

# *Public Anatomy*

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*Through text and image, Schuette–Hoffman and Bernardo explore the ways in which we as individuals and as a society approach the body in order to organize experience. They take anatomy as a metaphor for this process and gender as its subject. By juxtaposing personal narrative with cultural analysis, they first argue that science has played a supporting role in the way patriarchy objectifies women before it turns and problematizes this very position. In the end, Schuette–Hoffman and Bernardo suggest neither patriarchy nor the practice of anatomy is a totalizing system. There are always fissures through which individuals can approach the body.*

**a·nat·o·my** (ə nāt'ə me), n., pl. –**mies**. **1a.** a philosophical activity and practice which sought to reveal the wonder and goodness of God's creation through dissection of the human body (c. 1250 – 1800). **1b.** later reduced to a means of approaching and mastering the world through structure and function rather than purpose (c. 1650–1850). **2.** the process by which a subject is rendered object. **3.** the study of an object by its parts. **4.** a contested site of knowledge for poststructuralism, feminism, cultural studies, queer studies, disability studies, and other postmodern disciplines eager to critique the modernist search for an underlying order to reality. **5.** *Informal.* oversimplification that both benefits and harms the object of study: *She allowed patriarchy's anatomy of the female body to determine her sense of identity.* **6. public anatomies**, name given to open demonstrations or lectures by anatomists, usually including vivisection of animals as well as dissection of the human body. [1350–1400; ME < L *anatomia* < Gk *anatom(e)* a cutting up (*ana-* ANA- + *tom-* cut (var. of *tem-*) + *-e* n. suffix) + *-ia* -Y<sup>3</sup>]

## 6. PUBLIC ANATOMIES

name given to open demonstrations or lectures by anatomists...

THEY HAVE BEEN WAITING SEVERAL DAYS  
FOR THE EXECUTIONS, HOPING FOR  
DEATH BY DROWNING BECAUSE IT DOES  
NOT DAMAGE THE STRUCTURES OF THE NECK  
LIKE HANGING. IN THE MEANTIME, THE  
LECTURER READS A TRADITIONAL TEXT ON  
ANATOMY WHILE THE STUDENTS TAKE COPIOUS  
NOTES ON THE ANCIENT'S UNDERSTANDING  
OF THE BODY. WHEN THE LECTURER FINALLY  
RECEIVES WORD THAT ALL IS READY, HE ADVISES  
THE STUDENTS TO DISMISS THEMSELVES IN  
AN ORDERLY FASHION, BUT THE STUDENTS WILL  
HAVE NONE OF THAT. THEY RACE  
TO THE OTHER CHURCH WHERE THEY FIND  
THE CADAVER WASHED, SHAVED AND  
LAID OUT UPON THE THEATER TABLE.

1b. a means of approaching and mastering the world  
through structure and function rather  
than purpose

Recently, I picked up a copy of *Gray's Anatomy* (1858), Western medicine's premier anatomical text for over a hundred years. In the tradition of Enlightenment anatomy, the passive voice revels on the page, erasing any agent whose presence (whose body) might corrupt the objective aim of scientific description. The description itself is so detailed and precise that language becomes euphemistic; the human quality of the body is stripped away so that Gray may write, "To demonstrate the various fibres of the tongue, the organ should be subjected to prolonged boiling..." and a reader doesn't flinch, doesn't picture a glass specimen jar on a hotplate in which a tongue slowly rises and revolves on bubbles of boiling water. Gray's rhetoric is representative of the scientific worldview that sees the body's functions as derived from the body's structure. So, one's voice, for example, is simply due to an arrangement of muscular fibers in the tongue and the action of muscles in the larynx. Gray ignores what else the tongue may do—  
a lick, a kiss—and further ignores  
how the voice may be used or silenced.

