the artist acknowledges hierarchy and ideology as the issues that inevitably taint all classificatory systems.²⁸¹ Coming back to the skeleton that acts as a hinge between both cabinets, one is reminded that the system of organs, bones and viscera contained within the body is paradigmatic to the systems, cultures and communities of collective bodies that are contained within the world. A recognisable symbol of *memento mori*, the skeleton presides over the knowledge systems inferred by this collection of fragments, and it is also a poignant reminder of the impossibility of the human race to ever comprehensively structure and comprehend the world in its entirety.

What both sources reveal is our inherent need to dismantle, systematise and structure in order to consider firstly, the relationship between part and whole; secondly, how this can be thought about in relation to the body; and lastly, how the body can act as a pattern in which to begin making sense of the world. Any classificatory system is problematic and can be held accountable for biases and skewed perspectives, however these issues are arguably inevitable to any form of constructed knowledge. Whether it is the physical body or the cabinet as type of body, both have a history of representation as microcosmic entities that contain vast and complex networks of interdependent systems that function within a larger structure. Both images act as a reminder that excavating for knowledge requires a careful and considered cutting spectacle in order to extract, dismantle and create divisions in matter. These fractured pieces then bear a direct relation or can even remain indicative of their broader origin. In other words, a part by relation implies that it is a piece of the whole.²⁸²

Part to whole: Lacan and the *corps morcelé*

Thinking about the display of body fragments and their relationship to the concept of the body whole, led me to contemplate Jacques Lacan’s notion of the *corps morcelé*, and its relationship to self recognition and whole body synthesis said to occur within the specular image.²⁸³ For Lacan, the *corps morcelé* is inextricably linked to the mirror stage; described by the psychoanalyst as a “drama,” it involves a series of alternating phantasies in which the fragmented body image and

²⁸⁰ Dion quoted by Sue Thompson. Op.cit. 77

²⁸¹ Ibid. 77

²⁸² Hillman and Mazzio also discuss the status of the part relative to the whole. Op. Cit. Hillman and Mazzio. 12-14.

²⁸³ Lacan asserts that the mirror stage occurs during infancy, between the ages of 6-18 months. He notes that given the infant’s inability to walk, stand or support their own body, he describes seeing them positioned in front of a mirror as a “startling spectacle,” given that the child still displays the cognitive ability for self identification and is able to recognise their own image. See “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” in Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. (London: Tavistock & Routledge, 1977), 1-8.

the totalised or whole body image (*gestalt*) tenuously play out against one another.²⁸⁴ Lacan describes the recognition of one's body as a whole that occurs in the specular image to be an "illusion of unity," and according to the psychoanalyst it inevitably leads to the contemplation of one's image (or ego) in a divergent or disintegrating state.²⁸⁵ This is the *corps morcelé*, the fragmented body or *body in bits and pieces* that Lacan suggests is usually made manifest in dreams, appearing in the form of disjointed limbs or independent and exoscopic organs.²⁸⁶ According to Lacan, bodily disunity is evoked by images of "castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body."²⁸⁷ All are acts which involve penetrating incisions, and as we have seen in the previous chapters, all are gestures that are associated with anatomisation and types of cutting spectacles that have been inflicted on both the body and the body-image.

Elizabeth Grosz's feminist critique and interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalytic thought has been particularly informative regarding my reading of the oppositional tension that underpins the specular image of the body and the idea of the *corps morcelé*. Lacan postulates the mirror stage to be about "an identification"; an autoscopic awareness of the self and "the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image."²⁸⁸ Grosz has echoed Lacan's insistence that it is not an unconscious or distraught phenomenon, rather it must be understood as "an intellectual act, an act of (re)cognition."²⁸⁹ This act of self-recognition is reliant on visual perception; we are reminded that the cognitive awareness of the self as a whole or synthesised being is activated through the process of looking into the mirror and perceiving one's reflection.²⁹⁰ Put simply, it is by seeing that a person is first able to identify and delineate the external boundary between themselves and the world. This in turn can be described as the point in which an astute rupture or splitting occurs that allows one to differentiate self and other, subject and object. For Lacan, there is a "twofold value" in the mirror stage, having asserted, "In the first place, it has historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the development of the child. In second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body-image."²⁹¹ It is this second affect identified by Lacan that is of most significance to this chapter and what I want to examine in relation to the cutting spectacle imposed on the body as to render it a specimen or artefact for display. The idea that we have an instinctual and primordial relationship

²⁸⁴ Lacan states, "The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic..." Op. cit. Lacan. 5

²⁸⁵ Lacan, Jacques. "Some Reflections on the Ego (1953)." In *Influential Papers from the 1950s: International Journal of Psychoanalysis Key Papers Series*, edited by Steven T. Levy and Andrew C. Furman, 293-306. (London: Karnac Books Ltd, 2003), 302.

²⁸⁶ Lacan states, "The fragmented body—which term I have also introduced into our system of theoretical references—usually manifests itself in dreams when the movement of the analysis encounters a certain level of aggressive disintegration in the individual. It appears in the form of disjointed limbs, or of those organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecutions." Op. cit. Lacan, *Écrits*. 5

²⁸⁷ Ibid. 13

²⁸⁸ Ibid. 2

²⁸⁹ Grosz goes on to describe the significance of the child's recognition of self in the mirror, stating "The recognition of itself (the child) is a complex act involving, over and above registration and perception of the sensations, an apperception: an act of attributing perception to an underlying perceiver." See Grosz, Elizabeth. *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 35.

²⁹⁰ Grosz notes that whilst Lacan privileges vision in the mirror stage and his account of the formation of the ego, perception and identification is of course possible through the other senses. The author goes on to appear to concur with Lacan, stating "Of all our senses, vision remains the one which most readily confirms the separation from subject to object. Vision performs a distancing function, leaving the looker unimplicated in or uncontaminated by its object." Ibid. 38-39

²⁹¹ Op. cit. Lacan, *Some Reflections on the Ego*. 300

with the body-image becomes particularly interesting when thinking about what it is like to experience *looking* at the body rendered in parts or pieces for the purpose of attaining anatomical knowledge.

For Lacan, body-image unity is derived through the recognition of one's image in the mirror *as oneself*. However the illusory status of such recognition led Lacan to propose the existence of an *imaginary anatomy*, which according to his examples, presents itself through symptoms of phantom limb phenomena and hysteria. Grosz has described imaginary anatomy as one of the most under-developed yet productive ideas to have emerged from Lacan's work. The author suggests that beginning in a state of "biological chaos" as fragmented, unorganised parts, "will be constructed a lived anatomy, a psychic/libidinal map of the body which is organized not by the laws of biology but along the lines of parental or familial significations and fantasies about the body – fantasies (both private and collective) of the body's organisation."²⁹² To construct the body-image and piece together its anatomy by organising a cohesive representation of its totalised parts is just that, a representation of the body. One is viewing a reflection of the body that Grosz asserts is "lived in accordance with an individual's and a culture's concepts of biology."²⁹³

What does this then mean in regards to the knowledge of human anatomy that is derived by looking at collections of anatomical specimens? Sawday acknowledges the body as a construction pieced together through images, noting that we only become familiar and knowledgeable about our topographical anatomy through mediums such as photography, X-ray and interior imaging, television documentary, illustration and even surgical demonstration. Sawday argues, "We may look into other bodies, but very rarely are we allowed to pry into our own," and although one seemingly has the ability to undertake a multitude of 'voyages within', he asserts that these entry points offer "passages into THE body, but not MY body."²⁹⁴ Richard Selzer has mused on this notion that it is virtually impossible to explore our own interior directly and first hand:

The sight of our organs is denied to us. To how many men is it given to look upon their own spleens, their hearts, and live? The hidden geography of the body is a Medusa's head one glimpse of which will render blind the presumptuous eye.²⁹⁵

Selzer's evocation of the body interior as Medusan head is a compelling metaphor for the fact that we are reliant on images that reflect the body in order to comprehend its internal structure. In chapter 2 we examined the significance of the Medusa myth as a cutting spectacle characterised by the act of decapitation and its relevance as one of the earliest images of capital punishment. Citing Kristeva and Frontisi-Ducroux's ideas on Medusa as the maker of images, the myth was unpacked further to consider its relationship with ideas of simulacra, reflection and the double

²⁹² Op. cit. Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*. 44

²⁹³ Ibid. 44

²⁹⁴ Op. cit. Sawday 7

²⁹⁵ Selzer, Richard. *Confessions of a Knife* New York: William Morrow and Co., 1979. 17. Also quoted by Sawday, see *ibid.* 8

image. The concept of body interior *as* the Medusa head is another tier of implication. As Selzer asserts, the sight of our own organs is inherently denied to us, therefore the ability to see our body's interior is akin to how Perseus was forced to negotiate Medusa's stare before he was able to sever the gorgon's monstrous head: he was reliant on the reflective surface of his shield. Responding to Selzer's metaphor, Sawday suggests that the Medusa image can be considered the "archetypal expression of body-fear."²⁹⁶ The suggestion made by Selzer, that one is unable to look upon their own heart or spleen and live, recalls the fear of looking directly at Medusa, as meeting her gaze would also end life by casting that person to stone. Hence "we are driven to understand via representation and by trace"²⁹⁷ asserts Sawday, the emphasis here being 'driven to *understand*', which implies perception and cognition, as opposed to being simply 'driven to *see*'. Recalling Lacan's insistence that the specular body-image, reliant on visual perception, was one of illusory unity, he proposed the existence of imaginary anatomy, of which Grosz argues that these 'fantasies' speak more to the cultural concepts of biology than to the actual biology of our bodies themselves. This is because, as Sawday articulates it, for one to approach the body interior it must be done through "a complex articulation of reflective glances – a structure of representation," of which, he argues, the shield of Perseus can be considered emblematic.²⁹⁸ The anatomy of one's own body is hence constructed through intricate mirror work, through 'reflective glances' and a piecing together of fragmentary images.

Coming back to what it means to be a body looking and gazing at the body in parts reveals this action to be a complex and uncanny experience. The body specimen or artefact, whether whole or rendered in parts, can be considered to provide an unsettling reflection of one's own body. Indeed, Cregan drew attention to the cadaver's ability to become a mirror or reflective surface for the individual body of the spectator present in the anatomy theatre: "The body was not only a reminder of the transience of the flesh; under the anatomical imperative it was also a mirror of the observer."²⁹⁹ Before turning to examine the structure and display of the body in parts and the body whole in the context of the anatomical museum; thinking about the body as a site that intertwines the observer and observed, or the spectacle and spectator, leads me to recall the seminal work *Mirror Check* (1970) by Joan Jonas (fig. 51). In the original piece, Jonas performs a detailed examination of her naked body with a rounded, hand-held mirror. The artist meticulously charts the surface of her skin, using the mirror to frame and isolate fragments of her own reflection. Jonas elaborates on the significance of the mirror in her work,

From the beginning the mirror provided me with a metaphor for my investigations as well as a device to alter space, to fragment it, and to reflect the audience, bringing them

²⁹⁶ Sawday argues, "Selzer's image, then, conjures with a traditional fear of gazing directly at the body-object." The author is also astute in reasoning that the Medusa metaphor for the body-interior incites a gendered fear. By equating both male and female body-interiors as femininised spaces, according to Sawday they become understood as alien. Op. cit. Sawday. 9

²⁹⁷ Ibid. 8

²⁹⁸ Ibid. 11

²⁹⁹ Op. cit. Cregan. 58

into the space of the performance. These events were rituals for an audience that was included by this reflexion.³⁰⁰

In *Mirror Check* the act of looking intentionally takes place whilst being looked at; Jonas employs the mirror in order to negotiate the body as both the spectacle and the spectator in a way that is almost surgically considered. The idea that the mirror is a tool that can split the body is a reminder that its rupturing abilities remain congruent with the functional properties of the knife. The significance of these two objects as being inherent to anatomisation was considered in the introduction to the thesis. Like the knife, the mirror in Jonas's work is a device that can alter space as well as fragment it. When this is applied to the excavation of the body for anatomical enquiry it reminds me of Deleuze and Guattari's insistence that a body can exist as a *Body without Organs* and that the sum of its parts must be considered able to function autonomously as fragments of the whole. Their reasoning for the need to consider the body as a vessel of intersecting systems, becomes apparent when the authors discuss a necessary dismantling of the body in order to do so:

Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor.³⁰¹

Imbued in this statement is a potent surgical metaphor; dismantling by way of incision (*opening up the body*) in order to observe, measure and examine *with the craft of a surveyor*. It suggests that methods used to anatomise the body have also transgressed into structural modes for displaying knowledge derived from bodily fragments. Hence the anatomical museum is a site that is significantly underpinned by a dissective epistemological discourse, one characterised by the cutting methods and anatomical modes of enquiry, first imposed on the cadaver in the anatomy theatre and secondly exerted on the body by breaking it down into fragmentary artefacts for display. In the case of most anatomical museums, the origins of the collection were as a teaching resource; specimens underwent analysis, measurement and comparison against the same part from a variety of species in order to determine difference. As Jonas makes implicit in *Mirror Work*, the body in the anatomical museum also assumes the role of the spectacle and the spectator; the body as both subject and object of enquiry cements its position once again on centre stage.

Surveying the organism: the eighteenth century anatomical museum

Musée Fragonard is located within the Ecole Vétérinaire de Maisons-Alfort, a few miles east of Paris. Opening as the Royal Veterinary School in 1766, the site has housed a public exhibition

³⁰⁰ Jonas is quoted in Wark, Jayne. *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*. (Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 189.

³⁰¹ See *How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?* Op. cit. Deleuze and Guattari.160



Figure 51.

Joan Jonas, *Mirror Check* 1970.

First performed in 1970 at the Emanu-El, YMCA, New York and the University of California, San Diego.

Photograph: Roberta Neima.

space and a cabinet of comparative anatomical specimens since its inception.³⁰² The museum's collection has naturally been orientated towards the anatomy of animals, however it also encompasses a mixture of human comparative data, including organs, bones, anatomical casts and sectional models. The Museum is now officially known as le Musée de l'École Vétérinaire de Maisons-Alfort (MévA), yet it still employs the name Musée Fragonard after its director, Honoré Fragonard (1732-1799) who famously prepared and preserved human *écorchés* between 1766 and 1771. Today it holds the most extensive collection of Fragonard's anatomical specimens in the world, and its twenty-one *écorchés* are considered to be the oldest specimens of this kind of preservation practice to still be intact.³⁰³

Before undertaking a more thorough analysis on the significance of Fragonard's *écorchés*, the Museum's layout and the curatorial approach taken towards displaying its specimen collection warrants examination. Today the design of the MévA's is modelled on the museum's early twentieth century layout (fig. 52). Having undergone periods of obscurity and closure, the Museum's most recent renovation project undertaken between 2007-2008 has intentionally reconstructed its display to appear as the Museum did in 1902, the same year the collection was reopened in a new building on the grounds of the veterinary school. There was however one significant change made in the most recent refurbishment, the room devoted to Fragonard's *écorchés*: previously the first specimens to be seen upon entering the museum, they would now be located at the very end of the building succeeding four vaulted galleries of display cabinetry containing the museum's comparative specimens.

This shift reflects an explicit curatorial approach described by the museum director as both a physical and conceptual *division* of objects.³⁰⁴ That is, the recreation of the museum as it was at the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the introduction of a separate, yet connected internal gallery known as *Le cabinet du curiosités*, intended to reflect the content of the school's initial eighteenth century cabinet, which had begun the museum collection. Expanding on this curatorial approach, the new layout of the museum reads as a metaphor for parts and their relationship to the whole. To elaborate, upon visiting the museum, one's first experience is of an extraordinarily diverse yet meticulously arranged taxonomy of close to 5000 anatomical artefacts. Progressively moving through each of the connecting galleries reveals each chamber dedicated to a grouping of bodily fragments classified under the categories of comparative anatomy, pathology or osteology. It is in the final gallery that one encounters the arresting and theatrical full body *écorchés* prepared by Fragonard. It is as if one must regard the

³⁰² The initial specimen collection was an anatomical cabinet known as the *Cabinet du Roi*. The veterinary school's cabinet was modeled on the natural history collection at the Jardin du Roi, now known as the Jardin des Plantes located on the left bank in the city centre. See Christophe Degeurce, Jonathan Simon. "Fragonard's Ecorches in the Context of a New Project for a Historical Museum of Veterinary Medicine." *Medicina nei Secoli Arte e Scienza* 21, no. 1 (2009): 37-56. 40

³⁰³ Honoré Fragonard was the cousin of the famous rococo painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806). Both anatomist and artist were included as members in the Commission des Arts during the French Revolution. In what is the first comprehensive publication on Fragonard's *écorchés* to be translated to English, Museum Curator Christophe Degeurce suggests one of the reasons why Fragonard's *écorchés* have survived and remain intact today is the unique use of Venice turpentine as a varnish to seal the finished specimen. According to Degeurce, this type of robust sealer was used by painters to seal and protect their canvases. Degeurce suggests it possible that the anatomist could have acquired both knowledge on the material and the product from his cousin. See Degeurce, Christophe. *Fragonard Museum: The Écorchés*. Translated by Philip Addis. (New York: Blast Books, 2011), 71-72.

³⁰⁴ Op. cit. Degeurce and Simon. 52-54



Figure 52.

Musée Fragonard, gallery view: cabinets containing assorted human and animal specimens.

MévA Collection 2009.

Image courtesy Musée de l'École Vétérinaire de Maisons-Alfort, France.

contribution of each intricate biological system and acknowledge the significance of individual parts that make up the body's structure, in order to see the *écorché* as the point where each of the parts symbiotically coalesce as a re-construction of the whole.

