

## Giulio Bonasone's anatomical engravings

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Translating the physicality of the human body into visual representation has always been one of the crucial issues in the history of western art, and one of the major concerns of artists and philosophers of the early modern period. The discursive potential of images concerning the human body encompassed essential categories of knowledge, because they held the power of either reinforcing or destabilising the very concept of the reliability of images, and thus an entire cultural system which relied on the implicit truthfulness of certain scientific, social and political notions. During the early modern period, artists, physicians and natural philosophers were engaged in furious debates regarding these questions, due to forceful social shifts, extraordinary technological developments and a number of discoveries occurring simultaneously in the geographical and anatomical sphere.<sup>1</sup>

This article focuses on a short series of anatomical prints produced by Giulio Bonasone, a Bolognese engraver, during the second half of the sixteenth century. This collection deals with perceptions of the body and its representation in untraditional ways. Bonasone was a rather successful artist who worked in Bologna and Rome between 1531 and 1574, and who produced a vast number of engraving and a few paintings.<sup>2</sup> In his catalogue *Le Peintre Graveur*, still an authority in the field of early modern prints, Adam von Bartsch describes him as a well-known engraver, prolific and inventive in his figurations but not always consistent in the quality of his works.<sup>3</sup> This anatomical series was produced, according to Stefania Massari, around the early '60s of the sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> It presents, however, a number of odd, unprecedented features that set it apart from the abundant production of anatomical studies of that period. This collection, which comprises fourteen independent engravings, has not yet been subjected to the analysis it deserves: this article, then, aims to fill, at least partially, such gap. In the limited space of this study, my analysis will not include all images from the series. Rather, it will focus on a few prints that assume a particular importance in the field of early modern production and diffusion of knowledge about the human body and its role in the natural world.

The peculiar qualities of these images is immediately evident: in each plate the figures interact with many different objects that are ambiguous, or even extraneous to traditional visual vocabularies in the representation of early modern anatomical illustrations (a globe, ropes, a strange rectangular object, the branch of a dead tree). (Fig. 1, 2, 3, 4) Many elements and themes present in more famous images from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, such as the accurate display of every muscle, organ and limb, or the insertion of the human figure in some kind of natural or architectural environment, are strangely absent. The bodies that inhabit these anatomical illustrations exist in a space deprived of any sort of connotation, precariously perched on flat, anonymous surfaces. More similar to antique friezes than to images engraved on paper, each figure stands out of a dull background made of thick dark lines.

In this article I will posit that these images, rather than propose an accurate representation of the human body which could be useful for medical students, respond to complex social and psychic implications that were (and still are) inextricably connected to the violent act of dissection. In the early modern period, the body still maintained its implicit value as image of God and ideal centre of the universe: yet, it was on the way to

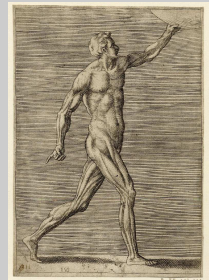


Figure 1:  
GIULIO BONASONE  
*Plate 11, Series of anatomical studies*, 1550-60, Engraving, 153 mm x 107 mm, British Museum, London

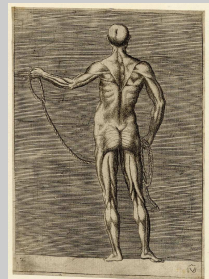
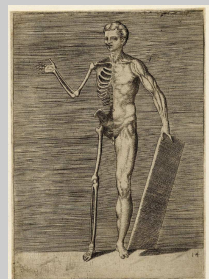


Figure 2:  
GIULIO BONASONE  
*Plate 2, Series of anatomical studies*, 1550-60, Engraving, 153 mm x 107 mm, British Museum, London



become nothing more than mere subject of cultural norms, legislations and restrictions. At the same time, however, the body was starting to assume a crucial role for a new production of knowledge: it is not casual that the Italian term *sviscerare* means not only “to examine, explore, investigate”, but also, quite literally, “to disembowel, lacerate, destroy”. Annihilate the body, then, was necessary to know it. A similar notion, which consequently materialised complex intellectual and social tensions, was already present during the early modern period, when the practice of dissecting corpses for didactic reasons was progressively spreading throughout Europe.

Traditionally, early modern anatomical illustrations expressed with emphasis (bordering on the rhetorical) their own intellectual authority. Thanks to a meticulous attention to detail and faithful complementarity to textual apparatuses that generally accompanied them, they claimed a reliability that depended from an absolute adherence to natural forms. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that the concept of anatomy as scientific discipline, and the very notion of “science” itself, was foreign to cultures and practices of the early modern period.<sup>5</sup> The ideas concerning nature and all its elements, including the human body, were not arranged around unmovable categories: producing knowledge was a fluid process, often based on more visual representations than the establishing norms, laws and rules. The artist’s imagination was not dependent from philosophical or scientific systems, but, on the contrary, was an autonomous creative tool, which retained its own authority.<sup>6</sup>

One of the essential ideas in the production and diffusion of this kind of images was the assimilation of the human body to the divine configuration of the entire universe. For this reason, illustrations belonging to treatises of natural history and philosophy usually represented the human (male) body as an idealised model, the most complete and perfected expression of nature.<sup>7</sup> Such a notion combined religious dogmas with influential texts and philosophies from classical times, among which the famous statement by Protagoras that “man is the measure of all things”. When looking at the figures from Giulio Bonasone’s series, it is evident how the main focal point of these engravings is the variety of motions, gestures and animations, rather than an idealised representation of the body. The distorted, extreme facial expressions, as well as the forced and contrived rendition of the muscles, indicate a very different purpose. To fully appreciate the uniqueness of these images, however, it is necessary to contextualise them in contemporary developments concerning the study of the human body.