*That's how I missed him, missed seeing him.*

*Until I almost walked into him.*

*"Go down on me," the boy in the ratty white t-shirt said.*

*He was old, maybe fifteen. "Suck my dick."*

*I tried not to understand the words, to keep my mind from translating,  
but I couldn't avoid reading his body and posture loud and clear.*

*He wanted something from me that I didn't want to give; it flashed in his eyes—  
I'm going to make you.*

*I did nothing.*

*I stood there and clutched my library books. I didn't scream to the tee-ball  
parents or run towards the nearest crowd of people. I didn't stomp on his foot  
with Ramona spunk or frantically think of what Nancy Drew would do.*

*I was a blank page, a nothing.*

*Two boys, small like me, came to my rescue. They challenged the boy in the t-shirt  
and released me from his spell of power.*

*I could run, and I ran, still clutching my books,  
the two blocks home.*

*I ran without looking back, knowing that the boy was beating  
up my rescuers.*

*I ran, and I did not ask for help,  
I did not tell anyone there was a fight.*

*I ran, and I did not speak of it at all.*

# 2 subject rendered object

The thorough detachment of Gray's rhetoric intrigues me. Yes, he

stands in a tradition that teaches and values such objectivity, but hasn't the

gentleman protested too much? Hasn't the tradition protested too much?

Of what are the philosophers and scientists afraid? Perhaps, the answer

lies in what has been left out — in the fluids of the body, its messiness, its

ambiguity. *Gray's Anatomy* is a sanitized text. The contents are divided into

structures and systems and organs, then, subdivided into members, which

are further subdivided until it seems the entire body, every single part, has

been accounted for and mapped. Accompanying figures are drawn with

the same cleanliness, what Waldby describes as an aesthetic "which involves

the hard-edged, crisp delineation of organs and tissue" (68). All muck has

been removed. One need not think of watery discharges, fat, or blood. The

body so mapped appears within our control. The complexity of the body,

Even the stomach,

the shiftiest organ

according to Gray

himself, can be

accounted for in all its

alterations: when empty,

when distended,

during inspiration,

under pressure from

without, and in its

variations due to age.

which might lead one to an awareness of fragility, vulnerability, and thereby

mortality, has been managed. It all makes sense. THERE IS NO ORGAN IN THE

BODY THE POSITION AND

CONNECTIONS OF WHICH

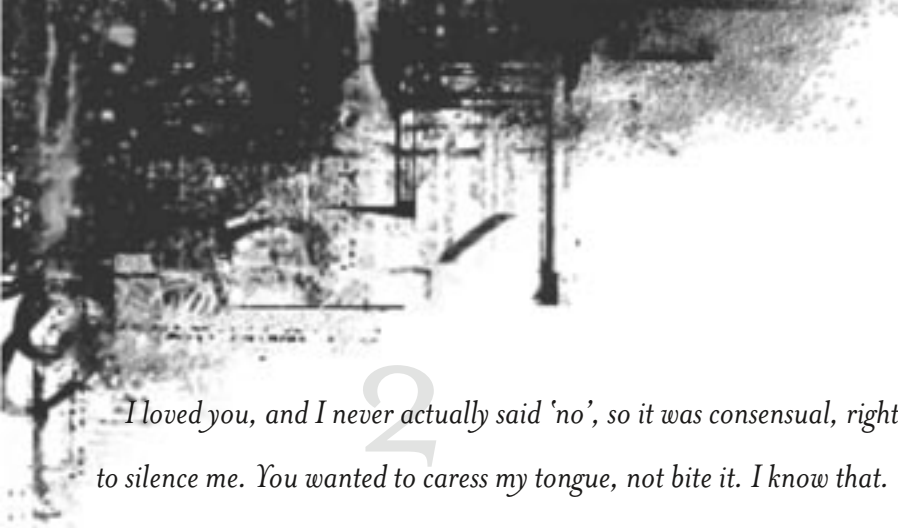
PRESENT SUCH FREQUENT

ALTERATIONS AS THE

STOMACH (907).