In the case of the Florentine museum *La Specola*, their renowned three-dimensional wax anatomies are juxtaposed against two-dimensional anatomical illustrations, in what could only be described as a morbid theatre of curiosities. *La Specola* was opened to the public in 1775 and remains housed within the Museo di Storia Naturale (Museum of Natural History) at the University of Florence. Considered the oldest public scientific museum in Europe, *La Specola* holds the largest collection of anatomical wax models in the world. In its formative years, the Museum was under the primary directorship of physicist and anatomist Felice Fontana (1730-1805).

Fontana's key objective was to simulate the volume and depth of the body using non-corporeal matter in order to create artificial anatomical specimens that could be employed as a teaching resource, as opposed to heavily relying on the often difficult acquisition of corpses and real body dissection.³⁰⁵ According to historian and anthropologist Renato G. Mazzolini, throughout his career Fontana's staunch line of argument was that "the human body cannot be known unless one assembles its constituent parts; one can only understand the entire body structure by analysis and synthesis i.e., by disassembling and reassembling it."³⁰⁶ Like the Musée Fragonard, the anatomical specimens of *La Specola* are meticulously arranged and displayed according to an astute taxonomic structure. The body is represented in a multitude of fragments, isolated systems and excised viscera. Currently there are approximately 1400 wax anatomical models housed in the museum inclusive of 19 full body specimens.³⁰⁷ Within the gallery spaces fragmented body parts are viewed in direct proximity to models of the body as a whole (fig. 53), an alternate method of display from Musée Fragonard's intention to reveal the body first in comparative pieces before concluding with the full body specimens. *La Specola's* approach to the display of its collection reflects the museum's decision to adopt two correlative schemes, the *systematic* and the *topographic*, in order to visualise and represent human anatomy.³⁰⁸ Visitors are presented with a structured analytical viewing of replica body parts in isolation whilst also being able to view and consider the relational significance of each part in situ, how they connect within the broader and more complex system of the human body. As a learning resource used to construct and communicate knowledge of anatomy, the collection's pedagogical output can be considered to have fostered knowledge just as much as it fostered an innate cultural curiosity to see within

³⁰⁵ Renato G. Mazzolini introduces Fontana's objectives in his essay "Plastic Anatomies and Artificial Dissections," Mazzolini goes on to outline Fontana's eventual move away from wax modeling in favour of wooden demountable models that could be handled, taken apart and put back together. See Mazzolini, Renato G. "Plastic Anatomies and Artificial Dissections." In *Models: The Third Dimension of Science*, edited by Soraya de Chadavrian & Nick Hopwood, 43-70. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

³⁰⁶ Ibid. 56

³⁰⁷ There are 10 rooms dedicated to the anatomical waxes. These succeed 24 rooms of cabinetry that contain specimens used for comparative zoology.

³⁰⁸ According to Mazzolini, the systematic scheme was intended to "display all the parts belonging to the same system, such as bones, muscles and nerves, modelling each structure separately from adjacent organs and cleaned of its attachments, as well as of vascular and nervous supplies". The topographic representations "responded to the need to view a given organ in situ with all its supplies of nerves, vessels, and lymphatics and its attachments to neighbouring organs." Op. cit. Mazzolini. 48



Figure 53.

La Specola, gallery view of Wax model body parts and whole body specimens.

Photograph: Kate Scardifield, 2011.

the confines of one's own body and comprehend its complex design. A visitor's comments made following their observation of *La Specola's* specimens in 1785 attest to this fascination of uncovering the hidden curiosities of our interior, "You see all the most secret parts of this complicated mechanism man, isolated, scattered, then reassembled, reunited, all ready harmoniously to fulfil in the general economy of the human body..."³⁰⁹

The mode of structuring one's experience of body fragments in relation to its whole, demonstrated in different capacities by the MévA and *La Specola*, can be understood as paradigmatic with what Sawday acknowledges as an architectural conceit applied to the representation of the body in Renaissance anatomical texts. The author notes that Vesalius "envisaged the body as 'constructed' and sought to replicate this construction by gradually building up the various detailed segments into an organized whole."³¹⁰ Therefore the anatomical museum exists as a type of three-dimensional anatomical text; a stage for reading and examining the structured parts in order to understand how they function within and make up the body. Three-dimensional body parts as opposed to their two-dimensional illustration can afford volume, create spatial awareness and allow viewers to acknowledge depth from a multiplicity of perspectives.

Realising the body in such a fragmentary state—dismembered, castrated, dismantled—is a haunting reminder of Lacan's idea that body unity is inherently an illusion. Dislocated, disjointed parts and excised organs galvanise the anxiety induced by the *corps morcelé* and undermine any sense of whole body unity. Christopher E. Forth and Ivan Crozier echo the ideas of Lacan, proposing that wholeness is always challenged by the appearance and acknowledgment of the parts. According to Forth and Crozier the nature of the body parts "often unpredictable functioning threatens to disrupt projections of closure and smoothness."³¹¹ As previously discussed in chapter 1, the anxiety that surrounded exposing the body interior and the taboo associated with breaching the body's surface boundary was able to be somewhat diffused by adopting sacred iconographic signifiers in both the anatomy theatre and the rendering of anatomical illustration in the early modern period.

One may recall the attention I drew to David Martin's argument – that the partitioned or mutilated body is predominantly characterised as either criminal or saintly, and that images of such bodies exist within a 'register of sanctity.' This was further affirmed in chapter 2 by examining the decapitating cuts of the guillotine and the practice used to procure silhouettes for physiognomic study; the image of the severed head was understood to operate within a iconographic economy. Now considering the proliferation of three-dimensional model body parts, I would suggest extending Martin's proposition to include the symptomatic body fragment

³⁰⁹ Romy Hilloowala, Benedetto Lanza, Maria Luisa Azzaroli Puccetti, Marta Poggesi, Antonio Martelli. "The Anatomical Waxes of La Specola." edited by University of Florence. (Florence: Arnaud, 1995), 5.

³¹⁰ Sawday continues, "the Vesalian text began with the skeleton, and then considered the muscles, the vascular system, the nervous system, the organs of nutrition and the abdominal viscera, to end with the brain." In theory, this approach was however contrary to methods used in practical dissection, where there was first the necessary dismantling of the body, breaking down the whole into its constituent parts for analysis and examination. Op. cit. Sawday. 132

³¹¹ Christopher E. Forth, Ivan Crozier, ed. *Body Parts: Critical Explorations in Corporeality*. (Lanham: Lexington Books, c2005), 6.

within the same sanctified framework. I use the term *symptomatic* to describe anatomical body artefacts, whether composed from real human viscera or replicated via a synthetic material, because the contemplation of these objects in an isolated state can reveal something that would probably not have otherwise been seen, something hidden which has been brought to light. Sawday describes that part of the body interior unexpectedly brought to the surface as “the calling card of the uncanny stranger”.³¹²

Fragments of the sacred: modelling the body in parts

The partitioning or dividing of the body into symptomatic artefacts is an established practice with complex theological underpinnings and religious implications, and is part of a broader history of significant auspicious rituals surrounding the body in death and illness. Caroline Walker Bynum has made a significant contribution to this discussion surrounding culturally ordained bodily fragmentation, particularly drawing attention to practices of dispersed burial and the veneration of saintly remains, which were prevalent throughout Europe in medieval times.³¹³ Bynum argues, “Artistic or actual, the practice of bodily partition was fraught with ambivalence, controversy and profound inconsistency.”³¹⁴ The severed or excised body fragment or artefact that results from partition can therefore be considered to exist in a dialogue with the sacred. To expand on this idea, I will consider the significance of the votive or *ex voto*, which in essence can be loosely defined as a symbolic object that is offered or invested at a consecrating site, forming part of a binding vow made by the bearer. In his significant essay *Ex-Voto: Image, Organ, Time*, art historian Georges Didi-Huberman draws attention to the multivocal implications of votive objects, their presence across a broad number of cultures and their persistent ubiquity across multiple ages.³¹⁵ For the purposes of this study I wish to draw attention specifically to the tradition of votive objects modelled on parts or fragments of the human anatomy. These include replicas of limbs, severed heads, individual organs and internal viscera, most commonly made from wax, but also produced in ceramic, stone or precious metals (fig. 54 and fig.55).³¹⁶

Comparing these examples of ceramic votives from antiquity with those from the present day reveals a remarkable ability in these objects to resist stylistic and material evolution. In most cases, anatomical votives have also denied any aesthetic assimilation towards shifting representational trends in the history of art. Didi-Huberman speaks to this idea, commenting on

³¹² Op. cit. Sawday. 9

³¹³ In particular, see Caroline Walker Bynum “Material Continuity, Personal Survival and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in its Medieval and Modern Contexts” 239-298. Discussion around bodily dismemberment as a sacred practice has also been undertaken by Jonathan Sawday, see “Sacred Anatomy and the Order of Representation” Op. cit. Sawday. 98-102.; Op. cit. Park *The Criminal and the Saintly Body*. 1-33

³¹⁴ Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 272.

³¹⁵ Didi-Huberman states, “Votive images are organic, vulgar, as disagreeable to contemplate as they are abundant and diffuse. They cut across time. They are common to highly disparate civilisations.” Didi-Huberman, G. “Ex-Voto: Image, Organ, Time.” *Esprit Createur* 47, no. 3 (2007): 7-16. 7

³¹⁶ Anatomical votives are theologically significant across a number of cultures, they remain present in acts of worship in countries throughout Central and South America, Europe as well as in India and Christian communities throughout Asia. For a historical discussion see Belting, Hans. *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994. See also Didi-Huberman, Georges. “Viscosities and Survivals: Art History Put to the Test by the Material.” In *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, edited by Roberta Panzanelli, 154-69. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008.



Figure 54.

‘Votive offerings in the form of the eyes.’ Presumed terracotta. Date unknown.

Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.



Figure 55.

‘A clay-baked viscera, Roman votive offering’. Date unknown.

Image courtesy Wellcome Library, London.

the votive object's ability to stage a 'ghostly return' into the present context.³¹⁷ He argues, "A contemporary ex-voto possesses exactly the same formal, material and procedural characteristics, the same scale and the same functions as an ex-voto made two thousand years ago."³¹⁸

Whilst in India in 2012 to undertake a studio residency at the Sanskriti Foundation in Delhi, I managed to afford some time to travel south. In old Goa I visited the Basilica of Bom Jesus, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the resting place for the relics of St Francis Xavier (1506-1552).³¹⁹ Outside the basilica, street vendors were busy selling bodily votive offerings made of wax (fig. 56). This image captures a cluster of these individual votive fragments, all isolated body parts that appear cleaved from the whole. They reveal themselves as anachronistic objects; though made of wax as opposed to terracotta or clay as in the earlier examples from antiquity, the singular arms, legs, torso fragments and truncated heads demonstrate the perennial and cross-cultural significance of the body broken down or fractured into parts. Watching these votive wax body objects being sold was a poignant reminder that even in this current day and age, a call on the sacred made via a sacrifice is a common occurrence in the hope of healing illness or relieving ailment.

The votive offering remains invested as a significant part of divine invocation, it symbolises a ritual of transference in which a persons damaged or unwell body can be symbolically imbued into a surrogate and externalised representation of one's anatomy. In Didi-Huberman words, "it becomes a matter of producing resemblances that are cut and reframed in line with the limits of the symptom."³²⁰ This suggests that this type of votive act is one reliant on a symbolic cutting practice. It is about isolating, excising and extracting the essence of an individual's ailment – there is arguably a surgical imperative embodied in each of these gestures. In her scholarship on the aesthetics of sacrifice, art historian Rebecca Zorach also evokes a potent cutting gesture that connects to the currency of the anatomical votive: "The votive image separates a body part—even symbolically severs it—to associate it, singly, with divine intervention."³²¹ This speaks to the idea of a psychic transference from the actual individual onto a resembling object. In chapter 2 a similar transference was revealed to have occurred between the guillotine victim and their *portrait de guillotiné*, and the sitter whose profile is traced then cut to produce a silhouette. It is

³¹⁷ Didi-Huberman's comments concur with Viennese art historian Julius von Schlosser, who produced a most influential study on the history of western wax portraiture in 1910. Didi-Huberman describes a "vocabulary of survival" in the scholarship of von Schlosser, noting the early 20th century art historian's fascination with wax effigies to resist formal evolution. See Didi-Huberman, Georges. "Viscosities and Survivals: Art History Put to the Test by the Material." In *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, edited by Roberta Panzanelli, 154-69. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 160.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.* 160

³¹⁹ In 1614 St Francis Xavier's right arm was detached from his remains kept at the Bom Jesus Basilica in Goa. The arm was sent to the Gesù, the major Jesuit church in Rome. This particular relic has been removed to travel internationally a very small number of times, including its 'Pilgrimage of Grace' to Australia between September–December 2012. St Francis Xavier was also the patron saint of Australia up until 1976. See "Pilgrimage of Grace", Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, accessed August 14, 2013. <http://www.sydneycatholic.org/events/pilgrimageofgrace/>

³²⁰ Didi-Huberman expands on the idea of symptom and its representation, "Someone who suffers in the right side of their chest will dedicate an ex-voto representing only the right side of a bust. And if they suffer to the very depths of their lungs or their guts, they will not hesitate to sculpt organic forms of them, half-observed and half-imagined. The anatomical ex-voto thus presents itself as a fragment, cut out in accordance with the fault-lines of the symptom itself." *Op. cit.* Didi-Huberman. *Ex Voto: Image Organ, Time*. 13

³²¹ Zorach, Rebecca. *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance*. (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 75.



Figure 56.

Wax votive offerings for sale at the Basilica of Bom Jesus, Vehla Goa, India.

Photograph: Kate Scardifield, 2012.

only through a symbolic split or cleaving a part from the whole that the votive object imbued with the essence of the original or real body, can be offered in exchange as its equivalent. Didi-Huberman describes it aptly, “the lame will keep their crutch to walk as best they can, while offering a leg of wax to incarnate their vow to walk as one should.”³²²

Theatres of the body: Fragonard’s *écorchés* and La Specola’s anatomical Venus

Armed with a better understanding of the theological and sacred implications invested in the body dismantled into parts, we can return to the anatomical collections of Musée Fragonard and *La Specola* to consider the significance of the whole body specimen as a body artefact. To briefly recall an earlier discussion in chapter 1, I considered the similarities between the anatomy theatre and the playhouse that have been made apparent in existing literature. My intention was to affirm both as sites encapsulating drama, where the body was performed or enacted as part of a spectacle. One can also consider the anatomical museum as a theatrical space, a site in which the body is again centre stage. Its deconstruction was made available for mass viewing and its reconstruction was undertaken using theatrical tropes that included tableaux, mimicry and *mis en scene*. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett speaks to this idea through her scholarship that regards the agencies of cultural display and the question, “what does it mean to show?”³²³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett asserts,

humans are detachable, fragmentable, and replicable in a variety of materials. The inherently performative nature of live specimens veers exhibits of them strongly in the direction of the spectacle, blurring still further the line between morbid curiosity and scientific interest, chamber of horrors and medical exhibition, circus and zoological garden, theater and living ethnographic display, scholarly lecture and dramatic monologue, cultural performance and staged re-creation.³²⁴

No better is the theatrical impetus of body artefact in the context of the anatomical museum expressed than in the whole body *écorchés* of preserved human viscera and in the striking replicas of the female body made meticulously in wax, known as the anatomical Venus. As previously indicated, Fragonard’s *écorchés* remain on display today at the MévA. These preserved human specimens were produced through a classical method of mummification employed by Fragonard, which involved the dissection of a cadaver and the draining of its blood and all fluids, followed by the meticulous injection of a coloured liquid, composed from wax, animal fat and plant resin.³²⁵ Great haste was needed with each procedure to avoid the specimen

³²² Op. cit. Didi-Huberman. *Ex Voto: Image Organ, Time*. 9. Didi-Huberman’s words are a reminder that for the votive offering to become a part incarnate of the whole, there is a vow that is made by the individual to affirm their devotion. Historian Robert Maniura has examined votive objects from the perspective of pilgrimage and performing acts of devotion. Maniura argues, “the material outcome of each vow was an artefact, but what was vowed in each case was an action: to make, to offer, to place.” See Maniura, Robert. “Ex Votos, Art and Pious Performance.” *Oxford Art Journal* 32, no. 3 (2009): 409-25.. 34

³²³ Op. cit. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2

³²⁴ Ibid. 34.

³²⁵ From corpse to *écorché*, it is important to acknowledge that the process of rendering the specimen was not without violence inflicted upon the deceased body. In order to expel the waxy, fatty fluid into the vascular system, first the rib cage needed to be sawn open to reveal the thorax and pericardium (a membrane like sac that surrounds the heart and bases

turning rancid. Arteries and veins would be squeezed and drained of their content before the body was submerged in an alcoholic bath for up to 15 days. Once drained and dried, the body was dredged up, suspended and arranged in a pose that seems more fitting of an ancient marble statue than that of a medical specimen.

The *Cavalier (Horseman)* is arguably the most remarkable of Fragonard's *écorchés* (fig. 57). The original display of the embalmed man on horseback is documented as having been cast in the centre of a dramatic tableau, flanked by a cavalry of smaller *écorchés* riding atop equine skeletons.³²⁶ Its clinical objective was to present examples of both human and equine myology, however the specimen in its original tableau can also be read as a clear invocation of the Horseman of the Apocalypse, the Christian biblical fable that precedes the Last Judgment. Although frozen in a position that suggests animated movement and life, the *écorché* is a stark reminder of death and mortality given its appearance, which can be likened to a body in the state of mid-decomposition. The religious connotations and suggestion of an impending Judgment Day, also enforce the reading of the *écorché* as *memento mori*.