The publication of the seven volumes of the *Fabric of the Human Body* by Andreas Vesalius in 1543 represented, as it is commonly known, a breakthrough in the modes of perception and representation of the body. (Fig. 5) This treatise on human anatomy included original illustrations, richly detailed and directly related to the textual body (relying on the use of cartouches, inscriptions, annotations). The *Fabric* developed and promoted not only an innovative system of practices related to medicine and the exploration of the body during dissections, but also a new epistemology based on the human body, which aimed to find common norms and rule to compensate the (often troubling) variety of corporeal differences. As I have already mentioned, the problems inherent in the search for reliability and truthfulness when reproducing the natural world in image assumed in the early modern period an even more urgent quality in relation to the body. These representations epitomised and influenced the production and diffusion of anatomical knowledge just as much as contemporary medical discoveries, so that notions of dissection and personal identity soon became interconnected, if not mutually dependant.

The innovations brought forth by the *Fabric* consisted not simply in the correction of a few mistakes in Galen’s system of physiology, to an extent already known but still part of a rigidly solidified medical knowledge. Rather, as Andrea Carlino argued in his *Books of the Body*, Vesalius proposed a new research methodology, through which he both reinforced the didactic potential of dissection and introduced a tool for a critical and empirical knowledge of the body, independent from classical texts.<sup>8</sup> Vesalius had been the first to realise how practices of dissection were the only possible guide for a reliable description of the human body. The

Figure 3:  
GIULIO BONASONE  
*Plate 14, Series of anatomical studies*, 1550-60, Engraving, 153 mm x 107 mm, British Museum, London

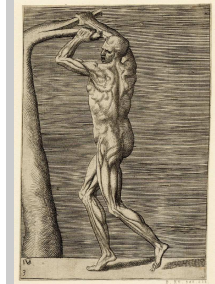


Figure 4:  
GIULIO BONASONE  
*Plate 3, Series of anatomical studies*, 1550-60, Engraving, 153 mm x 107 mm, British Museum, London

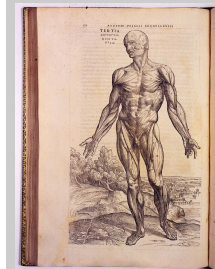


Figure 5:  
ANDREAS VESALIUS  
*Illustration from the treatise Fabric of the Human Body*, 1543, Engraving, Wellcome Collection, London



Figure 6:  
DOMENICO DEL BARBIERE  
*Anatomical Study*, 1540-50, Engraving, 238 mm x 338 mm, British Museum, London



method he proposed was at the same time didactic and investigative, so that body and text worked together to express this new knowledge. From the Fabric transpires thus a particular emphasis on the importance of combining visual representations with more abstract teachings and investigations.<sup>9</sup>

Bonasone's anatomical engravings, as opposed to the ones in Vesalius' treatise, were not produced for comparative or analytic studies of the human body. The figures, roughly sketched and seemingly assembled more at random than following methodical studies, could not be further away from the normative intent of the Fabric. While, in Vesalius' treatise, illustrations follow one another in a progressive unveiling of the body and its insides, in a path of discovery parallel to the physical act of reading the book (where pages become a metaphor for skin, muscles, bones), Bonasone's series follows no such methodological device.

It is significant that Bonasone's engravings are not referencing any kind of text. Rather than codifying specific norms and producing precise, quantifiable information or data, these figures prefer to communicate with the viewer in more immediate ways, through gestures, postures and facial expressions. The sense of unease that imbues these images originates precisely from this non-verbal quality. Of course, the enigmatic, impenetrable and somewhat macabre atmosphere of these illustrations belongs to many other early modern representations of dissections (such as the prints by Charles Estienne and William Harvey). They all represent, in different ways, the same nightmarish vision of a corpse coming back to life, obscenely displaying its muscles, tendons and bones.<sup>10</sup>

Giorgio Agamben argues, in his essay *Nudities*, that the desire to show one's own flesh, to force the body in incongruous and trivial positions, is a psychic strategy that aims to destabilise and disavow the divine essence to which the body, both in the theological and psychoanalytic fields, is inextricably connected. What is revealed, in these contrived postures, is the explicit and irreparable loss of this state of grace.<sup>11</sup> The naked body (and thus also the anatomised body, since the extreme point of nudity is the one where not only clothes are removed, but skin itself) as symbol of knowledge refers to philosophico-mystical discourses, because it embodies precisely the process of discovery, the appropriation of a specific discourse of knowledge. We are particularly fascinated by such images, Agamben posits, because they do not represent reality, the thing, the object, but the essential possibility to be aware of it, to understand it.<sup>12</sup>