In a contemporary context, the *Cavalier* has become yet again topical, due to the ethical controversy and notoriety surrounding Gunther von Hagens and his *Körperwelten* or *Body Worlds* exhibition. A researcher from the Institute of Anatomy at the University of Heidelberg, Von Hagens is the instigator behind an international touring exhibition of 'plastinated' human bodies, which, like the historic *écorchés* produced by Fragonard, are presented as living and animated within tableaux.³²⁷ Von Hagens has produced what can be considered an homage to Fragonard's *Cavalier*, a strikingly similar plastinated horse and rider are included in his contemporary exhibition.³²⁸ Another significant example of Fragonard's whole body specimens is the *écorché* known as *Samson* or *Man with a Mandible* (fig. 58). Manipulated into a position which suggests brutish strength and defensive aggression, the *écorché* clutches a mandible (the jawbone of a horse or ass), his glass eyes stare defiantly and his top lip curls in anger, he raises his right hand as if prepared to strike. The specimen's namesake evokes the biblical story of Samson and the Philistines, inciting an outwardly pious and retributive fable. It has been suggested that this particular specimen was originally displayed at the entry to the cabinetry galleries of comparative anatomy specimens, allowing spectators to contemplate the whole body structure before viewing it in a multiplicity of deconstructed parts.³²⁹

of pulmonary artery and aorta). A detailed description of the classical methods employed by Fragonard is outlined by Christophe Degueurce. See Degueurce, Christophe. "The Celebrated Écorchés of Honoré Fragonard, Part 2: The Details of the Technique Used by Fragonard." *Clinical Anatomy* 23, no. 3 (2010): 258-64.

³²⁶ Op. cit. Degueurce. *Fragonard Museum: The Écorchés*. 86

³²⁷ Much of the controversy surrounding von Hagen's exhibition is whether the preserved cadaver specimens on display have been ethically acquired. Much criticism has been lauded over the provenance of corpses being unacknowledged. In 2004 von Hagen returned seven corpses to China after viable information surfaced that these were the bodies of executed criminals. See Harding, Luke. "Von Hagens Forced to Return Controversial Corpses to China." *The Guardian*, January, 23 2004., accessed July 17, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/jan/23/arts.china>. For an informative discussion on Von Hagens's exhibition and plastination practice analysed in relation to the body displayed in 19th and 20th century scientific museums, see Canadelli, Elena. "Scientific Peep Show: The Human Body in Contemporary Science Museums." *Nuncius-Journal of the History of Science* 26, no. 1 (2011): 159-84. See also Van Dijk, José "Bodyworlds: The Art of Plastinated Cadavers." In *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*, edited by Margaret M. Lock Judith Farquhar, 640-57. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

³²⁸ Op. cit. Degueurce and Simon. 39

³²⁹ Ibid. 94



Figure 57.

Honoré Fragonard, *Cavalier* c.1761-66.
Preserved human and equine specimen, MévA Collection.



Figure 58.

Honoré Fragonard, *Samson or Man with a Mandible* c.1761-66
Preserved human specimen, MévA Collection.

In contrast to Fragonard's upright and austere male *écorchés*, the wax modeled female body, commonly referred to as the anatomical Venus, was represented in a reclining state, strikingly similar to that of a supine corpse.³³⁰ Described by art historian Roberta Ballestriero as 'lavish dolls', the female models in the collection at *La Specola* recline with eyes softly open, holding what scholar describes as "a gentle look, a languid gaze".³³¹ Produced at the hands of the museum's chief modeler Clemente Susini (1754-1814), each wax Venus is presented lying horizontal, positioned on a silken cushion and held within a glass coffin-like viewing cabinet. These cabinets, as we have seen in a previous image, occupy the centre of nearly all the exhibition galleries and are flanked by replica body fragments and illustrations of sectional anatomy. Of particular significance is the anatomical wax known as the 'Medici Venus' (fig. 59 and fig. 60); a demountable model where the stomach casing is removable in order to reveal the organisation of individual organs, the reproductive system and the presence of a developing foetus. Ballestriero has drawn attention to the fact that the outward appearance of the female's body reveals no signs or indication of pregnancy. In fact, my first-hand experience of viewing the other female anatomical wax models in the collection revealed that the archetypal Venus was always represented as a young, sensual and most importantly, desirable woman. The passive body language, the languid gaze, and blatant attention towards fertility are underpinned by what can be described as a sadomasochistic approach to comprehending female anatomy. One is reminded of the artistic tropes employed to illustrate the female body examined in chapter 1. The absence of any clinical neutrality is once again evident; the model's suggestive recline explicitly expresses sexual availability and promotes a voyeuristic gaze.

The anatomical illustrations previously examined in chapter 1 demonstrated the presence of moral allegory and religious parable engrained within images of the flayed body that accompanied anatomical texts. Regarding Fragonard's *écorchés* and *La Specola's* Medici Venus one can see how tropes of the sacred and the theatrical coalesced to become sculpted three-dimensional versions of these spectacular and uncanny body images. Ornamental and aesthetically seductive, these whole body artefacts embody intentional artistic strategies that can be considered to deter from the graphic realities of dissection and bodily dismemberment. In the context of the anatomical museum there was the absence of experiencing first-hand the process of the body's division; viewers gazed at the *dissected* in absence of a *dissection*. One is reminded of the discussion in chapter 2 regarding the guillotine, which considered the invisibility of cutting or the disappearance of incision, leaving only a mark or trace of its existence through the object it carves or severs into being. DalMolin's proposition that 'the cut is always already past' lead her to argue that it could only be signified within the realm of fantasy – "a fantasy of cutting says nothing about the implementation of the cut itself."³³² This notion of a 'fantasy of cutting' speaks to Lacan's idea of illusionary unity and its exacerbating effect of imaginary anatomy. It has been documented by a number of scholars that Fragonard's *écorchés* largely served a decorative role within the context of the museum, given the collection's primary purpose was as a veterinary

³³⁰ These female wax anatomies were said to have been called Venus in reference to the classical *Venus of Medici* sculpture. See Ballestriero, R. "Anatomical Models and Wax Venuses: Art Masterpieces or Scientific Craft Works?" *Journal of Anatomy* 216 (2010): 223-34. 2

³³¹ Ibid. 228

³³² Previously quoted in chapter 1. Op. cit. DalMolin. 5



Figure 59.

The Medici Venus, 1782.

Demountable anatomical wax model by Clemente Susini and Guiseppe Ferrini.

Photograph: Saulo Bambi, Museo di Storia Naturale.

Image courtesy Museo di Storia Naturale Università di Firenze, section Zoologica *La Specola*, Italy.



Figure 60.

The Medici Venus, 1782.

Demountable anatomical wax model (interior view) by Clemente Susini and Guiseppe Ferrini.

Photograph: Saulo Bambi, Museo di Storia Naturale.

Image courtesy Museo di Storia Naturale Università di Firenze, section Zoologica *La Specola*, Italy.

teaching tool.³³³ During Fontana's directorship he advocated for a shift away from wax specimens to interactive wooden models given the great difficulties involved in handling the delicate wax objects.³³⁴ In both cases these whole body artefacts were essentially artistic representations of the anatomised body, and the pedagogical lens that frames them is more due to the scientific and museological context they continue to inhabit as opposed to their functional properties as anatomical teaching tools.

The body dismantled, made fragmentary and broken down into parts has a history rich with scientific, artistic and theological implications. For contemporary artists the fecund territory of the anatomical collection connected to the museum or institution remains a dense and complex site in which response, critique and alternative imaginings are possible. Turning to examine the work of Catherine Truman and Christine Borland, I wish to draw attention to their distinct yet immensely significant practices that can be understood to operate within a contemporary culture of dissection in visual arts. Truman and Borland each enact their own process of anatomical enquiry that reflects on the representation of the body fractured into parts for medical scrutiny. In the process of analysing key works, what I hope to reveal is their engagement with history as a material to investigate, excavate, uncover and hollow out. In their own distinct ways each artist looks to the artefacts of the anatomical museum, exhuming their essence into the present context in a way that is akin to Walter Benjamin's understanding of historical materialism. Each artist intentionally engages with history and objects conventionally restricted to historical scientific discourse in order to afford "a unique experience of the past."³³⁵ By making incisions and extracting their subject matter from history, Truman and Borland rethink, remember and re-envision how we have come to represent and garner knowledge of the body by encoding its parts.

Catherine Truman: tender cuts

In what can be described as an enquiry that seeks to imagine and enact the experience of the lived body via an extrapolation of its parts, the work of Catherine Truman can be considered to activate Lacan's conceit of imaginary anatomy and propose new ways of thinking about a constructed representation of the body interior. Truman's cutting spectacle is activated through intentional inflictions of the hand in the making process and an emphasis on sensation and connection that derives from the handmade.³³⁶ Truman's meticulously carved sculptures imagine the body as a multiplicity of disparate yet interconnected fragments. The artist's corporeal objects are

³³³ See in particular Degueurce, who states that the museum's "large collection of comparative anatomy and pathology also acquired many 'exotic' animals and other elements that would not have been encountered in France. Thus, other pieces joined Fragonard's écorchés in illustrating the prestige and standing of the veterinary school rather than serving to teach students useful anatomical knowledge." Op. cit. Degueurce & Simon. 42

³³⁴ For a detailed examination of the production and utility of models in *La Specola's* collection see Märker, A. "The Anatomical Models of La Specola: Production, Uses, and Reception." *Nuncius-Journal of the History of Science* 21, no. 2 (2006): 295-321.

³³⁵ Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Pimlico ed. (London: Random House, 1999), 262.

³³⁶ Margot Osborne outlines Truman's innate connection to the handmade object and importance of making with the artist's own hands. Osborne cites, "the importance of materials-based knowledge as a vehicle for creative language and the aesthetic of the intimate gaze." See Osborne, Margot. "Parallel Universe: The Grey Street Workshop." *The Grey Street Workshop*, accessed November 1, 2013. <http://graystreetworkshop.com/p/publications..> Truman is also a certified practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method, centred on movement, posture, breath and proprioception, see the Australian Feldenkrais Guild Inc. accessed November 1, 2013. <http://www.feldenkrais.org.au/about-feldenkrais-method>.

essentially illusionary representations, though as we have seen such artistic illusions are no less valid than their clinical counterparts, given that any representation of the body interior is derived through reflective glances and forms of representational trace. Truman's work offers another approach to reflect on the body interior, one that is constructed through tactile engagement and enacted interventions into both organic and synthetic materials. At first appearance, these objects can appear lodged somewhere between anatomical specimen and natural history artefact, a synthesis that reflects on Truman's ongoing research into anatomical illustration, biological specimen collections and the history of medical imaging. Curator and arts writer Julie Ewington has proposed that a correlative methodology exists between Truman's process-driven approach to making and the anatomist's practice that stages an investigation into the depths of corporeal matter.³³⁷ Truman's practice reveals that the body remains a contemporary concern with regards to its concealed volume and hidden depths. Like the anatomist, Truman undertakes investigations into the body's spatial configuration through a carving and cutting process, a methodology that allows the artist to conjure and make visible the body's invisible interior terrain. Ewington has drawn attention to the significance of Truman's employment of carving and cutting techniques, working delicately and dextrously into materials such as English Lime wood and wax. Ewington states,

in the act of carving the artist starts from the outside (the body, the block of wood), and feels herself into a place where desire and image, active and imagined body meet.³³⁸

In this respect one can conjure the image of the anatomist making their first incision into a cadaver; by breaching the boundary of skin through their own process of cutting and carving into viscera they expose, reveal and delineate the intricate systems and objects that are contained within. In *Carving without portrait* (fig. 61) Truman suggests the exposure of muscle beneath muscle, where the raw tendons are organically shown to overlap creating what appears to be evidence of the body's mycological webbing. The artist alludes to the peeling back of these tendons and sinew in order to expose a reversed grain of fleshy fibres underneath. As previously made apparent, the peeling back and revealing of the body's layers is a significant visual strategy operative in historical anatomical imaging, most notably, the gesture of peeling back layers of skin and flesh were witnessed in images of the *écorché* or *flayed man*, introduced in chapter 1. Truman's work, however, is absent of a figure that symbolises the body as the container of such visceral objects; the work resists any type of clinical classification and its origin remains impossible to locate within the body's mappable schema. The object therefore appears to be of the body, yet it alludes any ability to be geographically placed within the body's structure. In isolation, *Carving without Portrait* can recall the anatomical votive object. It can also be read as what was described earlier in the chapter as a symptomatic body fragment or, as Sawday characterised that part of the body interior unexpectedly brought to the surface, "the calling card of the uncanny stranger."³³⁹

³³⁷ Op. cit. Ewington, "Catherine Truman: Invisible Places to Be." In *Seppelt Contemporary Art Awards*. 43

³³⁸ Ibid. 43

³³⁹ Previously quoted. See Op. cit. Sawday 9



Figure 61.

Catherine Truman, *Carving Without Portrait* 2005.

English lime wood, paraffin wax, shu niku ink, 43 x 26 x 10 cm.

Collection of the National Gallery of Australia. Photograph: Grant Handcock.

Image courtesy the artist.



Figure 62.

Catherine Truman, *Ongoing Being* 2010.

Mixed media including: hand-carved English Lime wood, hand-carved Chinese Box wood, eucalypt twigs, heat-forms styrene, plastic, paint, glass, steel, bone, marine sponges, sponge rubber, canvas, wax, paper.

80 x 204 x 83 cm. Photograph: Grant Handcock.

Image courtesy the artist.

In the exhibition *Abstract Nature* at the Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide (2010), Truman presented a new work titled *Ongoing Being* (fig. 62). The work evolved through a considered and experimental approach to found objects and the artistic staging of tactile and intimate material interventions. *Ongoing Being* was described by curator Margot Osborne as a “process-driven tableau.”³⁴⁰ From the artist’s perspective Truman considered the emphasis of the work to be about the body as an experience in relation to process, hence in her own words, the work “is never finished. There are no neat conclusions”³⁴¹. *Ongoing Being* comprises a collection of natural and synthetic objects that obliquely reference ambiguous organic and corporeal material, incorporating eucalypt twigs and marine detritus, along side carved pieces of English Lime and Chinese Box wood. Once lacquered, polished and waxed the assortment of objects comes to reference a taxonomic arrangement of bodily fragments. According to Truman, each piece evolved in response to the previous piece that was made. This instigation of a piece-by-piece relational approach to the development of the work, and their subsequent presentation and display as specimens encased within a glass vitrine, recalls the classificatory methods of cataloging and arranging comparative specimens within the context of the anatomical museum. In the exhibition catalogue essay that expands on the work, Osborne asserts,

It is almost impossible at times to distinguish which objects are found in nature, which ones are carved in box wood, and which are hybrids where organic materials have been reconfigured into new forms.³⁴²

In *Ongoing Being* one again experiences a transgression and confounding of boundaries activated via Truman’s processes of selection, incision and extraction. In relation to the cutting gestures enacted by contemporary artists that this thesis has already explored, evidence of the cutting spectacle’s ability to generate an affect of the uncanny is again revealed in the work of Truman. In *Ongoing Being* the familiar is once again coupling with the unfamiliar, expressing a mimetic intent: the viscera-like objects speak as a series of fractured bodily artefacts, but collectively read as a *corps morcelé*.

Truman’s engagement with the anatomical museum, the fragmented body artefact and its modes of representation are again reflected in the series *Eye Carvings* (fig. 63). In what could be described as a vignette of facial fragments, each piece offers a differing expression of the eye and brow achieved through the varied contortion of the interior facial muscles. Alluding to both the process of looking and to how the externalised expression of emotion has been represented, Truman’s arrangement and display of these fragmented facial specimens aligns them with the eighteenth century specimen collections used to augment anatomical teaching and enquiry. *Eye Carvings* recalls the work of Italian anatomist Anna Morandi (1714-1774), a significant anatomical wax modeller during the eighteenth century who worked closely with her husband Giovanni Manzolini (1700-1755), also a distinguished wax modeller, to develop anatomical

³⁴⁰ Osborne, Margot. "Abstract Nature ", edited by Samstag Museum of Art. (Adelaide: University of South Australia, 2010), 34.

³⁴¹ Ibid. 34

³⁴² Ibid. 34

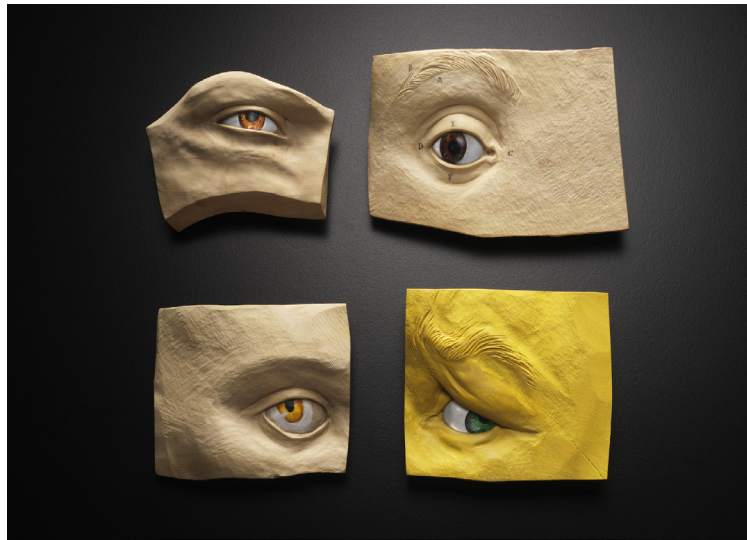


Figure 63.

Catherine Truman, *Eye Carvings* 2007.