It is then from representations of the body that it is possible to extract a more insightful anatomical knowledge. This intuition, with its somewhat exoteric taste, seems to reverberate in the images I have discussed so far, precisely due to the way they reproduce and make the body visible. The figures are situated in a more abstract and intellectual context, where knowledge is not merely transmitted but actively created. The links between figures and text, references to classical art, allegorical themes, natural landscapes and architectonical ruins are not merely stylistic details, but iconographical tools that aim to reinforce a specific notion of the human figure. All these devices contribute not only to the production and dissemination of ideas on the importance of anatomical studies (drawing on authoritative classical culture), but also, perhaps, to mediate between the desire of knowledge and the anguish and guilt generated by the physical act of dissection, after all still a heavily stigmatised practice.<sup>13</sup>

Both in Italy and in Europe, corpses were anatomised in a theatrical setting, during performances that had strong liturgical undertones. Anatomy as a practice was subjected to rapid changes: from private lessons for students of medicine and surgery, it was quickly transforming into a public spectacle, open to a wide range of individuals (artists, craftsmen, even casual spectators).<sup>14</sup> The ritualistic aspect of human dissection, a solemn combination of public punishment and production of knowledge, norms, conventions, is a fundamental aspect in early modern culture, and plays an important role in both the analysis and the understanding of anatomical representations. As Jonathan Sawday argued in his seminal book *The Body Emblazoned*, published in 1995, such dramatic performances merged theatrical practices, bio-political

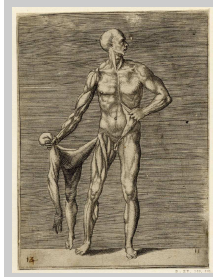


Figure 7:  
GIULIO BONASONE  
Plate 13, *Series of anatomical studies*, 1550-60, Engraving, 153 mm x 107 mm, British Museum, London



Figure 8:  
JACOPO BERENGARIO DA CARPI  
Illustration from the treatise *Isagogae breves*, 1523, Woodcut, National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland, U.S

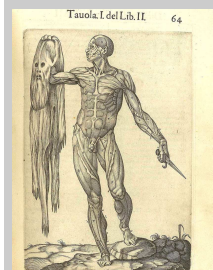


Figure 9:  
JUAN VALVERDE DE AMUSCO  
Illustration from the treatise *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano*, 1556, Engraving, National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland, U.S



demonstrations of judicial power, and philosophical allusions to the divine origin of the human body, with all its theological implications.<sup>15</sup> As Sawday points out, the issues of crime and punishment were inextricably intertwined into many aspects of early modern Italian culture. Dissection as capital punishment was an established practice in Italy by the second half of the thirteenth century. It was designed not only to evoke terror at the idea of the violation of the body, but also to add another, much more horrifying dimension to the already harsh sentence: the denial of a Christian burial, which involved the posthumous – and eternal – punishment of the criminal's soul, thus unable to access Heaven.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the stigma associated with public dissection also lied in the dramatic violation of personal and family honour and the humiliation derived from the public exposure of the naked body.<sup>17</sup> These issues were definitely present in the minds of artists who worked on anatomical illustrations, and provoked intense emotive reactions that emerged in different ways in their production.

It is very likely that Giulio Bonasone himself assisted to such spectacles in the renowned anatomical theatre of Bologna. After all, studying human proportions and acquiring first-hand experience of human bones, muscles and skin, was considered the mandatory approach for those who wished to learn how to correctly represent the human body. It was first Lorenzo Ghiberti in his *Commentarii* of 1447 to state that

“It is necessary [for the artist] to have seen anatomy, so that the sculptor knows how many bones are in the human body when sculpting a male statue, and how many muscles are in the body and all the nerves and ligatures are in it”.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of such statement should not be underplayed: however, similar ideas already existed in essence, as Leon Battista Alberti attests. In his treatise *De Pictura* of 1435, he advised painters to represent the nude body drawing the bones first, then the flesh, and finally the skin, thus assuming that artists had some prior knowledge of human anatomy.<sup>19</sup> It is now common knowledge that already in the early sixteenth century the study of anatomy as a didactic practice for artists was firmly positioned among the practices of “bella maniera”<sup>20</sup>, especially after Leonardo's and Michelangelo's progresses in the study of the realistic composition of human figures. Countless studies of single bones, limbs and muscles remain to us as a proof of how widespread such anatomical practices were in that period.