Clockwise from top left: *Crunchie Eye*, Hand-carved Chinese Boxwood, mother of pearl, acrylic, confectionary wrapper (Crunchie), paint, 80 x 60 x 10 mm. *Time Out Eye*, Hand-carved Chinese Boxwood, mother of pearl, acrylic, confectionary wrapper (Time Out), paint 100 x 65 x 20 mm. *Mint Pattie Eye*, Hand-carved Chinese Boxwood, mother of pearl, acrylic, confectionary wrapper (Mint Pattie), paint, 75 x 65 x 15 mm. *Painted Eye*, Hand-carved Chinese Boxwood, paint, Hand-carved Chinese Boxwood, paint 80 x 60 x 10 mm.

Photograph: Grant Handcock. Image courtesy the artist.



Figure 64.

Comparative eye specimens in wax (date unknown), Anna Morandi (1714-1774).

Museo di Palazzo Poggi, Università di Bologna, Italy.

teaching resources and display specimens at the University of Bologna.³⁴³ In 2011 I visited the Museo di Palazzo Poggi, housed in the Archiginnasio building in Bologna. Along with its famed anatomical theatre discussed in chapter 1 are galleries dedicated to the anatomical wax models produced by Ercole Lelli, Morandi and Manzolini. Truman's work appears to directly respond to Morandi's studies of the eye (fig. 64); commissioned as part of a teaching resource for the University's Medical School, Morandi's models became part of the University's public display collection documenting the wonders and the curiosities of the human body for medical students and lay visitors. In reference to Morandi's models of the eye, their composition suggests a level of ornament that subtly recalls the seductive tropes of tableaux and mimicry previously discussed in relation to the specimens of the *Méva* and *La Specola*. In Truman's work, the subtle lettering present on the top right hand specimen reveals an acknowledgment towards the history of codification exerted over the body object. The artist's invocation of this historical wax model aesthetic is a reminder that anatomical representation is never clinically neutral but always mediated through a cultural and temporal lens, both in its production and in its observation.

By engaging in a dialogue with fragmented body artefacts, contemporary artists like Truman continue to negotiate the dense and complex terrain that is the history of the body reduced to its parts for the acquisition of knowledge. Examining how artists go about enacting such enquiries in relation to this notion of cutting as a form of excavation—a process of uncovering and hollowing out—leads me to further consider Walter Benjamin's ideas on the notion of historical materialism. In his essay "Thesis on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin proposed that the past can only be grasped as an image and that this image is fleeting and transient, resulting in a need to seize it before it disappears.³⁴⁴ Benjamin goes on to warn against historicism's inevitable siding with the rulers or victors of an era, what are essentially the dominant authorities that exert power and demand submission over those who are powerless. According to Benjamin, "the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment."³⁴⁵ Such spoils need to be considered in the context of the anatomical collection: how and where specimens have been procured raises a number of ethical questions that affirm Benjamin's suggestion that these objects be viewed with cautious detachment. From here, Benjamin makes the assertion,

For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to

³⁴³ In her comprehensive publication that regards Morandi's life and work, Rebecca Messbarger argues that the Morandi's contribution to the University and her superior craftsmanship in modeling has been largely ignored or marginalised in the majority of historical texts that document wax anatomies, instead the majority of scholarship was directed towards the work of her husband. See Messbarger, Rebecca. *The Lady Anatomist: The Life and Works of Anna Morandi Manzolini*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010.

³⁴⁴Op. cit. Benjamin *Illuminations*. 255

³⁴⁵ Ibid. 256

another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.³⁴⁶

Christine Borland: the dead teach the living

There is a crucial interplay between the historical and the contemporary body artefact in the work of Scottish artist Christine Borland. Much of Borland's practice is centred on a negotiation with past modes of representation imposed on the body in a medical or scientific context, particularly with regards to questions of identity and the ethics of display. Borland is renowned for working with university institutions and medical museums, regularly adopting forensic methodologies to investigate the identity and provenance of specimens held within these collections.³⁴⁷ Nicky Bird of the Glasgow School of Art has described Borland's imperative as an "impulse to preserve."³⁴⁸ The artist's work predominantly charts areas of sculpture and installation, with Borland regularly staging acts of casting and replicating to produce objects in simulacra to the collection specimens she is engaged with. In this respect, Borland's works is often involved in creating a double or a mimetic representation of an already existing body artefact. The artist intentionally reinterprets and recontextualises objects characterised for scientific viewing in a way that provokes a new line of questioning with regards to their procurement, presentation and encoding as a specimens of bodily knowledge. Borland notably takes an interdisciplinary approach to this type of enquiry, evident in her seminal work *Second Class Male, Second Class Female* (fig. 65) which began with the artist obtaining two commercially available human skulls from an osteological supplier.³⁴⁹ From here, Borland worked with forensic experts to stage an investigative process that allowed the artist to gather data relating to each specimen's race, gender and age.³⁵⁰ Using this data in combination with forensic imaging technology allowed Borland to develop a three-dimensional facial reconstruction of each skull. She then used the results of this reconstructive imaging to produce two bronze heads, bestowing each specimen a reverent identity afforded through the recreation of their face, drawing stark attention to the implications of trade in relation to the body in parts.

According to Bird, Borland's work "has consistently been directed to the traces of unidentified others caught, for whatever reasons, in the cracks of medical institutions and their archives."³⁵¹ In

³⁴⁶ Ibid. 248

³⁴⁷ Borland has collaborated with a number of medical institutions, and maintained an ongoing collegial relationship with the Medical Faculty at the University of Glasgow. She was also the visiting fellow at the Medical Research Council's Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the university between 1998-1999. See Lu, Peih-ying. "Medical Communication as Art - an Interview with Christine Borland." *Language and Intercultural Communication* 10, no. 1 (2010): 90-99. 91

³⁴⁸ Bird, Nicky. "Christine Borland: Fruitmarket Gallery Edinburgh." *Art Monthly* Feb, no. 303 (2007): 28-29. 29

³⁴⁹ According to Bird, the skulls came from India before a government ban occurred on the trade of human remains following questionable sources of supply. See *ibid.* 28. The contention surrounding the trade and commercial purchase of human remains also reflect changes to the Human Tissue Act in the UK 2004, which came into effect in 2006. A significant intention the update to these laws was to prioritise and uphold the need for appropriate consent. See "Human Tissue Act 2004," The National Archives, UK, accessed October 7, 2013. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/30/contents>

³⁵⁰ The title of the work is documented to be in response to the quality of the bones being deemed 'second class'. See "Christine Borland: Preserves." edited by The Fruitmarket Gallery. Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2006., exhibition guide accessed October 7, 2013. <http://www.fruitmarket.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/file/ChristineBorland.pdf>

³⁵¹ Op. cit. Bird. 28

this respect the artist's concern lays predominantly with issues surrounding agency and consent in relation to the body artefact. In Borland's work *The Dead Teach the Living* (fig. 66) developed for Sculpture Projects Münster in 1997, the artist revisited seven forgotten specimens held in the collection of the Anatomical Institute of the Faculty of Medicine at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität.³⁵² The original specimens are a series of life and death masks cast from plaster and clay and are believed to have been acquired for the University collection in the early 20th century, however the date of their creation and in most cases, their provenance remains unknown. Only small amounts of information with regards to each specimen's origin was able to be gathered by the artist: two of the clay cast heads bore inscriptions describing them as representing "Characteristics of the Nordic Race," one is considered to be of a unknown male from the island of Borneo, another is presumed to be of Southwest African origin, whilst approximately four of these specimens had simply been labelled "Origin unknown."³⁵³ Using computer-aided technology to scan each artefact, Borland produced a replica of each specimen in high-density polymer plastic, the artist's intention in her own words was to employ "a means of replication that was to do with the future rather than to do with the past" citing that she wanted to abstain from using a hands-on method of casting believing the objects had already "been touched enough."³⁵⁴ Each of the heads were then presented on individual concrete plinths at the site where the university's first anatomical theatre stood between 1781-1849.

In Borland's work these forgotten physiognomic objects relegated to the confines of institutional history are exhumed and reimagined to exist within the context of the contemporary. The significance of this act can be analysed from a number of cultural and ethical points of departure, however not all of these are able to be thoroughly unpacked within the parameters of this research. The implications of this work I wish to address concern Borland's staging of an anatomical enquiry as a form of excavation, firstly in relation to the transgression between the historical and the contemporary undertaken by the artist and secondly, in the effect of the double achieved through Borland's process of replication that leads to an inferred state of sacrality in the work that can also be considered as a gesture of memorialisation. According to Kristen Hutchinson, Borland's approach to negotiating the tiers of historical context and the conventional scientific coding afforded to these body artefacts is to employ layering as a metaphor that reflects the relationship of these objects to the "various layers of history" they are forced to negotiate.³⁵⁵ Hutchinson states,

By referring to several layered moments of history, Borland shows history not as a linear progression but as one that folds back onto itself, circular and conflicted.³⁵⁶

³⁵² The title of the work *The Dead Teach the Living* is in reference to Vesalius and, according to Borland, this powerful phrase was visible on the dissection theatre wall when she first visited the university to begin research for the project. Op. Cit. Peih-ying. 97

³⁵³ Hutchinson, Kristen. "Remembering the Dead: Past, Present and Future in Christine Borland's the Dead Teach the Living." *Object: Graduate Research and Reviews in the History of Art and Visual Culture*, no. 7 (2005): 62-81. 64

³⁵⁴ Borland is quoted in an interview with Peih-ying Lu in 2010. In the interview Borland also discusses the technology used in the work *The Dead Teach the Living*, noting that today this type of technology has not only improved immensely, but is readily available. At the time when the project was undertaken in 1997, Borland was using what was considered leading edge technology. The process involved each specimen undergoing three-dimensional scanning then the objects were produced by a fabrication company used predominantly for the German car industry. See Op. cit. Lu. 98

³⁵⁵ Op. cit. Hutchinson. 76-77

³⁵⁶ Ibid. 77



Figure 65.

Christine Borland, *Second Class Male, Second Class Female* 1996.

Two human skulls, documents, two bronze heads, plinths, plaster skulls, plaster moulds.

Dimensions variable. Photograph: Alan Dimmick.

Image courtesy The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.



Figure 66.

Christine Borland, *The Dead Teach the Living* 1997.

Installation view, detail. Sculpture Projects Münster.

Dimensions variable.

Image courtesy Roman Mensing.

Where I agree with Hutchinson's understanding of Borland's work undermining historical linearity, from the perspective of my research I would assert that Borland's most significant gesture is not one of metaphorical layering, but rather it is the artist's enactment of a cutting metaphor to excavate and uncover the historically marginalised. To elaborate, Borland's first action was to undertake an informed and decisive process of selection and extraction to determine the specimens within the faculty's collection she would work with. This act in itself can be thought about as surgical, in that the artist needed to draw a line (or cut a shape) around the parameters of her project and the objects of her enquiry. Remembering back to Foucault, he insisted that "knowledge is not made for understanding, it is made for cutting"³⁵⁷, a proposition that directly aligns the act of cutting with the discernment of knowledge. In this respect, one can think about Borland's work as making an incision into history where characteristics of depth and volume can be applied to its recesses. Borland's extraction and exhumation of these artefacts creates a rupture within the linear or chronological construction of time, echoing Benjamin's assertion that the task of the historical materialist was "to blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history."³⁵⁸ In this respect, Borland's gesture is one of cleaving a void and making space for the individuals which history has reduced to objectified specimens; Borland instigates a process of re-personification of the body artefact as a way to acknowledge their unknown identity in the context of the present. Significantly, Borland's metaphorical cutting gesture is also present through her use of scanning and printing technology to produce a double or exact replica of each specimen. The connection I am proposing here is with the mirror; one will recall earlier discussions of it as an image making tool, analogous with the knife as both objects have the ability to bring about rupture. Borland brings into light the role of the body replica as an artefact or effigy that has operated, and continues to operate, across medical, scientific and visual art practice. The works also recall how the study of anatomy that dismantles the body into a series of fractured or fragmented parts, is inextricably linked to discourses of portraiture and classical sculpture. Kristen Hutchinson has posed the question "does memorializing these subjects within the Western tradition of the portrait bust distance them from the category of 'other' or does it reinforce it?"³⁵⁹ One can interpret Borland's work as addressing this 'other' associated with the specimen through her intention of re-remembering these objects outside the dusty cabinets of the medical faculty. Placed on the site of the original anatomical theatre, Borland presents the cast body specimen directly in line with the anatomical act of dissection – an inquiry that above all was steeped in a ritualised practice of dismembering, classifying and coding for the purpose of colonising bodily knowledge.

To briefly reflect, this chapter has explored the significance of the body rendered in pieces or cut up into parts. The eighteenth century anatomical museum has been examined as a site in which a cutting spectacle occurred through the ordering, classifying and display of body artefacts. Thinking further about the relationship between the body in fragments and the body whole has

³⁵⁷ Previously quoted in the introduction. Op. Cit. Foucault. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. 154

³⁵⁸ Op. cit. Benjamin *Illuminations*. 263

³⁵⁹ Ibid. Hutchinson. 70

afforded an understanding of the sacred symbolism that can be imbued within body parts. Through an analysis of works by Catherine Truman and Christine Borland, the significance of constructing knowledge of the body through its representation as an image or artefact has revealed that both artists are engaged in a critical dialogue with the politics and ethics of the body's display. Importantly, this chapter has considered anatomical enquiry as a type of excavation, a process of uncovering and hollowing out. At this point in the thesis a culture of dissection in contemporary art is evident and the cutting spectacle has been revealed as a key signifier that maintains multiple historical implications. The following chapter will consider how my work contributes to further understanding the idea of art practice as a form of anatomical enquiry and how by enacting my own incising gesture I am making my own cut– creating a space in which to consider and position my practice within the field.

Chapter 4
Art Practice as Anatomical Enquiry
or
Is the Whole Ever Really the Sum of its Parts?

Significance clings to the soul just as the organism clings to the body, and it is not easy to get rid of either.

– Deleuze and Guattari.³⁶⁰

In “An Ethnographic Study of Art as a Discipline Concealed in the Beliefs and Practices of Two Artists,” J.S Carroll and Neil C.M Brown draw attention to the “concealed frames of reference” that motivate artists – ideas and ways of making that are not explicitly acknowledged, yet are manifest in the modes and forms of making that contribute to a particular characterisation of a practice.³⁶¹ Their study argues that issues of concealment can relate to both the production and the display of artwork; this is something I have come to interpret as a type of veiling or an obfuscation that can occur between the artist and the work. Outlining their need for the study, Carroll and Brown assert,

The practices of contemporary artists are most often concealed and their unconcealment is contingent upon the imprecise interpretations and projections of critics, and from the artists themselves. It is a condition of craftsmanship and an irony of avant garde practice in the arts, that the way artists arrive at what they do is concealed in both the performance and in the products they make.³⁶²

When I first read this article by Brown and Carroll in 2007 it made me think quite intensely about the idea of practice; what is seen and what is unseen. As more time unfolded (and in the context of this research), I have begun to think more about the space that inherently arises between the idea and outcome of a work. My impetus to undertake this research into cultures of dissection and what broader implications they offer with regards to contemporary art practice is a direct result from my own studio investigations across ideas, matter, material and form. Put simply, before thinking about the outcome of a work I wanted to consider its genesis; I wanted to understand why the cut and the act of cutting had become a method and a way of working that was present throughout so many aspects of my art practice.

This chapter will examine a selection of key works I have developed through the research, and reflect on their ability to activate the historical and theoretical underpinnings considered throughout the first three chapters. Having investigated a field of seminal artists whose works

³⁶⁰ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari. "How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?" In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 149-66. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. 160

³⁶¹ J.S Carroll, Neil C.M Brown. "An Ethnographic Study of Art as a Discipline Concealed in the Beliefs and Practices of Two Artists." *Australian Art Education* 21, no. 1 (1998): 21-34. 23

³⁶² *Ibid.* 23

demonstrate the presence of a culture of dissection within contemporary art practice, this chapter will also aim to contextualise my work within this culture, and reflect on the significance of my approach to art making as a form of anatomical enquiry.

In 2010 the first series of works I produced in response to my textual research considered the relationship between ‘cutting open’ and ‘cutting out.’ In doing so I examined the historical intersections between comparative anatomy and the pseudo-science of physiognomy, the intention being to divide, fragment and dislocate images of the body into countless parts in the pursuit of understanding the relationship of part to part, and part to whole. This body of work formed the exhibition *The whole and the sum of its parts* at MOP Projects (2010). Parallel to this I produced the first of three conference papers to address my research on the historical and contemporary intersections being proposed by my work.³⁶³ It is not my intention in this chapter to present an examination of my studio outcomes in a chronological order. Instead, concurrent with the methodology for my research, which transgresses between the historical and the contemporaneous, I have again drawn on Foucault’s understanding of knowledge in terms of its “oscillating reign” as opposed to asserting its progression via a linear trajectory over time.³⁶⁴ Additionally, my focus on specific works that have resulted from my creative studio research is also intended to augment the prominent conceptual, theoretical and philosophical ideas that have been considered throughout this thesis. Foucault’s assertion that knowledge, rather than being made for purposes of understanding, is instead “made for cutting,” therefore presents the act of cutting in alignment with the discernment of knowledge, which is how I will attempt to think through and articulate my approach to making.

The aim of my studio research has been to investigate what possibilities the cut and the act of cutting have as a methodology for my practice, and how this can manifest through both material and metaphorical gestures. My objective has been to stage an examination of the cut and the act of cutting as an artistic strategy, in order to think about and locate my art practice as a form of anatomical enquiry. My studio research has therefore involved speculative and diverse enactments of the cutting gesture. This has resulted in the creation of site-responsive assemblages that evoke the notion of a return to theatre, and investigations into the aesthetics and iconography of sacred and imaginary anatomy, as well as a formative project that looks at the significance of the fragment or the offcut in the context of a studio practice. On a material level, I have considered cutting to be about carving shape and delineating form, whereby an object in the guise of a positive or negative may be extracted from incisions made into matter. The cut and the act of cutting have also revealed themselves throughout the course of this research as potent metaphors for the way in which we process information and ideas; as it has been demonstrated in this thesis, cutting is a form of analysis in which division is prized as a method to ascertain knowledge.

³⁶³ This first conference paper was titled *Into Theatre and Under the Knife: The spectacle of the cut and the act of cutting the anatomised body*, Art Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ) conference in Adelaide (2010). Additional conference papers addressing my research have also included, *Uncanny Bodies: The spectacle of early modern dissection and its implications on visioning the body*, Australia and New Zealand Society for the History of Medicine, University of Queensland (2011); *The Cutting Edge: Dissective Practices in Contemporary Art*, SCA Graduate School Conference, University of Sydney (2011).

³⁶⁴ Previously quoted. Op. cit. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. 153



Figure 67.

Kate Scardifield, *Piece by piece* 2010

Adaptable assemblage for a potential action. MDF, oak dowel, hand cut fabric, acrylic paint, tassels.

Dimensions variable.

Photograph: Tommy Thoms

I have come to consider my process as a way of thinking through making, echoing Eugenie Lemoine-Luccioni's words "to cut is to think"³⁶⁵ whilst also reminding myself that in doing so, I am enacting Kember and Zylinska's assertion whereby "an in-cision is also a de-cision."³⁶⁶ In their essay "Cut! The Imperative of Photographic Mediation," Kember and Zylinska assert the cut as a "recurrent moment" in which the transformation of matter takes place.³⁶⁷ They cite the cut as both a transdisciplinary technique employed across practices such as filmmaking, writing and sculpture, whilst it also remains the outcome of an imperative (the command: "Cut!").³⁶⁸ In responding to Karen Barad's insistence that the cut is "enacted rather than inherent," Kember and Zylinska understand and interpret the cut as "a causal procedure that performs the division of the world into entities, but it is also an act of decision with regard to the boundaries of those entities."³⁶⁹ It is from this insistence that 'an in-cision is also a de-cision' which has led me to consider the cut as a transformative choice when inflicted upon matter, a determinative act of judgment, and even a calculated manoeuvre.

Staging a return to theatre

Where Kember and Zylinska have considered Karen Barad's notion of the 'agential cut' in relation to photographic practices, I have been interested in how Barad's ideas can pose grounds for thinking about the syntactic arrangement of three-dimensional objects in the exhibition space. The idea that the cut is 'enacted rather than inherent' firstly speaks to the performative implications of this gesture that can be inflicted by myself as the artist, but also by the audience through their engagement with the work. Secondly, it recalls the importance of considering variant degrees of incision – types of cuts that can be produced in absence of the knife. Much of the work produced in response to this area of my studio research considers the agency relations between the observer and observed, and the spectacle and the spectator, with the intention being to open up an engagement between the artwork and the viewer that goes beyond static looking and into a more dynamic egalitarian space, one which encourages interaction.

Piece by piece (fig. 67) was the first adaptable assemblage made in response to this idea, where I began to think about the ability for the cutting spectacle to infer a potential interaction. An iteration of work was exhibited in the group exhibition *Kut* at Alaska Projects in 2011. It comprises 5 timber panels from which a series of silhouette portraits have been extracted. These correlative pieces were then used to form 3 staff-like props. Each modular object was marked in relation to a positive/negative concordant. Extending from earlier wall-based installations, these sculptural folding cut-outs come away from the gallery wall, with each figurative fragment intersecting another at various parts to cause a series of joints, angles and hinged points of connection. Like small wooden craft models that require piece-by-piece assemblage in order to

³⁶⁵ Op. cit. Lemoine-Luccioni. 15

³⁶⁶ Op. cit. Kember and Zylinska. 82

³⁶⁷ Ibid. 71

³⁶⁸ Ibid. 71

³⁶⁹ Ibid. 82

reveal their skeletal-like structure, the objects are interchangeable, adaptable and unfixed in the gallery space. *Piece by piece* can be thought of as a multi-authored work reliant on enacted gestures to move, order or rearrange parts in relation to their constituents. The decisions made by the spectator to shift, reorder or adapt parts of the assemblage operates as an implicit metaphor for surgical incisions employed to open matter, investigate and acquire knowledge of three-dimensional space.

One will recall the proposal made in chapter 1 to consider the cut or act of cutting as a type of theatre, informed by Artaud's concept for a theatre that aims to affect the whole anatomy. A return to theatre was proposed in order to investigate the cutting spectacle, its ability to create space via the making of a hollow or a void, and its capacity to split and transform matter to produce a doubling effect. This theatre is characterised by the presence of cruelty, not confined to the 'sadistic or bloody' but what Artaud describes as qualities of diligence, decisiveness, determination and irreversibility. These are qualities that have come to be revealed as analogous with the cutting gestures inflicted by the surgeon, the anatomist and the executioner, as well as the artist. Artaud's insistence was that the audience—a body or grouping of bodies—exists at the centre of this theatre. His argument was for the conventional boundaries between stage and spectator, performer and audience, to be disassembled: "we ought to return through theatre to the idea of a physical knowledge of images, a means of inducing trances."³⁷⁰ My studio experiments have continued to speculate on these ideas and their implications towards the development of new modular and adaptable sculptural objects, as well as considering how the audience can perform their own speculative incisions into the work, a type of theatrical cutting gesture to be enacted in the exhibition or gallery space.

Patterns for Penance (fig. 68 and fig. 69) is an open-ended sculptural assemblage composed from reclaimed industrial thread spools, rope, braided twine, and treated timber. The composition of each totemic structure is reimagined with every installation process, allowing for new dialogues to occur between the objects in the work and each site in which it is installed. Iterations of this work have been exhibited in Australia and in the United States, including *Votive Offerings*, a solo exhibition for Art Month (2012), the Redlands Westpac Art Prize (2012), *As Above: So Below*, Good Children Gallery, New Orleans (2013), and Sydney Contemporary Art Fair (2013). The evolving composition of the work is done by threading, building and accumulating modular elements. Each configuration is a transient result: it exists in an ongoing state of being unmade and remade, the product of a repetitive succession of gestures.

Whilst the assemblage and display of *Patterns for Penance* is implicitly performative, each of the modular components can also be understood as performative in their making. The repetitive actions of wrapping, coiling, stitching and binding become akin to a spiritual act such as praying the Rosary, or can be considered a gesture of repair. I have thought a lot about how my gestures in this instance almost exist in opposition to cutting, my treatment of these materials is more likened to joining, hinging or mending techniques. In surgery, the term *suture* refers to a joining or repair

³⁷⁰ Op. cit. Artaud. 61

of a wound, most commonly through the use of stitches. In anatomical terms, a *suture* or *sutura* can refer to the rigid or strong holding joints in the skeletal framework—for example the hinge points in one’s ankles or knees—as well as a seam or join in the skull where divisions in the bone surface have become ontogenetically fused together.³⁷¹ In this respect I have thought about my material process in generating this work to be about making and procuring parts, which rather than divided or dissected from a singular source, are individually built in succession from the ground up, prefacing the agency of part over whole; a type of body without organs.

Curator Michael Hawker has drawn attention to a similar prefacing of part over whole in the works of Sally Smart, whose act of dismantling “challenges the idea of the wholeness and unity of the human subject.”³⁷² In the recent *Contemporary Australia: Women* exhibition at Queensland Art Gallery/ Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2012) Smart presented a new commissioned series of works titled *Artist Dolls* (fig. 70). Through this collection of sculptural assemblages Smart has extended on her wall-based works, like *The Anatomy Lesson* (fig. 46) discussed in chapter 2, to create a series on haphazardly suspended marionettes. The dolls embody a joining of disparate fragments – found objects, cardboard cylinders, treated fabric and paper cut images are brought together to create a grouping of delicate, yet fractured, bodily totems. Smart becomes the surgeon in *Artist Dolls* through the act of hinging together and joining disparate parts. Suspended from the ceiling and left to twist and turn ominously, this theatre of the constructed body employs dramatic lighting, thereby creating an ominous shadow-play that flits between abstraction and figuration.

In *Patterns for Penance* the surfaces of each empty cotton spool has been re-covered in intricate thread patterns, the depth of each line and shifting thickness in colour recall systems of measurement and the comparative nature of the fragment or similar objects in multiple. In the execution of this work, a significant part of my intention was to propose alternate grounds and surrogate objects implicit of an unfamiliar ceremonial or ritual act. In Artaud’s vivid characterisation of the Theatre of Cruelty, he describes “objects of unknown form and purpose” being present in the space.³⁷³ In a way, the abacus-like structures assembled in *Patterns for Penance* read as ambiguous and evolving totemic forms. Where Smart’s *Artist Dolls* are to be watched and observed, the modular structures of *Patterns for Penance* are not passive objects but potentially active props; they rest, lean and await enactment in the gallery space. Artaud was adamant that the theatre that aimed to affect the whole anatomy “must first break theatre’s subjugation to the text and rediscover the idea of a kind of unique language somewhere between gesture and thought”.³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ The surgical suture has a vast number of manifestations dependent on the type of join and the stitch required. See Wilson, Sir Erasmus. *A System of Human Anatomy: General and Special*. Edited by Paul Beck Goddard. American ed. Philadelphia Lea & Blanchard 1843; Franklin, E. C. *The Science and Art of Surgery: Embracing Minor and Operative Surgery*. St. Louis: Missouri Democrat Job & Printing Establishment, 1867. For a discussion on the connections between the surgical suture and the tailor’s stitch see Velpeau, Alf A. L. M. *New Elements of Operative Surgery*. Washington: Duff Green, 1835.

³⁷² Hawker, Michael. *A cast of dancers*. Contemporary Australia: Women. (Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art. 2012), 129.

³⁷³ Op. cit. Artaud. 76

³⁷⁴ Ibid. 68



Figure 68.

Kate Scardifield, *Patterns for penance* 2012.

Adaptable assemblage for a potential action. (Installation view).

Oak dowel, pine, acrylic paint, hand-coiled thread spools, cotton thread.

Dimensions variable.

Photograph: Dara Gill.



Figure 69.

Kate Scardifield, *Patterns for penance* 2012.

Adaptable assemblage for a potential action. (Installation detail).

Oak dowel, pine, acrylic paint, hand-coiled thread spools, cotton thread

Dimensions variable.

Photograph: Dara Gill.



Figure 70.

Sally Smart, *Artist Dolls* 2011-12.

Installation view, Contemporary Australia: Women, Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA), Brisbane.

Image courtesy the artist.

A significant aspect of my studio enquiry has been an investigation into the theatrical implications of the art object. Thinking about Artaud's proposition for a unique language located between gesture and thought has led me to examine the possibility for art objects to occupy a point of interconnectivity between perception and experience. At the point of their encounter with the work, the viewer has the ability to enact their own physical interventions, and through these metaphorical incisions into matter and its reconfiguration a new site or space can be imagined. The rearrangement of objects or interactions with theatrical props are a reminder of Barad's claim that "momentum is meaningful only as a material arrangement involving a specific set of moveable parts."³⁷⁵ Elizabeth Grosz's consideration of corporeal phenomenology has been informative with regards to developing speculative works that simulate a theatrical site in which the viewer or audience can make their own altering cuts. Grosz responds to Merleau-Ponty's idea that the body does not simply occupy space; rather it 'inhabits or haunts space.' She asserts,

It is as an embodied subject that the subject occupies a perspective on objects. Its perspective represents the position within space where it locates itself. Its perspective dictates that its modes of access to objects are always partial or fragmentary, interacting with objects but never grasping or possessing them in their independent and complete materiality.³⁷⁶

There is a sense here of an obscured view, something this thesis has come to acknowledge in relation to the inability to ever truly see one's own body interior. As previously examined, it is something that can be negotiated via a visual system that doubles and reflects, one based on representation and trace.

Untitled (Shrine Work) (fig. 71) is an assemblage of objects that intends to provoke a potential action or obliquely entice a performative gesture. The work consists of three parts – a staff-like pole; a painted platform and an aureole. Brought together, these objects intend to simulate an unfamiliar consecrated site and suggest a hallowed space. The iconographic signifiers at play evoke an awareness that this assemblage of objects represents an oblique theistic site. When I began making this work I was thinking a lot about the anatomy theatre in the context of a hallowed or sacred space, but also as a site of spectacle and performativity. The ritualised practice of dissection occurring in theatre was indeed an *act* of theatre: the gesture of cutting the body was performed as part of a predetermined ceremony in which the corpse assumed its role centre stage.

In 2011, as part of the International Artists Residency Program at the Sanskriti Foundation, I undertook a period of studio research and development in India. Whilst on a walking tour through Old Delhi, we entered a dilapidated haveli. Within its central courtyard I came across a bare and empty, yet shrine-like space (fig. 72). In comparison to the rich, colourful and ornate architecture of the Hindi, Jain and Islamic sites of worship throughout the city, this shrine site appeared desolate. I was told that this inconspicuous site was a non-denominational public shrine; anyone could pause and worship at this site regardless of religious affinity or creed. What struck me most

³⁷⁵ Op. cit. Barad. 139

³⁷⁶ Op. cit.. Grosz. *Volatile Bodies*. 90-91



Figure 71.

Kate Scardifield, *Untitled (Shrine Work)* 2012.

Adaptable assemblage for a potential action. (Installation view).

Hand cut fabric, dress pins, oak dowel, coiled thread spools, MDF, acrylic paint.

Dimensions variable. Photograph: Dara Gill.



Figure 72.

Non-denominational alter for worship. Old Delhi, India.

Photograph: Kate Scardifield, 2012.

upon seeing this open and empty site for worship were the subtle iconographic cues that made it immediately identifiable as a site where ritualised reverence was performed. A raised rectangular marble slab was positioned against a modest section of marble wall, and set back into the wall was a small mantle framed by a decorative elliptical arch. Each of these relational elements denoted this space as a site of ambiguous sacrality or hallowed ground.

This associative recognition was influential in the development of *Untitled (Shrine Work)*. The emphasis on ‘work’ in the title implies an action or the undertaking of a process, it is a *doing* thing. Work in this instance traverses the spatial and the temporal; it is open-ended and ongoing. One’s encounter with the piece is inevitably evocative of time – ‘have I arrived before a performance? Have I missed a live action in which these objects are made incarnate?’ The constant presence of this configuration of objects, whether being activated by a viewer in an oblique inquisitive gesture or left idle and resting, are a reminder of theatre’s primacy; its immutable existence means that there are points where this type of theatre remains dormant or where it is activated and installed. In *Untitled (Shrine Work)* the body of the viewer is positioned at the centre of this theatre, which becomes installed or activated through the infliction of a gesture, a physical engagement—be it subtle or feverish—with the space. How one interacts, intervenes or engages with particular objects in particular spaces is always through a process of cognitive awareness, whether accepting or rejecting, of social and cultural queues. Grosz reminds us of this: “experience is of course always implicated in and produced by various knowledges and social practices.”³⁷⁷ She goes on to argue,

The body is able to move, to initiate and undertake actions, because the body schema is a series or rather a field, of possible actions, plans for action, maps of possible movements the body “knows” how to perform. The body schema is also the field in which the subject’s cohesion and identity as a subject and its intimate incarnation in and as a particular body take place.³⁷⁸

Sacred and imaginary anatomy

Previously considered in this thesis were ideas expressed by Blanchot’s in his essay “Two Versions of the Imaginary.” These ideas concerned the relationship between the image, the corpse or ‘cadaverous’ object, and the assertion that artists who work with the illusory substance of images have the ability to “idealize beings” and to elevate them to a state of “disembodied resemblance.”³⁷⁹ Regarding the image and signification, Blanchot suggests that the image is capable of transgressing between states of making and *unmaking*, acts of dismantling and construction:

³⁷⁷ Ibid. 94

³⁷⁸ Ibid. Grosz. Pg 95

³⁷⁹ Previously quoted in Chapter 1. Op. cit. Blanchot. 419

Man is made in his own image: this is what we learn from the strangeness of the resemblance of cadavers. But this formula should first of all be understood this way: *man is unmade according to his image.*³⁸⁰

The ability for the cutting spectacle to contribute to the unmaking or taking apart of the body has been a formative enquiry across my studio research. Responding to the idea of a ‘disembodied resemblance’ lead me to consider how representations of the biological body are constructed through a process of anatomical dismantling, and how the display of dismembered or fragmented body parts in turn aids in the construction of the biological body image. Part of my creative enquiry has involved a period of field research in 2011, which allowed me to spend time compiling data and directly engaging with historical source material from medical and anatomical collections across the UK and Europe.³⁸¹ I was able to experience first hand how western institutions have historically cast an anatomising gaze onto the human body, and the significant role played by eighteenth and nineteenth century anatomical museums in contributing to a specific mode of representation that concerns the production and display of body artefacts.

In a congruent manner to Catherine Truman, my investigations into the history of anatomical representation have been a significant driver in the development of my practice. In chapter 3 the discussion regarding Truman and Christine Borland’s work demonstrated how both artists have a distinctive approach to working with history as a material, critically examining anatomical collections and provoking questions concerning agency, specimen acquisition and the procurement of bodily knowledge. I’ve also come to consider history and historical data as a type of material into which I undertake my own carvings and incisions. In examining past anatomical discourses and their intersections with theology and the sacred, my approach is to consider the past as a type of matter which displays both volume and depth, in a concurrent way to the physical mediums such as wood, paper or cloth used to articulate my findings. My ideas that concern anatomical enquiry as a type of art practice have come into being through a direct engagement with the history of anatomy. The first tier of which is witnessing the body in a state of fragmentation and dismemberment, and secondly, through the act of viewing disembodied doubles, replicas and reflections of the real.