The punitive act of flaying was another practice associated not only to the study of anatomy and the judiciary system, but also to artistic activities. According to early modern scholars such as Sarah Kay, removing the skin as punishment was not only a recourse of law but also a form of “poetic” or moral justice. While it was instigated as sentence, it could be reversed into – and even embraced as – a sort of Christian sacrifice, situating the criminal in a kind of christological dimension. Thus, the extreme suffering of such physical and intellectual torture, (since it encompassed physical pain and definitive loss of identity) could be sublimated into an abstract, almost spiritual invulnerability.<sup>21</sup>

An interesting detail in relation to the link between punishment and anatomy is that each lesson at the anatomical theatre of Bologna would begin with the formulaic expression “our subject for the anatomy lesson has been hanged”.<sup>22</sup> The recurring presence of ropes in Bonasone's anatomical images seems to be an explicit reference to this dense culture of punishment, shame and ritual. It is surprising to notice the almost insolent attitude of the figure in Plate 2 (Fig. 2) who resolutely turns away from the viewer. It is as if the corpse is evoking, through a deliberate denial of eye contact, its own identity loss, its reduction from man, created in the image of God, to object of study, no more dominating nature but simply a part of it.

The dual state of the body, stuck between sacredness and materiality,

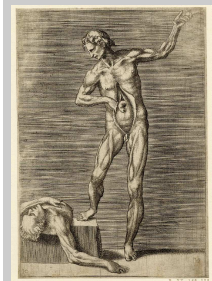


Figure 10:  
GIULIO BONASONE  
*Plate 10, Series of anatomical studies*,  
1550-60, Engraving,  
153 mm x 107 mm,  
British Museum,  
London

seems to be epitomised in Plate 14, (Fig. 3) in which the figure is literally split in half: on one side, it is still fully fleshed, on the other only bones remain. Such a figuration was already on the way to become a common trope in early modern anatomical images, not only because it offers a comprehensive picture of how bones influence the motions of the muscles,<sup>23</sup> but also because it acted as reference to allegorical and philosophical concepts concerning the temporary nature of the body. An example of this trend appears, for instance, in an engraving produced by Domenico del Barbieri after a drawing by Rosso Fiorentino. (Fig. 6) In this image, two *écorchés* (flayed bodies) and two skeletons are showed simultaneously: the exasperated details in the representation of the muscles and the stretched, unnatural poses of the bodies reflect the visual vocabulary of the contemporary mannerist style. The details of the trophies and battle vestiges are easily recognisable as allegorical references to the ephemeral value of life's accomplishments and glories. The mysterious dark curtain on the right and the cloth that covers the skeleton on the left, almost a parody of the laurel crown on the head of his flayed companion, are most likely allusions to the inevitability of death. In Bonasone's engravings, however, such allegorical references are accurately avoided. Moreover, if compared to Domenico del Barbieri's skeleton, the one in Plate 14 (Fig. 3) is outlined with scarce attention to physical accuracy, especially in the detail of the right hand, which seems still be covered in flesh. The focus is clearly on the emphatic, demonstrative gesture of the right arm. The enigmatic rectangular object on which his left hand is posed, maybe a column or even a stylised tree trunk, contributes to the general feel of incongruity. But it is perhaps the detail of the facial expression that generates the gloomy sense of loss and dread that imbues this engraving. The mouth, open as if emitting a constant lament, and the eyelids, lowered or maybe open on hollow eye cavities, transform this figure from a rigorous technical illustration into a terrible vision from Hell.

Whoever dealt with bodies and their representations was certainly well aware of the discursive relationship between the incisions artists made on metal plaques to produce images and those made on cadavers during dissections. Prints, easily accessible and reproducible on a large scale, became in the early modern the favourite mode of transmission and diffusion of anatomical knowledge, eventually creating a well-defined style with its own conventions and recurrent representations. Engraving, a highly skilled craft characterised by a lengthy process and an uncertain result, was conceived in consideration of the materials it employs, its nature, resources and potentialities. Since the medieval period, it was common to consider the medium, in this case a metal plaque, as a bearer of a specific meaning per se.<sup>24</sup> The similarities between the act of peeling the paper from the plate and ripping the skin from the body could not have passed unnoticed.

Plate 11 of Giulio Bonasone's anatomical collection (Fig. 1) shows a figure holding an object similar to a globe<sup>25</sup> placed in the upper right angle. Yet, both the pose and the odd shadowing seem to leave space for another interpretation, one that takes into account the intersections between engraving and dissecting the body. In this image, it appears the flayed body is grabbing the folded angle of the very page it is engraved onto. As the anatomist strips the skin from a dead body, to discover the inner functions of a still mysterious organism, so the engraver strips the paper from the metal plaque to unveil the newly created image, a new site of knowledge. The skinless corpse seems to be removing another layer of skin, the layer of the page imprinted on the metal plate, as if mirroring the same procedures it has been subjected to.