As it has been previously examined, the cut is the result of a mutual gesture exerted by the hand and the knife in a state of a reciprocal agency. With each incision made there is a considered decision enacted in order to realise it. In this instance, these surgical gestures echo Katherine Rowe’s assertion that it is through the dexterous mechanism of the hand that anatomy reveals itself as “a fruitful correspondence between cutting (sic) and the rational.”³⁸² A conscious decision in my practice has been to work as much as possible with my own hands in relation to my chosen media. This is also a largely conceptual decision that relates to performing cutting

³⁸⁰ Ibid. 423

³⁸¹ In chapter 3 I focused specifically on the institutional collections of Musée Fragonard and *La Specola*. In addition to frequenting these museums, during my field research I was able to visit the Palazzo Poggi Museum, University of Bologna; Surgeon’s Hall Pathology Museum, at the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh; Hunterian Museum, at the Royal College of Surgeons, London; Museum Boerhaave, Leiden.

³⁸² Op. cit. Rowe. 291

gestures and enacting incisions into materials such as paper or cloth, which could be thought as a substitute for the physical body. This allows me to maintain a corporeal and tactile connection with my work that I consider aligns with the importance of touch between surgeon and patient, anatomist and cadaver. Rowe's emphasis on the agency of the hand in dissection speaks to both the historical and contemporaneous significance of anatomical enquiry as a type of practice that warrants tactile interaction. She states,

Treating the interior mechanism of the body through dissection obviously requires touching it, placing the hands inside it, lifting successive layers of tissue to reveal their points of origin and arrival.³⁸³

In a relational context to Truman's practice, my emphasis on the hand and the handmade contribute to affirming the intimate relationship that can exist between an artist and their materials. Julie Ewington has echoed this idea with regards to Truman's approach to practice, citing "For all its obscene specification, anatomy is always a personal matter."³⁸⁴ Ewington's emphasis on touch and the tactile connected to Truman's work acknowledges the artist's technical training in jewellery and metalsmithing, practices that can require intense and dexterous hand manipulation.³⁸⁵ I believe my approach to materiality and the insistence I have towards maintaining a corporeal connection to my work reflects my training in textiles.³⁸⁶ During the formative years in which I began developing my practice I was engaging extensively with cloth, fibre and other technical textile-related processes. These ways of working are inextricably linked to a honed dexterity achieved through working with one's own hands.

To recall the earlier discussion of Rowe's scholarship in chapter 1, I considered her proposal that it is through agency and the inflictions of the hand that the body has been historically shaped and imagined.³⁸⁷ *Untitled (Study for Shrine Work)* is a series of working collages that take as their starting point the idea of making and unmaking human anatomy (fig. 73 and fig. 74). Part of my intention in this series has been to explore converging theological and scientific visual cultures that image the body as a fragment or collection of fragments. This work has involved isolating and excising images from biological textbooks, old scientific periodicals and various outdated medical texts. The method of procuring each piece is surgical in nature: with each image selected careful incisions are undertaken in order to extract it from the page. Each anatomical image isolated and excised as part of the *Untitled (Study for Shine Work)* series has come from textual sources with a publication date range between 1967 and 2009. Collected in second hand book

³⁸³ Ibid. 293

³⁸⁴ Op. cit. Ewington, 43

³⁸⁵ Truman undertook an Associate Diploma in Jewellery/Metalsmithing at the University of South Australia between 1981-1985. She is also a founding partner of Grey Street Workshop in Adelaide, along with Sue Lorraine and Anne Brennan operating since 1985. Grey Street is a collectively run studio and workshop space for jewellers and craft practitioners who actively engage in a studio-based practice. See "About Grey Street Workshop", accessed September 12, 2013. <http://greystreetworkshop.com/p/about>

³⁸⁶ I completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a major in textiles in 2006 at the College of Fine Arts, UNSW. During my undergraduate degree both my training and studio theory was in textiles and I worked with a number of established and respected textile artists including Ruth Hadlow, Belinda von Mengerson, Liz Williamson and Yoshiko Wada, to hone specific technical skills in weaving, dyeing, felting and fabric manipulation.

³⁸⁷ I quoted Rowe in chapter 1 in relation to the analysis of the *Fabrica* title page and the symbolic elevation of touch and the dexterous hand by Vesalius. Rowe states, "The body imagined in relation to its hand is shaped by those fictions particular to the hand: the principle of rational organisation, the capacity for artistry and manufacture, the dependencies of mutual labour and layered agency." Ibid. 288



Figure 73.

Kate Scardifield, *Untitled (Study for Shrine Work I)* 2012.

Collage material on Saunders Waterford paper.

67 x 88 cm (unframed).

Photograph: Dara Gill

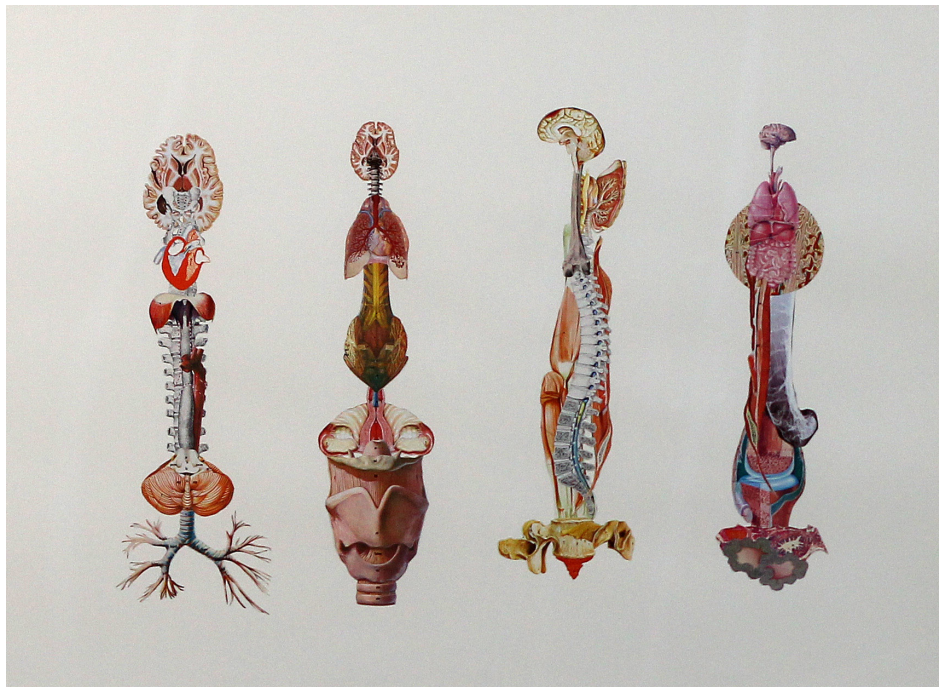


Figure 74.

Kate Scardifield, *Untitled (Study for Shrine Work II)* 2012.

Collage material on Saunders Waterford paper.

67 x 88 cm (unframed).

Photograph: Dara Gill.

stores, charity shops and bric-a-brac markets, these educational resources are predominantly outdated and out of publication, having been superseded by new editions with revised imaging and scholarship. These obsolete texts reveal both the subtle and remarkable shifts that have occurred in illustrative and aesthetic approaches to pedagogical medical imaging over a 42 year period.

From a historical perspective, Sawday has drawn comparisons between pre-Renaissance anatomical images and the later Vesalian images of sixteenth century, his intention being to emphasise and acknowledge that alternate visual strategies employed to convey anatomical discourse are often misleading. He argues that rather than demonstrating an evolution of interior knowledge, later imaging should be thought more to demonstrate different ways of understanding and comprehending the relationship between the body and the world.³⁸⁸ Regarding contemporaneous medical imaging, Sawday asserts,

with its sharply delineated colour schemes, the clear differentiation between the multitude of different nerves, veins, arteries, the poised volumetric and cleanly cut tubular structures, the play of light and shadow, is a convincing illusion of the body-interior, designed to aid the understanding of the relative disposition of the parts. In fact, it no more depicts what an actual interior looks like, beneath the scalpel, than does the Vesalian image.³⁸⁹

Sawday is essentially suggesting what I understand to be the crucial role of art in attempts to know and construct knowledge of human anatomy. Thinking about this further, it is perhaps not so much about the relationship between the body and the world that generates a particular representation of its hidden interior. Perhaps medical imaging can be thought about more as how the world imagines the body to be, how it brings these fantasies into existence as images. Through the process of collecting, extracting and analysing diverse illustrations of the body, *Untitled (Study for Shrine Work)* acknowledges the influence of the cultural and the temporal that contribute to shifts in representation.

One is reminded of the discussion in chapter 3 regarding the body interior as the illusive Medusa's head. Like Perseus, the ability to look upon one's own internal body is inherently denied and one is forced to comprehend and contemplate their interior via a reflective representation or doubling trace. The trace of the body's interior that I have attempted to construct in *Untitled (Study for Shrine Work)* is a melange of bone, organ, and viscera brought together to form imaginary biological totems. Each anatomical fragment surgically hinged or sutured together resists a temporal location or aesthetic understanding that is in any way linear or chronological. The disembodied state of each structure draws on the anachronistic currency of the votive object or ex-voto, a reminder of the sacred implications of the body broken down into fragments and their presence as part of theistic rituals. Even though these structures can suggest a

³⁸⁸ In relation to the Vesalian images, Sawday argues, "The point of these images is not that they demonstrate an evolution in understanding, so much as they illustrate quite different modes of understanding the relationship of the body-interior to the world beyond the body's boundaries." Op. cit. Sawday. 100

³⁸⁹ Ibid. Sawday. 100-101

rebuilding, remaking or reimagining of the biological body, the nature of collage undermines any sense of totality or wholeness in these objects. As a vehicle for piecing together disparate parts, Elza Adamowicz describes the profound ability for collage to “reveal the mechanisms of the assembly process by displaying its breaks.”³⁹⁰ These breaks, points of severance or ruptures are what lead Lacan to propose the “*imago du corps morcelé*,” his instance being that the “image is selectively vulnerable along the lines of its cleavage”.³⁹¹ According to Lacan,

Such typical images appear in dreams, as well as fantasies. They may show, for example, the body of the mother as having a mosaic structure like that of a stained-glass window. More often, the resemblance is to a jig-saw puzzle, with the separate parts of the body of a man or an animal in disorderly array. Even more significant for our purpose are the incongruous images in which disjointed limbs are rearranged as strange trophies; trunks cut up in slices and stuffed with the most unlikely fillings, strange appendages in eccentric positions, reduplications of the penis, images of the cloaca represented as a surgical excision, often accompanied in male patients by fantasies of pregnancy.³⁹²

Lacan’s description of what he terms as ‘incongruous images,’ those of cut-up bodies, severed limbs and castrated appendages that characterise fantasies of the *corps morcelé*, are also evocative of the Bakhtinian grotesque and Kristeva’s reading of the abject. Where Bakhtin understood the grotesque as a body unclosed, unfastened or in a state of transgression, the Kristevian abject is that sense of destabilising repulsion at any interior or corporeal matter that becomes detached from the body or disassociated from the self. The idea extended through this theoretical framework relates primarily to the establishment and negotiation of the body’s boundaries. To recall Mary Douglas who argues that it is the body’s margins that are exceptionally invested with attributes of power and danger, “Each culture has its own special risks and problems. To which particular bodily margins its beliefs attribute power depends on what situation the body is mirroring.”³⁹³

It warrants acknowledgement that corporeal boundaries are ambiguous, often fluid and shifting when considered across diverse cultural and temporal instances. My research has focused specifically on the body in an early modern cultural context and from the perspective of western discourses in which it is understood as a physical and psychological entity. In this respect, this thesis has shown that the idea of breaching the body’s boundaries through practices of dissection is not only about incising into or opening up the body, but also the dissective impetus inherent to practices that delineate or cut out the body based on its exterior line.

Totems, Amulets and Effigies (fig. 75–78) is a series of five gouache and pencil works on paper that infuse recognisably corporeal anatomies with unfamiliar objects and heads in portrait, to suggest a perspective that is uncannily both interior and exterior, known and unknown. The

³⁹⁰ Op. cit. Adamowicz. 15

³⁹¹ Op. cit. Lacan, *Some Reflections on the Ego* (1953). 297

³⁹² Ibid. 297

³⁹³ Op. cit. Douglas. 150

silhouettes have then undergone a cutting and cross-cutting process that grids their surface into a plane of intersecting lines. The pattern is caused by the formalised repetition of painting each colour separately, similar to laying colours in a screen printing process, allowing the fictional bodies to reveal themselves through the successive build-up of modular fragments over time. As we have examined, Lavater advocated for the significance of the silhouette portrait and argued for its ability to reveal an individual's inner moral and spiritual make-up. According to Lavater the most accurate way to attain a physiognomic reading was by taking a 'shade' of a person's face, specifically their face in profile. This shade needed to have the ability to remove all distracting features, from hair and jewellery to skin tone and eye colour, rendering the profile as monochromatic positive and negative spaces.

One will recall the analysis of Kara Walker's work in chapter 2 and the examination of the silhouette as a facialised object, part of the 'white wall/black hole' system proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. Where the authors argued that the head severed from the body brought about its facialised coding, they also advocated for the ability for the whole body to become facialised, citing this operation as a process "worthy of Dr Moreau."³⁹⁴ In Walker's work *Cut* (fig. 79) there is an implicit violence and self-effacing quality to the piece that demonstrates the innate ability for the act of cutting to be at once both dissective of a part and creative of a whole. At first glance the leaping young woman could appear a joyous, yet a closer inspection reveals a much more sinister edge – her wrists have been slit and fountains of blood burst out of their hollows. Walker's decision to cut into black paper, to intentionally dissect from a black surface a black female figure whom then aggressively cuts her own body, speaks to the historical western legacy of racial objectification and of profiling of the other. Grasping a barber's razor, the woman in silhouette is charged with wielding her own self-harm, an act that suggests the exertion of ownership, a reclaiming of the symbolic knife used to sever and delineate, and the destabilisation of agency given to silhouette portraiture to affirm prejudice through difference.

In *Totems, Amulets and Effigies* (fig. 75–78) I have continued to work with the idea of pattern as a decorative destabiliser. Having previously worked extensively with found textiles, my intention has often been to work with ornate surfaces, using pattern, texture and grain of cloth as a way to disrupt or optically undermine the starkly graphic monochrome historically afforded to the silhouette. The intense layering and repetition of colour is intended to create a difficult surface for the eye to rest on, subverting the idea that the silhouette exists as a vacant, chasm-like space for the projection of interiority, and undermining its ability to become entirely facialised. With regards to process of facialisation, Deleuze and Guattari's offer a short argument in opposition to part-body objects, their negation being directed towards bodiless organs and the fragmentation of corporeal matter. They argue that flaying, slicing and anatomising followed by "sewing things randomly back together again" is an act of Frankenstein. I understand this Frankenstein reference

³⁹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari's invocation of Dr Moreau was previously discussed in chapter 2. To expand on their argument with regards to whole body facialisation, they state "if the head and its elements are facialized, the entire body also can be facialized, comes to be facialized as part of an inevitable process. When the mouth and nose, but first the eyes, become a holey surface, all the other volumes and cavities of the body will follow. An operation worthy of Doctor Moreau: horrible and magnificent. Hand, breast, stomach, penis and vagina, thigh, leg and foot, all come to be facialized." Op. cit. Deleuze and Guattari. 170

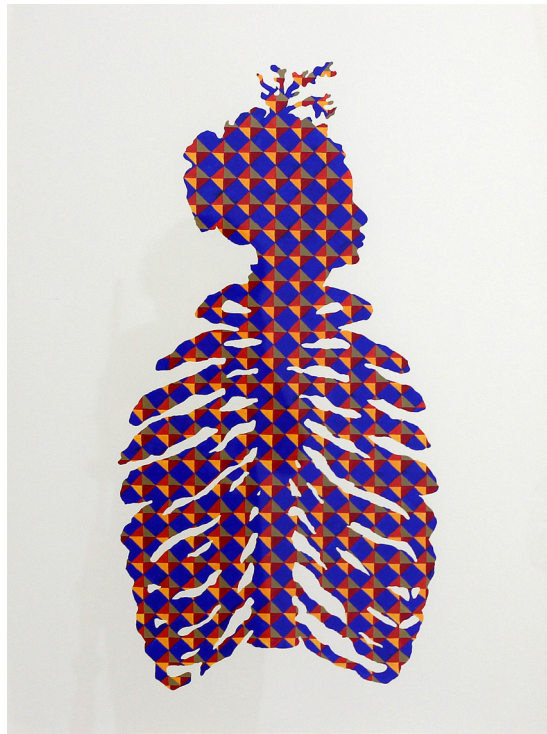


Figure 75.

Kate Scardifield, *Totems, Amulets and Effigies I* 2012.

Gouache and pencil on Saunders Waterford paper.

88 x 67 cm (unframed).

Photograph: Dara Gill.

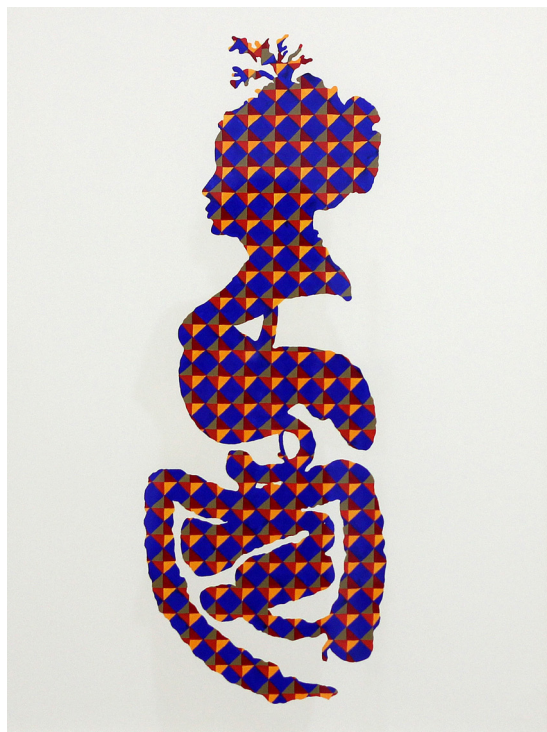


Figure 76.