Other images in this collection, such as for instance Plate 13, (Fig. 7) represent the corpse removing its own skin and holding it as if it were a cloth or a cloak. Sarah Kay posits that this figuration was made common by devotional representations of Saint Bartholomew, such as that in Michelangelo's *Final Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel.<sup>26</sup> More than a popular way of producing images, however, depicting a corpse flaying itself was both a way to display the features of each muscle while preserving the unity of the human body, and a strategy that triggers a deep affective and visceral response. Self-anatomising corpses populate not only the pages of Vesalius' *Fabric*, but appear in the vast majority of

texts, even from earlier times, concerning the body. They are featured, for instance, in Berengario da Carpi's *Isagogae breves in anatomiam humani corporis*, a medicine treatise published in Bologna in 1523 (Fig. 8) and in books as famous as the Fabric, such as the immensely popular *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano* by the spaniard Juan Valverde de Amusco, printed in Rome in 1556. (Fig. 9) Somewhat in between plagiarism and genuine attempt of improvement, Valverde famously borrowed almost the entirety of Vesalius' illustrations (without acknowledging his authorship) in some cases combining them together to produce particularly insightful images, which represent even today a fertile terrain for the study of early modern practices related to the body.<sup>27</sup>

In these anatomical illustrations, skin is no longer perceived as a mere surface, but becomes instead a more productive site onto which political, cultural and psychic issues are projected. As it has been pointed out, the fact that skin (or its representations) can mean at the same time beauty and abjection, and evoke both attraction and repulsion, highlights the skin's potential to bear multiple and at times contradictory meanings.<sup>28</sup> And contradictions and ambiguity seem to propagate from body to printed space in Plate 13. (Fig. 7) The figure's shadow does not dissolve into emptiness: instead, it stops abruptly when meeting the background, suggesting the association of the printed figure to statuary reliefs. The corpse is represented in the process of tearing his skin apart, so that its body appears, once again, splitting in half: one side is still enveloped by skin, while the other exposes its insides. An uncanny shadow of that same body, however, seems to emerge from the lump of skin he is holding in his right hand. An inert mass, somewhat elongated, this formless sack of skin is transformed into a smaller scale double of the body it comes from. The skin from the corpse's arm, slightly twisted, assumes the shape of a leg. The skin removed from the right leg, instead, maintains its form, and clearly mirrors the one made of flesh. There is no encounter nor exchange in this figuration. In what seems like a refusal to acknowledge his own fragmentation, its dissociation, the corpse forcefully turns his head away from his double, a shadow of himself made of dangling skin, enclosing emptiness. Removing skin brings about a brutal elimination of personal identity, because it unveils one of the most troubling displacements of the human psyche: situating the essence of the self not inside the body, but on the skin, its enclosing layer.<sup>29</sup>

In anatomical images, the body is an individual entity that can be scrutinised, rationalised, normalized, so that the split, the doubling, happens between the fleshy materiality of the body and the intangible idea of consciousness, of individuality, a site of knowledge production. The body is, in the images by Bonasone, something to colonise through mental abstraction, and it becomes a territorialised representation of the space in which anatomisation happens. As Didier Anzieu notes in his book *The Skin Ego* of 1985, skin functions in a paradoxical way, since it is a form of identity that we perceive in modes that are simultaneously opposite: permeable and impermeable, superficial and profound, truthful and misleading, source of pleasure and pain.<sup>30</sup> Considering those elements in reference to anatomical art, in which "phantasies of mutilation of the skin have been freely expressed", Anzieu concludes that painters, much earlier than writers and psychoanalysts, "perceived and represented the link between skin and perverse masochism".<sup>31</sup> The theme of inflicting pain in ourselves and to others is explicitly expressed in Plate 10, (Fig. 10) in which a male figure lies dead at the feet of another, partially flayed and holding a knife. This image represents an original response to the social discourses and iconographical conventions discussed so far. If the trope of the self-dissecting corpse was already part of an established visual culture, the paradoxical splitting between victim and executioner had never been expressed with such clarity. This illustration seems to embody (pun intended) such processes of physical and psychic fragmentation. In Vesalius' treatise it is the same body to be represented over and over, page after page, removing each time a new layer, from skin to bone. This figuration, instead, doubles the body, seeking new meanings by destabilising the notion of individual identity and corporeal integrity.

As I have already mentioned, representing corpses of criminals as initiators of their own dissection was a strategy to complicate the rituals

surrounding crime and punishment. Through self-dissection, these figures internalise the punitive act, since they give in to the social obligation to produce anatomical knowledge; yet, at the same time, they resist to penal codes of the early modern age, because it is from them that this knowledge depends.<sup>32</sup> In Plate 10, (Fig. 10) the course of the events is unclear: the plate could represent a murder scene, perhaps a re-enactment of the criminal act committed by the anatomised body in life that eventually led to his punitive dissection. Or, conversely, we could be seeing the same figure at two different moments in time: the self-flaying man prefiguring the fate (his life-after-death, as purveyor of knowledge) of the one lying lifeless on the pedestal. Such an image, complicating the narrative of dissection, would certainly appear less disturbing were the two bodies represented separately (as they are in Vesalius' *Fabric*). Pairing, in this instance, sets off a peculiar kind of abjection, one that is triggered by the breakdown of boundary between life and death, inside and outside, self and other.

The psychoanalytic notion of abjection has been developed by Julia Kristeva in her book *Powers of Horror* of 1980. Heavily based on Lacanian psychoanalysis, the book defines abjection as the child's process of forcefully expelling what is part of itself. What is abjected, however, can never be completely excluded, but remains part of ourselves, and throughout our lives constantly challenges our concepts of self-identity and integrity. According to Kristeva, the corpse is the space in which borders between self and other are erased, collapse, lose meaning. The corpse reminds us that death is inevitable, but is not simply because it is a symbol of human mortality. It directly infects our own living, violating our own borders. Representing the epitome of abjection, we reject corpses, but they are that from which we are ultimately unable to depart.<sup>33</sup> This print seems to materialise both the traumatic encounter with the cadaver and its pervasive ability to pollute our perceptions. The dead body, laying awkwardly on the left, is now forever lost. The one standing, seemingly alive, repeats its own dissection by peeling away its skin and exposing the insides of its abdomen (represented, significantly, without any kind of anatomical accuracy). This figure is in between life and death, a corpse that came back to life only to die again. The bodies from Vesalius' *Fabric* aimed to transform anatomised bodies into categories of knowledge through their insertion in classical landscapes, which remind viewers that integrity and fragmentation are not in binary opposition but can freely take each other's place. Those of Valverde's attempted to produce a space in which the inherent contradictions of translating the body's physicality into representations could be explored.<sup>34</sup> This image, instead, seems to be doing something completely different. The body is certainly not represented as an idealised form, epitome of perfection and generator of norms and laws; it is neither an attempt to reveal internal problems in anatomy as a practice. It is, perhaps, a sombre suggestion that knowledge cannot be acquired through accumulations of technical notions. Corporeal unity, lost in dissection, cannot ever be recovered. Fragmentation is absolute and inevitable.

In the limited space of this article, I aimed to propose a new way of looking at the anatomical series produced by Giulio Bonasone. The entire collection would of course require a more detailed analysis due to the large amount of peculiarities it contains, which are perhaps unique in the context of early modern Italy. These images seem to react to the complex cultural circumstances that surrounded the study of the human body, in between dominant religious beliefs and shifting philosophical thoughts, according to which the human body could (and should) be analysed through practices until then reserved to objects and elements from nature. The actual moment of dissection, which was about to become a social ritual with its own rigorous regulations, produced in spectators and executioners intense emotive responses: when translating anatomy into image, these responses were manifested in different modes. Generally, there was an attempt to reconstruct some kind of bodily integrity despite – or even because of, the violent laceration of the corpse (a laceration that was both physical and psychic). In Giulio Bonasone's anatomical series, instead, the intent seems to be the opposite. These images intensify the split between corporeal physicality and personal identity, and replicate indefinitely notions of rupture, doubling, fragmentation, materialising a creeping sense of morbid abjection.

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> These debates are discussed at length in a vast and ever growing literature. The sources here considered include PARSHALL 1993, CARLINO 1999, SMITH 2006, DACKERMAN 2011.

<sup>2</sup> On Giulio Bonasone's biographical details, see CUMBERLAND 1793.

<sup>3</sup> BARTSCH 1866, p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> MASSARI 1983, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> On this issue see, for instance, BECK 2015.

<sup>6</sup> On the generative potential of artistic imagination see, for instance, KUSUKAWA 2012, and PARSHALL 1993, especially pp. 554-579

<sup>7</sup> On the concepts of microcosm and macrocosm, see FOUCAULT 1994. As it is well known, in the second chapter of this book Foucault describes what he defines the "epistemic shift" that happened towards the end of the seventeenth century concerning the perception of the human body as centre of the universe. His analysis, while still relevant today, has recently been critiqued as excessively triumphalist, and somewhat limiting due to its stark periodisations.

<sup>8</sup> CARLINO 1999, pp. 1-3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> WILSON 1987, p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> AGAMBEN 2011, p. 75.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84

<sup>13</sup> See FERRARI 1987.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>15</sup> SAWDAY 1995, pp. 75-76.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55

<sup>17</sup> PARK, 1994, pp. 13-14

<sup>18</sup> "[Bisogna] auere ueduto notomia acciò che' llo scultore sappi quante ossa sono nel corpo humano uolendo comporre la statua uirile et sapere e muscoli sono nel corpo dello huomo et così tutti nerui et legature sono in esso." GHIBERTI 1998, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> ALBERTI 1980, Vol. II, par. 36.

<sup>20</sup> SCHULTZ 1985, 67.

<sup>21</sup> KAY 2006, p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> SAWDAY 1995, p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> GINN, LORUSSO 2008, pp. 297-298.

<sup>24</sup> KAY 2006, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> According to the Adam von Bartsch's interpretation. See BARTSCH 1866, p. 168.



[26](#) KAY 2006, pp. 38-39.

[27](#) The controversies between Vesalius and Valverde are of interest, but find no space in the limited scope of this article. On Valverde have written, among others, KLESTINEC 2005, and WOLF 2007.

[28](#) CAVANAGH, FAILLER, JOHNSTON HURST 2013, p.2.

[29](#) KAY 2006, p. 47.

[30](#) ANZIEU 1989, p. 17.

[31](#) *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[32](#) POWELL 2011, par. 19.