Kate Scardifield, *Totems, Amulets and Effigies II* 2012.

Gouache and pencil on Saunders Waterford paper.

88 x 67 cm (unframed).

Photograph: Dara Gill.

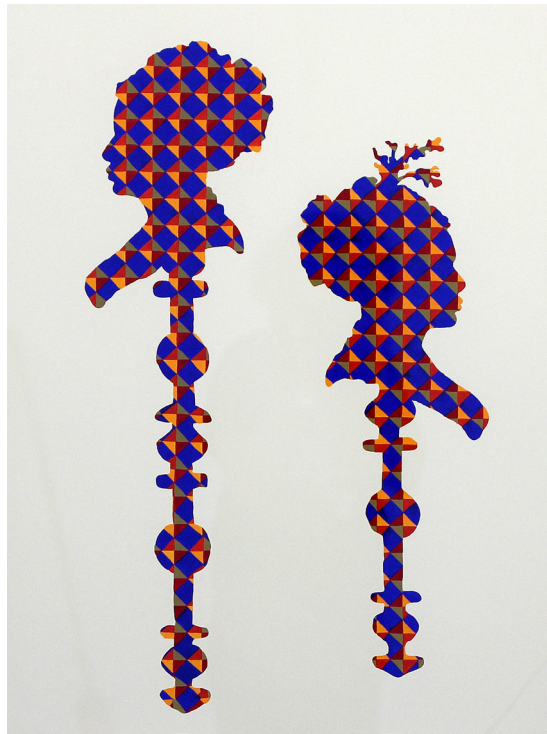


Figure 77.

Kate Scardifield, *Totems, Amulets and Effigies III* 2012.

Gouache and pencil on Saunders Waterford paper.

88 x 67 cm (unframed).

Photograph: Dara Gill.

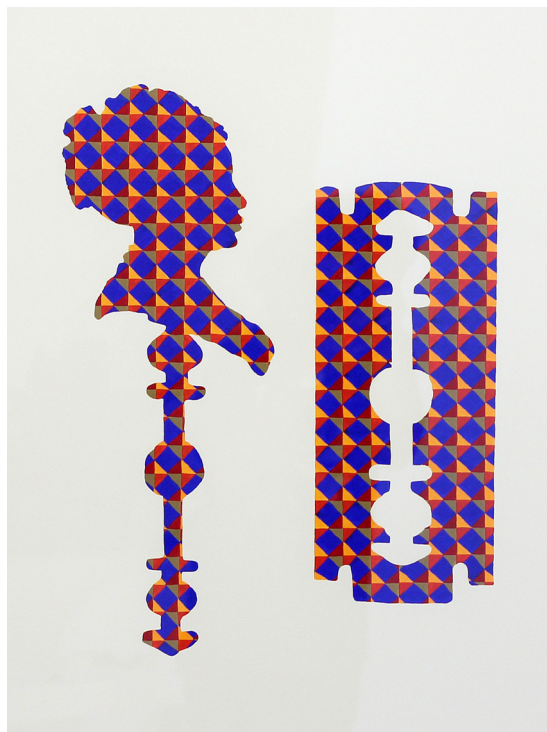


Figure 78.

Kate Scardifield, *Totems, Amulets and Effigies IV* 2012.

Gouache and pencil on Saunders Waterford paper.

88 x 67 cm (unframed).

Photograph: Dara Gill.



Figure 79.

Kara Walker, *Cut* 1998.

Cut paper on wall, 223.5 x 137.2 cm

© 1998 Kara Walker

Image courtesy Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.

not as a rejection of anatomisation used to render the parts of the body as facialised, but rather an opposition towards any kind of feverish dismemberment and haphazard piecing together that lends itself to the idea of the body reconstructed as a monstrosity. Deleuze and Guattari's concern derives from their need to consider the body without organs through the process of dismantling the organism. Considered in chapter 3, I proposed this undertaking to be an implicit surgical metaphor, a type of considered and calculated body dismantling the authors suggest is inherently "measured with the craft of a surveyor."³⁹⁵

In a similar process to the works in the *Untitled (Study for Shrine Work)* series, each imagined anatomy in *Totems, Amulets and Effigies* has been developed through the extraction and collection of existing image material, as well as miniature drawn and imagined cut-outs of interior and exterior bodily fragments. In this instance dismantling the organism is done with precision and exactitude, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest: "You don't do it with a sledgehammer, you use a very fine file."³⁹⁶ In *Totems, Amulets and Effigies*, when it came to joining disparate interior and exterior body parts with imagined objects to formulate hybrid bodily structures, the paper collages were traced and re-traced, a process which seamlessly helps to fuse each hinged point of connection, rendering it a smooth closed ontogenetic surface; a singular facialised object delineated like a silhouette, through one exterior drawn line. This exterior line, however, intentionally charts internal parts of the body that have been brought to the surface. Heads grow from abstracted viscera—a rib cage, a digestive system—barring resemblance to a group unknown ancient figures or hieroglyphic symbols. For Deleuze and Guattari, "the question of the body is not one of part-objects but one of differential speeds."³⁹⁷ In this instance *Totems, Amulets and Effigies* speaks to a temporal intersection, a cutting and cross-cutting of the body's boundaries. The series also draws on the formal and metaphorical connections between anatomical wax models and the theistic currency of the votive object or ex-voto image.

To recall Georges Didi-Huberman, votive images have the ability "cut across time."³⁹⁸ Their resistance to linear aesthetic and material shifts throughout history warrants Didi-Huberman to stress the need to approach the analysis of votive images in a non-chronological sense, instead employing an alternate temporal lens in order to consider why these forms and images repeat across variant times and cultures.³⁹⁹ Freud proposed that the 'compulsion to repeat' was what characterised the appearance and sensation of the uncanny. Silhouettes we know have the uncanny ability to suggest both an absence and presence, and their use within a physiognomic context was intended to make visible the invisible. The intention of *Totems, Amulets and Effigies* was to reimagine the anatomical icon in response to Kristeva's assertion that the sacred is not to be found in the sacrifice, but rather in its "capacity for representation."⁴⁰⁰ Responding to the

³⁹⁵ Ibid. 160

³⁹⁶ Ibid. 160

³⁹⁷ Ibid. 172

³⁹⁸ Op. cit. Didi-Huberman, *Ex-Voto: Image, Organ, Time*. 7

³⁹⁹ According to Didi-Huberman, the history of the votive image "insists and resists every chronology of evolution or 'progress'." Votive anatomical objects, as it has been previously examined, were regularly produced in wax, but also in stone and metal, intended to psychically embody an individual's illness, infliction or a particular symptom. Ibid. 7

⁴⁰⁰ Previously cited and examined in Chapter 2. See Op. cit. Kristeva. *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*. 130

currency of the severed head as an iconographic image, understood in Kristevian terms as a ‘sign of the sacrificial cut,’ the heads that appear to grow organically from interior body parts and totemic-like structures are all recognisably female. Whilst this was a decision I consider to reflect more on my own gendered and lived experience, it also was a way for me to negotiate the medical tradition of imaging the female body purely from the perspective of its reproductive function. It became my own way of overcoding, a re-facialisation of previously encoded parts.

In praise of fragments

At the beginning of chapter 3 I quoted Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett regarding the poetic significance of the fragment. In her examination of the agencies of display that govern ethnographic objects, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is adamant that fragments are not simply of a pre-existing virtue, rather they are the product that results from an action. In the author’s words, “We make fragments.”⁴⁰¹ Having worked extensively with silhouettes and cut-outs across paper and cloth, something I have always felt consciously attuned to are the material remnants, the offcuts that linger once the object or image has been excised from its surface. I have thought about the material relationship that ensues between the positive and the negative, as well as the metaphorical implications of absence and presence that result from these cutting gestures I inflict into matter. *Remnants of Relics* (fig. 80) is the first work that resulted from my studio research in relation to these ideas. In a literal sense it is a remnant, an offcut procured in the making of *Going into theatre* (fig. 81). These mutually inclusive works are a reminder that the cut not only creates space, it also produces two sides or severed edges simultaneously. In the process of forming two interdependent works I instigated a relationship between objects whereby one could not exist without the other. In doing so, it further imbued in my research the need to investigate the idea that a part by relation implies that it is a piece of the whole.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett understood the procurement of fragments and ethnographic objects as an “essentially surgical issue” describing the process as “an art of excision, of detachment, an art of the excerpt.”⁴⁰² Importantly, she goes on to further elaborate on the politics of these types of incision employed first to procure and then to display, asking, “Shall we exhibit the cup with the saucer, the tea, the cream and sugar, the spoon, the napkin and placemat, the table and chair, the rug? Where do we make the cut?”⁴⁰³ I have thought a lot about this statement in relation to art practice and the inevitable material and conceptual incisions that are made in the process of making work. Where does the artist *make the cut* and what, if any, is the significance of the fragments that end up on the cutting room floor, or the parts that are carved away in the making of the art object? The body is inherent to the idea of anatomical enquiry, but as it has been revealed in this paper, the concept of a ‘body’ is not purely confined to biological organisms. It can be paradigmatic for other types of entities that require a systematic dismantling in order to comprehend it as a structure of multiple relational parts. DalMolin has described this aptly:

⁴⁰¹ Previously quoted in chapter 3. See Op. cit. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. 19

⁴⁰² Ibid. 18

⁴⁰³ Ibid. 18



Figure 80.

Kate Scardifield, *Remnants of Relics* 2010.
 Fabric, heat-set adhesive, cotton thread, dress pins.
 167 x 68 cm (irregular).
 Photograph: Tommy Thoms.



Figure 81.

Kate Scardifield, *Going into Theatre* 2010.
 Hand cut fabric, heat set adhesive, dress pins.
 220 x 130 cm and 220 x 170 cm (framed diptych).
 Photograph: Tommy Thoms.

The body may then be associated with the canvas, the music sheet, the stage, the screen, and the blank page, all vibrant superstrata inviting the artist's decision. On impact the cut becomes instantly the line separating the bodily surface, exploding its materiality into decisive parts, like a symbolic lock of hair, a fetishized leg, a castrated sex, even if these partial objects generate a kind of anguish in view of what was lost in the transaction—the cut itself and the remnant of the carved up surface—rather than complete satisfaction for their initiators.⁴⁰⁴

In this respect the notion of 'body' can also be both understood as and used to describe an artist's practice. Indeed it is already inherent to the way we talk about artistic outcomes, most commonly used in reference to the artist as a producer of a 'body of work'. In the production of work it is inevitable that things are carved away, selectively disregarded and omitted in order to allow such a 'body' to reveal itself. All artists in this context are cutters, we are the instigators of decisive incisions that shape the way our work comes into being outside the concealed confines of the studio. As DalMolin asserts, "the artist remains bound to the outcome of a primary cut that ultimately brings forth his oeuvre."⁴⁰⁵

SHRINE WORK (fig. 82–85) is a project that can be loosely described as a studio excavation, utilising the gallery space at Alaska Projects in Sydney for twelve consecutive days in May 2012. The intent of this venture was to act out and explore ways of making that had become apparent in my studio practice, but had to date remained as residue in the progression towards an artwork, or could be considered as material or conceptual collateral that was generated in the making of something else. I have referred, and continue to refer, to this material and immaterial substance as offcuts. *SHRINE WORK* was an attempt to trace these offcuts; the remnants, discarded thoughts and material musings that were situated around artworks I had produced over a period of six years. The debris created in the making process was to be examined and tangents were to be teased out in ways that had yet to be considered outside the confines of my studio space.

I began with an empty gallery, moving in a table, numerous boxes of paper, materials and tools; what could best be described as a large and overwhelming collection of odds and ends. I had no definitive plan of how I was going to work through the mass and I continued to enforce on myself that what happened over the twelve day period was not about making a work or presenting an outcome, rather it was about the act of beginning to process, analyse and understand the ephemera that had built up around me. My first action in the space was begin working through the boxes of loose paper I had amassed. This was predominantly made up of files of magazine cut-outs, the remnants of pages used for collage material, drawings, silhouette studies and anatomical diagrams (fig. 82). These were all essentially remains and offcuts, the negative that I really never intended to use. The parts I had extracted from these sources then either went on to be used in artworks or sit in manila folders waiting to be revisited at some stage. For years I knew that this material was somehow obliquely significant, evidenced by the fact I had not parted with

⁴⁰⁴ Op. Cit. DalMolin. 5

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. 5

it, but rather held onto this mass that continued to grow and accumulate as I kept making work. Now I began pinning them piece by piece to the wall, creating patterns based on structure, subject matter and chronology. The patterns kept changing as I went – things went up, came down, and were moved around. What I thought would be a relatively quick exercise to ease myself into the project became a complex mapping of years worth of paper offcuts. Six hundred and thirty-seven pieces were re-examined in the process as I worked through the paper on the wall for three days. What surprised me most was my ability to recollect what had been removed from each offcut by examining the remains. In most cases I could recall where that removed piece had ended up – in a work, on file, in a box somewhere that I had been avoiding unpacking. Through this remembering I unlocked a knowledge bank that felt unsettling, the intimate relationship I had with each fragment was more complex and uncanny than I'd previously realised. Once examined and documented, the paper came down off the wall and I began to re-evaluate my approach to this tracing and excavating act. I concluded that what I actually needed to do was physically get *above* this material, to be able to see and observe this mass of refuse from a topological perspective.

Before addressing the implications of this shift in perspective, I want to speak about a significant element of conversation and exchange that occurred during the twelve day process. Given the fact I was undertaking this project in a gallery context, I was asked by the gallery director if I would like to give an artist talk about my work whilst I was working in the space. As the intention of the project was not an exhibition and I was not trying to make a work, I felt that an artist talk was superfluous in this instance. Instead, I proposed to host a small lunch for a group of artists in which some of the broader ideas around art practice as a form of anatomical enquiry could potentially be discussed.⁴⁰⁶ A personal letter was sent to a group of artists, some of whom I knew and others who I was not previously acquainted with but was familiar with their work (fig. 83). I intentionally invited a spectrum of artists with diverse practices ranging across the material, conceptual and the performative.⁴⁰⁷ This was mainly in response to the idea that across disparate forms of art practice, divisive strategies are engaged to negotiate both ideas and material form. Methodologies, both intended and unintentional, based around incision, extraction and analysis are also employed. The lunch and the conversations that ensued amongst this group of artists were of immense value and affirmed that like a scientist or an anatomist, artists too carve their own parameters of enquiry and select their own defined objects of study in order to frame their practice.

Returning to the discussion that concerned my methods of engaging with the offcuts, the decision made was to approach the studio material and residue in a similar manner to that of an archeologist. I began gridding off sections of the floor in order to classify, analyse and consider each fragment piece by piece (fig. 84 and fig. 85). Working with an overall sense of surveying

⁴⁰⁶ Alaska Projects occupies an unconventional gallery space located in a disused council office in a Kings Cross car park. The lunch was set up and held across a section of car spaces adjacent to the gallery space. See "About Alaska", accessed September 2, 2013. <http://home.alaskaprojects.com/About>

⁴⁰⁷ The artists in attendance at the lunch were Connie Anthes, Robyn Backen, Liam Benson, Will French, Sarah Goffman, Cara Oake, Peter Nelson, Leigh Rigozzi, Joan Ross and Jessica Tyrrell. Artists invited who were unable to attend were Dan and Dominique Angeloro, Deborah Kelly and Tom Polo.



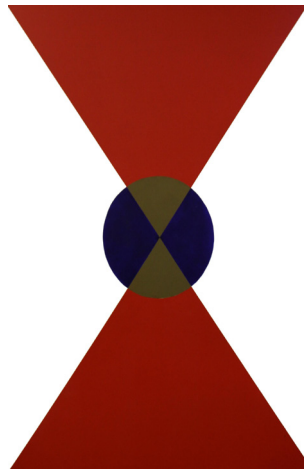
Figure 82.

Kate Scardifield, *SHRINE WORK* 2012

Alaska Projects, Sydney.

Project Documentation: Studio excavation of 637 paper offcuts sorted over three days.

Photograph: Kate Scardifield.



S H R I N E W O R K

Alaska Projects
Level 2, Kings Cross Carpark
9A Elizabeth Bay Road
Elizabeth Bay NSW 2011

17 May 2012

Dear Joan,

I would like to invite you to lunch. I will be hosting this small get together at Alaska Projects in Kings Cross on Sunday 27 May at 1.30pm.

The reason for lunch is that I'm about to undertake a studio excavation project at Alaska for the next 12 days. The intent of this venture is to act out and explore ways of making that have become apparent in my studio practice, but have remained as residue in the progression towards realising an object, a quantifiable outcome, or an artwork.

This excavation is an attempt to trace remnants, discarded thoughts and the material musings that are situated around a number of recent works. I plan to investigate the debris and hopefully tease out some of these tangents that have begun to appear in my studio practice.

Lunch is an opportunity to bring a group of artists together over a meal. I would like to ask you to bring something along that you consider to be a possible tangent or discarded remnant generated in the making of one of your own works. The form that this artefact takes is completely up to you; it could be an image, a material experiment, a potential action or a conceptual relic.

A delicious meal and refreshments will be provided so it is not necessary to bring anything else.

I hope you can attend and ask that you RSVP by Thursday 24 May.

Kind regards,

Kate Scardifield

Figure 83.

Kate Scardifield, *SHRINE WORK* 2012
Project documentation: Letter for Lunch (Joan Ross).
Signed and posted A4 letter. 29.7 x 21 cm.



Figure 84.

Kate Scardifield, *SHRINE WORK* 2012

Installation detail, Alaska Projects.

Timber, bricklaying line, overhead projectors, studio collateral and ephemera.

Dimensions variable.

Photograph: Kate Scardifield.



Figure 85.

Kate Scardifield, *SHRINE WORK* 2012

Installation detail, Alaska Projects.

Timber, bricklaying line, overhead projectors, studio collateral and ephemera.

Dimensions variable.

Photograph: Kate Scardifield.

allowed me to conceive of visual patterns as well as formal and conceptual relationships between objects. The grid allowed me to work within individually defined spaces for scrutiny, but meant that each of the areas was not physically separated, which brought a certain organic quality to the links and connections between neighbouring gridded squares. I considered the tools I used to render work (knives, scalpels, scissors and brushes) in the same manner I regarded my material residue and failed experiments – as laboured artefacts that had resulted from a cutting gesture. My intention was to afford a level of care and intimacy to every piece that was investigated. I realised that there is a distinct element of performativity involved in the excavation process, particularly when it is enacted in an unconventional context. Mark Dion's staged archaeological projects such as the *Tate Thames Dig* attest to this idea of excavation as being a clinical, albeit performative, volumetric study. By 'clinical' my reference is not invested with the subjective sense of being cold or sterile, rather it is more to suggest that the procuring, analysis and categorisation of parts suggests that the protocols of scientific study makes it the performer of a process. Archaeologist Colin Renfrew argues, "The heart of the *Thames Dig* is not really the display at the end of it. It is the work of the volunteers on the foreshore, and all that labour of conservation and classification in the tents."⁴⁰⁸ This emphasis on *WORK* in the title of my project is because what I have *not* intended to do was create a static shrine or a graveyard of good intentions out of my offcuts and studio ephemera. Rather the project is essentially about acts of uncovering, reconsidering, classifying and coding that are often reserved for the scientist. I am not a scientist, nor was I pushing for a fixed outcome of display. Instead, the process and the methodical working through, sectioning off, and studying of objects and studio artefacts became the key objective of the project.

In January 2013 I was given the opportunity to develop a new iteration of *SHRINE WORK* at the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) (fig. 86–89). The project expanded to include an experimental seven-day excavation of the Tasmanian painter Geoffrey Dyer's studio. The process involved sifting through, cataloguing and extracting over one thousand studio artefacts. The results of this process were configured into an outdoor installation on the grounds at MONA. This extension of the project was a profoundly different undertaking and result to what I had experienced and achieved at Alaska Projects through the excavation of my own studio practice. Firstly I had no familiarity with the studio I encountered; it was essentially a foreign body on which I undertook an excavatory dissection. At the time I maintained what I believed to be an objective viewpoint. However, on further reflection I came to the conclusion that objectivity was not the means by which I performed incisions and extractions into Dyer's studio collateral. It was a process of enacting a cutting spectacle, creating and synthesising my own splits into matter that were inevitably based on my own perception of what they could represent. Debord reminds us that the separation between real life and representation is bridged by the spectacle. He argues, "In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood."⁴⁰⁹ The imputation of truth, so often implied through the systematic and taxonomic arrangement of parts or fragments, is not guaranteed as the existence of truth. For Debord, "To reflect on history is

⁴⁰⁸ Renfrew, Colin. *It may be art but is it archaeology? Science as art and art as science*. Mark Dion: Archaeology. Ed. Alex Coles, Mark Dion. Black Dog Publishing Ltd, England, 1999. 21

⁴⁰⁹ Op. cit. Debord.14



Figure 86.

Kate Scardifield, *SHRINE WORK (Geoff Dyer)* 2013.
Installation view, Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) Tasmania.
Photograph: Kate Campbell.



Figure 87.

Kate Scardifield, *SHRINE WORK (Geoff Dyer)* 2013.
Project documentation: Selecting, sorting and cataloguing in Geoff Dyer's studio.
Photograph: Kate Campbell.



Figure 88.

Kate Scardifield, *SHRINE WORK (Geoff Dyer)* 2013,
Installation view, Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) Tasmania.
Photograph: Kate Scardifield.



Figure 89.

Kate Scardifield, *SHRINE WORK (Geoff Dyer)* 2013
Installation detail, Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) Tasmania.
Photograph: Kate Scardifield.

also, inextricably, to reflect upon power.”⁴¹⁰ This is important to consider not only in relation to the agency I exerted over Dyer’s studio ephemera, but also through the power I had to dismantle, arrange and juxtapose the material and metaphorical ‘body’ of my own practice. Debord understood the spectacle as a phenomenon that is simultaneously united and divided. He argued that in its most contradictory form, “division is presented as unity, and unity as division.”⁴¹¹ In this respect, Lacan’s proposition for the ‘illusion of unity’ generated by the specular image brings another layer of implication with regards to thinking about art practice as a form of anatomical enquiry. The question arises whether practice thought about as a whole can ever truly be considered the sum of its parts.

Across the development of my studio work what has become evident on reflection is the significance of *thinking* through *making*; the carving of a framework to situate my practice has occurred through a series of specular enactments of the cutting gesture in what has been a process driven investigation. When Deleuze and Guattari put forward their definition of a ‘concept’, they asserted,

Every concept has an irregular contour defined by the sum of its components, which is why, from Plato to Bergson, we find the idea of the concept being a matter of articulation, of cutting and cross-cutting. The concept is a whole because it totalizes its components, but it is a fragmentary whole.⁴¹²

In the process of articulating a concept one is expected to communicate and speak distinctly; to carve out an area of enquiry is to frame or instigate a boundary line around a particular idea. From my perspective this can be notoriously difficult for artists, as it sometimes comes with the inference of severing those intriguing or overlapping edges that connect the work to other spaces of meaning. Yet when Deleuze and Guattari expand on articulation as a series of “cutting and cross-cutting” actions, this also invites the idea that a concept, or a conceptual practice is not bound by clear (or clean-cut) parameters; it has the ability to generate alternate patterns, possibly paradigmatic relationships that connect it to other terrain not demarcated within the boundaries of the original enquiry. In Deleuze and Guattari’s words,

Possible worlds have a long history. In short, we say that every concept always has a history, even though this history zigzags, though it passes, if need be, through other problems or onto different planes. In any concept there are usually bits or components that come from other concepts, which corresponded to other problems and presupposed other planes. This is inevitable because each concept carries out a new cutting-out, takes on new contours, and must be reactivated or recut.⁴¹³

⁴¹⁰ Ibid. 98

⁴¹¹ Debord asserts, “Like modern society itself, the spectacle is at once united and divided. In both, unity is grounded in a split. As it emerges in the spectacle, however, this contradiction is itself contradicted by virtue of a reversal of its meaning: division is presented as unity, and unity as division.” Ibid. 36

⁴¹² Giles Deleuze, Felix Guattari.. *What Is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. Edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, European Perspectives. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 15-16.

⁴¹³ Ibid. 18

On reflection I have come to consider my practice-lead research as a series of intersections between ideas, history, theory and form. The notion that every concept always has a history is something that the key works generated throughout my research actively respond to. There are multiple histories and perspectives that are revisited and reanimated within my practice – and in relation to the *SHRINE WORK* project this also inevitably includes my own history and perspective. The artists examined over the course of these chapters have all been identified as seminal practitioners operating within a culture of dissection in contemporary art. In the guise of thinking about my own practice as a form of anatomical enquiry, I am reminded of Deleuze and Guattari's proposition that a concept is only a whole because of its totalised components. My practice can then be thought about as a contributing fragment to a culture of dissection within contemporary art, just as each artist within the field of practitioners discussed contributes their own fragment. This then creates a fragmentary whole, what is essentially a larger body of knowledge becomes characterised by the diverse and distinct sum of its parts.

Conclusion

When I consider bringing together and synthesising my research to affirm its contribution to the field, I also recognise that an element of irony exists, given that this practice-led research project has examined cultures of dissection and cutting as both a methodology and a subject for enquiry. My investigation has transgressed between the historical and contemporaneous, the objective being to dismantle and unpack significant enactments of the cutting spectacle. In the process of undertaking this research, implicitly related histories, theories and artefacts have been dissected and broken down into fragmentary parts for analysis. As this thesis has affirmed, knowledge is then brought about through a process of construction, an informed piecing together of interrelated parts that is both calculated and considered.

The findings presented in this thesis lay the groundwork for identifying a contemporary culture of dissection, and the significance of the historical and theoretical context for such a culture has been rigorously examined in order to demonstrate and locate its presence and relationship to current art practice. In the introduction I alluded to a weaving metaphor as a way of creating a framework of historical and contemporary cuts, incisions and dissective strategies. Karen Dale proposed a similar woven metaphor for her body of research only to negate it; the author citing issue with the drawing together of disparate materials and the implied homogeneity that results through the production of a woven cloth.⁴¹⁴ Instead, Dale turns to patchwork as a structural analogy in order to account for the incongruences in the shape and form of intersecting ideas, as well as acknowledging the inclusion of existing scholarship, or “fabrics made by others.”⁴¹⁵ Whilst Dale’s argument makes valid points, I consider her description of weaving to be rather rigid and intransigent. When I think about weaving I can remember the experimental approach I was encouraged to bring to this technique in my undergraduate studies in textiles. The weaving together of materials can be exceptionally dynamic when one starts to vary their parameters. Fibre diameter, fibre material, threads per inch, tension within the structure – these are all qualities that go into the making of a nonhomogeneous cloth. In this respect, it is my belief that a weaving metaphor is appropriate for my research; what I have aimed to produce is a unique cloth reinforced by diverse and variable threads. As asserted in the introduction, my intention has not been to homogenise the practice of cutting; as this thesis has demonstrated, no two act of incision can be considered the same. Rather my approach has been to move back and forth, drawing threads from the past into the present and adjusting tension through analyses that traverse both delicate cuts and slashes that sever.

This thesis has taken as its starting point the under-acknowledged significance of the cutting spectacle within contemporary art practice, and how cutting is an inherent characteristic that can be ascribed to a culture of dissection. In order to reveal a culture of dissection within contemporary art, one first has to have an understanding of how such a culture can be defined, before determining how it manifests in a contemporary context. Supported by the analysis of historical source material, throughout this thesis I have demonstrated that this culture can be

⁴¹⁴ Dale asserts, “weaving can be seen as a challenge to the traditional methods and tools of the ‘anatomising urge’. Rather than being a method of division it is a means of creating and fabricating.” The author also draws connection to the association of weaving and patchwork as women’s work, citing their use as metaphors within feminist discourse. See Op. cit. Dale. 28

⁴¹⁵ Ibid. 63-64

characterised by an engrained cutting spectacle. Its epistemological implications, which have previously remained implicit and under-recognised within the field of contemporary visual arts, have at this point been made apparent through an examination of seminal artists who undertake acts of anatomisation, or whose practice can be positioned as a type of anatomical enquiry. Over the course of this research I was particularly interested and focused on the notion of scaffolds, and how these structures for displaying the cutting spectacle crossed from the punitive to the medical, the museological, and in to the contemporary exhibition space. My investigation into cutting as a gesture inflicted on the body has been carried through to the representation of the body in images. This has yielded evidence that such a spectacle cannot be confined in terms of cutting into or cutting open, rather what has been determined is that cutting is a complex gesture that affords many outcomes; hence truncating and severing incisions were also examined alongside those that fracture, producing subsequent bodily fragments.

In chapter 1 the intrinsic relationship between the cutting and sites and spaces of theatre was examined. Through a theoretical frame that proposed a return to theatre and responded to Freud's call for an aesthetic enquiry into the uncanny, the implications of the cutting spectacle were investigated and revealed as a specific mode of incision inextricably linked to the anatomisation of the body. The work of ORLAN and Teresa Margolles was considered to demonstrate the contemporaneous significance of a dissective visual culture and what it means to cut open the body, either physically or via a material metaphor.

Chapter 2 has confirmed the cutting spectacle as a gesture of political significance; through a historical examination of the guillotine employed during the French Revolution and the eighteenth century pseudo-scientific practice of physiognomy, representations of the severed head were determined to exist as emblematic signifiers for those individuals who embody the sacred or pertain to the sacrifice. Importantly, it was revealed that the cutting spectacle employed to anatomise and examine the body's interior had the ability to transgress to another type of incision employed to detach, demarcate and delineate the body's exterior. The implications of this type of cutting practice were investigated in the works of Kara Walker, Sally Smart and Deborah Kelly, artists who engage with a visual economy of silhouettes and cut-outs in order to critique and subvert representations of the body and histories inscribed onto the body politic.

Chapter 3 positioned anatomical enquiry as a form of excavation, looking specifically to the production and procurement of body fragments and the idea of imaginary anatomy. The eighteenth century anatomical museum was examined to consider the implications of presenting the body in parts and the body whole, the use of theatrical tropes and methods of mimicry amongst modes of classification and display. Underpinning this chapter was Lacan's theoretical proposition of the *corps morcelé* and an investigation into the relationship between the observer and the observed, the spectator and the spectacle. The works of Catherine Truman, Christine Borland and Mark Dion were discussed, revealing that each artist engages in their own distinct cutting practice, and how this can incorporate archaeological approaches and stratigraphic

methodologies. The significance of history as a material was made evident in each artists' work through the enactment of cutting gestures intended to both uncover and hollow out.

In chapter 4 I addressed the creative component of this research through an analysis and discussion of key works generated over the period of this project. My studio approach was demonstrated to embody the idea of thinking through making; accordingly, cutting as a material and metaphorical gesture was shown to have been employed across speculative and diverse works that traverses sculpture, assemblage, installation and painting. Importantly, I argue that my practice can be considered a form of anatomical enquiry; drawing on the historical and theoretical discussions that occur in the first three chapters has allowed me to contextualise and augment my contribution to the field.

Throughout this thesis there has been a coupling of psychoanalytical theories in discussion with Deleuzian ideas concerning the body, which has contributed to a series of intersections – or to use Deleuze and Guattari's language, 'cuttings and cross cuttings.' However, it is important to acknowledge that not all ideas can be considered totally compatible and it has not been my intention to retroactively force them to fit together. This position is also reflected through my creative work, where I have not intended to illustrate or demonstrate theory; rather I think about my practice as an activation of ideas on, around and within the theories discussed. One is reminded of Foucault, whose assertion that "knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" evokes the complexities, diversities and differences that are negotiated in the process of research.⁴¹⁶ Where Foucault implicates the cutting gesture with the ability to discern and extract the knowledge it desires, I have attempted to activate this gesture by dissecting historical images, theoretical threads and contemporary practices, drawing fragments together through the process of suturing and interconnectivity in a way that bolsters and strengthens each idea through its relationship to another.

To recall the apprehensive and suspenseful tone of Richard Selzer, "To let it out, to cut it open, is to risk losing it over earth, an oceanic tide."⁴¹⁷ The contemporary artists discussed within this thesis have been identified as seminal practitioners contributing to a culture of dissection in contemporary art, but they are not however to be thought of as encapsulating the entirety of such a culture. There are many artists who have not been discussed in this thesis who employ or respond to cutting spectacles in their work and whose practice can be characterised as a form of anatomical enquiry. In truth, this was at first a concern of mine, however in hindsight not being able to analyse all the other artists within the confines of this paper has allowed me to unpack the significance of the historical inflictions of the cutting spectacle. I wish to acknowledge this as a considered decision made to define the parameters of this research. Put simply, I am of the belief that achieving a greater understanding of where we have been allows one to better understand where we are going. Consequently, the historical examination and analysis of source materials throughout this thesis has afforded me a much more comprehensive understanding of the

⁴¹⁶ Op. cit. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. 130-131

⁴¹⁷ Op. cit. Selzer, *Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery*. 42

significant implications of dissective practices and what it means to *cut into*, *cut out* or *cut open* the body. What the contemporary artists examined in this paper demonstrate is the great depth and diversity in forms of practice and modes of enquiry that can be thought about within the context of a culture of dissection. This investigation has then paved the way for further artists to be examined and considered in relation to this field.

Evolving from the research undertaken in this thesis, there are directions and ideas that have arisen that have not been able to be fully extrapolated within the context of this project. Regarding the developments in my studio practice, there are also intangible yet immutable ideas oscillating within and around my work that cannot be fully quantified, alongside ideas that have come to light that lead the work in new directions that were not necessarily present during the making. These directions and ideas propose new avenues for enquiry that would not have been made apparent had it not been for the foundations laid at this point.

In pursuing these emerging facets of my practice, I have identified further potential for an investigation into the significance of ceremony and ritual in relation to practices that commemorate the dead. In 2014 and 2015, with support from the Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship and the Australia Council for the Arts, I plan to observe and document two significant festivals; *Semana Santa (Holy Week)* in Seville, Spain, and *Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)* in Mexico City. This field research will then form the conceptual foundation of a new work project, where my intention is to gain a greater understanding of how particular sacred objects operate and how bodies interact with these artefacts during ritualised celebrations. This project will continue to examine my interest in creating artworks that can simulate a devotional relic or operate as an implicit sacred site. Building on my knowledge of the complexities surrounding the cutting spectacle, this project will allow me to further experiment with what implications a dissective mode of enquiry can have on objects and how this can inform the configuration of interactive artworks in the exhibition space. Essentially, this enquiry will continue to examine the possible relationships that can be forged between the observer and the observed, the spectacle and the spectator. *Into Theatre, Under the Knife: Cultures of Dissection and Contemporary Art Practice* has provided a historical and theoretical context in which to consider my work. What is most rewarding at its conclusion is the realisation that this is a means and not the end.

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