[33](#) KRISTEVA 1982.

[34](#) SAN JUAN 2008, pp. 57- 60.

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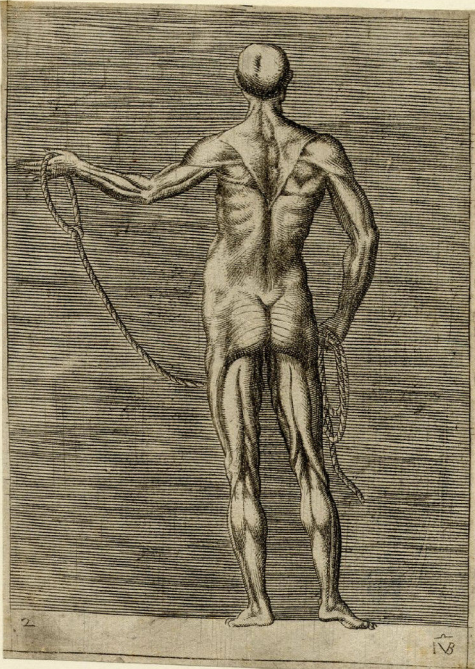
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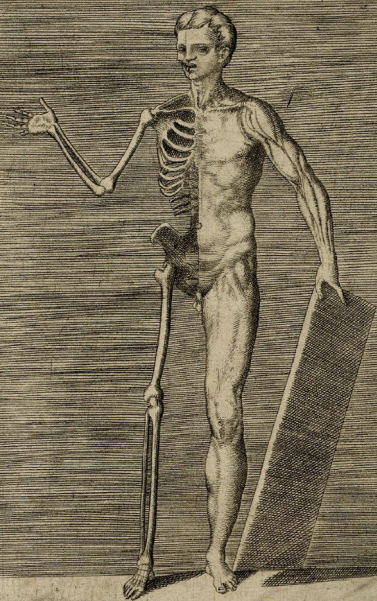


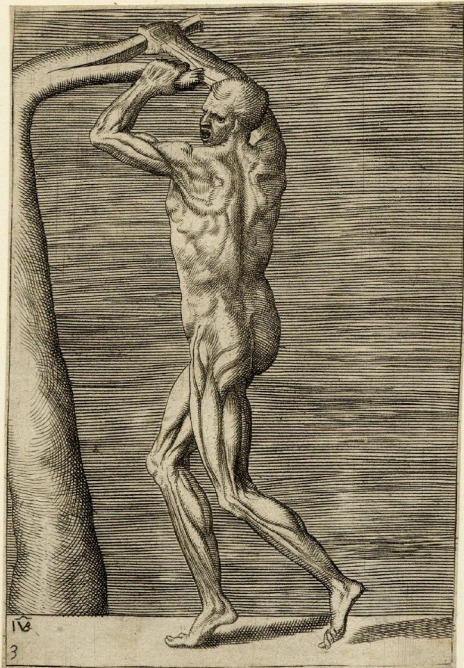




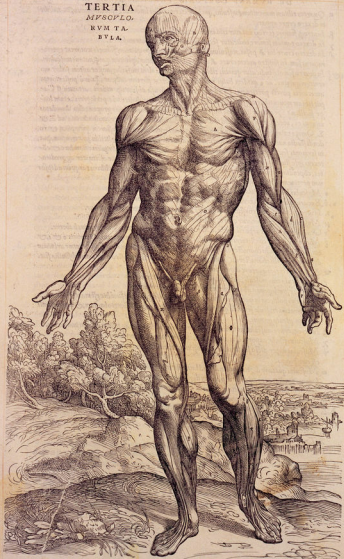
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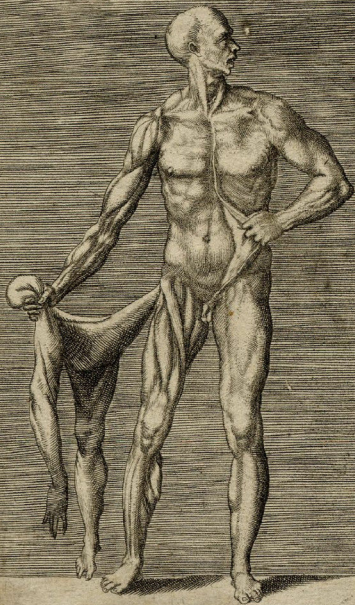


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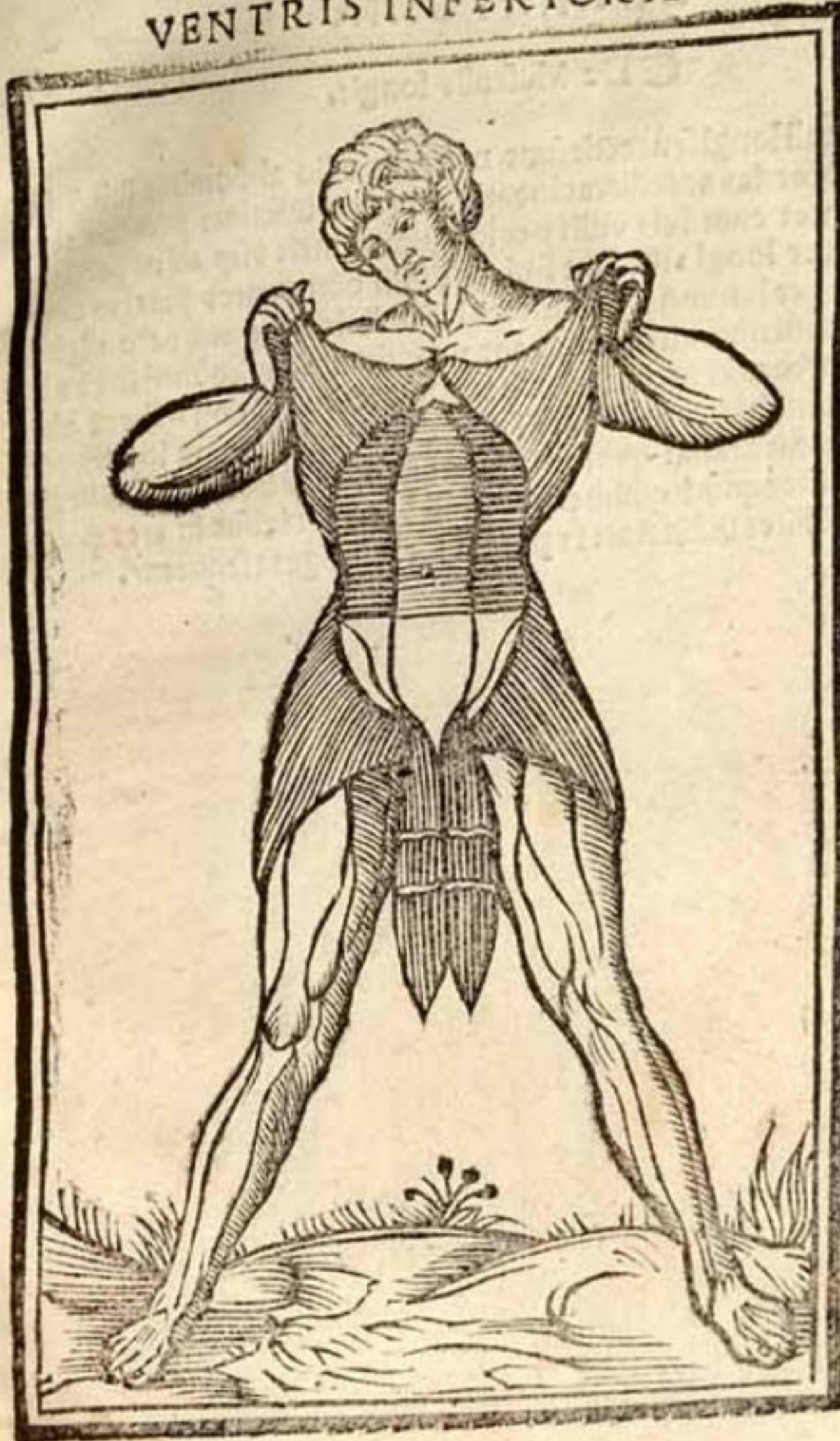
# DE ANATOMIA

In hac fi-  
gura habes  
duos mus-  
culos obli-  
quos ascen-  
dentes: qui  
se in cruciat  
cū duobus  
descendēti-  
bus in alia  
figura posi-  
tis: qui qdē  
descēdētes  
sunt supra  
istos ascen-  
dentes: &  
totus vnus  
ex p̄dictis  
musculis de-  
scendētib⁹  
supra posi-  
tis in alia fi-  
gura cū cor-  
di sua sup-  
equitat ob-  
lique mus-  
culū vnum  
ex istis ascē-  
dētib⁹ obli-  
que: & fa-  
ciunt simul  
figurā. x. līe  
grāce: &  
istorum mu-  
sculorū etiā  
parsecarnea



est a lateribus: corda vero eorū sunt in medio vētris: q̄ sūt ēē duarū pelli-  
cularū: & habent vnā pelliculā tantū supequirantē musculos longos: alia  
vero pellicula est infra musculos longos: q̄ atheret cordis latitudinaliū  
musculorū: & istę corda ēē terminātur in linea: q̄ ē ī medio vētris: ut vides,

# VENTRIS INFERIORIS



7  
In hac fi-  
gura vides  
qualiter el-  
leuatis mu-  
sculis lōgis:  
sub eis est  
vna pellicu-  
la: quæ est  
de corda  
musculorū  
obliquorū/  
quæ habet  
villos obli-  
quos: & est  
vna sub qu-  
olibet mu-  
sculo lōgo  
ut vides in  
hac figura:  
& musculi  
lōgi sunt il-  
li q̄ pendēt  
iter coxarū:  
ut appare-  
ant esse uas-  
ti a loco suo  
naturali: ut  
possint vi-  
deri corda  
p̄dictorū  
musculorū  
obliquorū  
ascendē-  
tium,