*I loved you, and I never actually said 'no', so it was consensual, right? You loved me and never, in a thousand years, wanted to silence me. You wanted to caress my tongue, not bite it. I know that.*

*But our bodies transformed our desires when your hormones hit the bloodstream and mine did not. (Come out, come out, wherever you are...)*

*I felt your urgency as you rubbed your pelvis against my inner thigh, your jeans chafing at both of us. I witnessed you on the chase, after some wild animal, sharp and elusive, gorgeous and hot. I was lost to you then, the virgin hiding behind a tree, dismayed by the violence of the hunt.*

*How would you have known that I loved you if I had said 'no'? Because there were times when I did, and they were hard. You felt rejected, and I had no way of saying, "It's me, not you," without sounding like I was saying, "It's me, not you." Everyone knows that line means I do not love you anymore. But I did.*

*You surprised me, the time in the cabin on the lower bunk, by kissing your way down my body and placing your tongue between my legs. It embarrassed me. It intrigued me. It worried me.*

*But how to account for the stomach*

*when it serves as a response*

*to the fluid,*

*the messy,*

*and the ambiguous?*

*I had no time to get out of my head, to risk moving down*

*into my body, before you turned. Your knees straddled my*

*shoulders, your head returned between my legs. I had heard of*

*this in adolescent titters, high school friends who joked about*

*the number 69. I understood that I should take you into my*

*mouth. I gagged as you moved inside me, slow to feverish, in*

*pursuit once more. I hunkered down and held the tension, like*

*a spring from the bunk's wire frame, designed to hold the stress*

*without giving way, without straightening. When you came, I*

*swallowed your semen—warm and salty—in shock. I turned my*

*face on the pillow and held my stomach closed.*

## 2 when a subject is rendered object,

The problem with the Enlightenment anatomists: once they accepted the split between mind and body and assigned subjectivity exclusively to mind, they felt free to treat the body as object and nothing more. They forgot that we interpret experience as bodies.

We think and feel with our bodies. The stomach turns; the tongue recoils. The body makes judgments. It reacts.

Far from the separation between matter and spirit that the Enlightenment embraced, the body expresses our vitality, that which is soulful about us, or, if we are wounded, the body expresses our loss, our lack. It suffers.

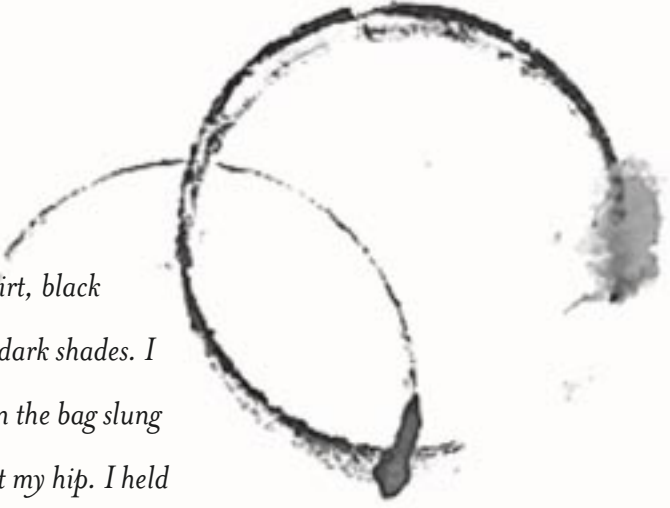
This lived embodiment, the body in its social dimension, does not go away simply because our culture is infused with the Enlightenment's treatment of the body as object. But, at the very same time and for the exact reason that

we are embodied, we take up the Enlightenment project in our flesh. We are bodies divided. We objectify ourselves; we objectify others, even as we

experience that objectification in our guts, subjectively.

3. I study my experience as an object, by its parts  
204<sup>th</sup> Street curved and turned into Bainbridge Avenue, the heart of the neighborhood, the combat zone. Civilians milled about, unaware. I took stock. A shop owner swept glass and bottle caps, ragged bits of newspaper and cigarette butts into the gutter. Satisfied, he returned to his shop. The hot gust of a bus pulling away from the curb sent the newspaper bits up. They fluttered and settled back on the sidewalk, right where they'd begun. Ahead, a pair of teenage mothers strolled. They burst out laughing. One of the boys, busy pulling candy from its wrapper, tripped into his mother. She grabbed his arm and gave him a shake. "Watch your step." I swerved around them and hustled up the sidewalk.

3. it can be studied by its parts



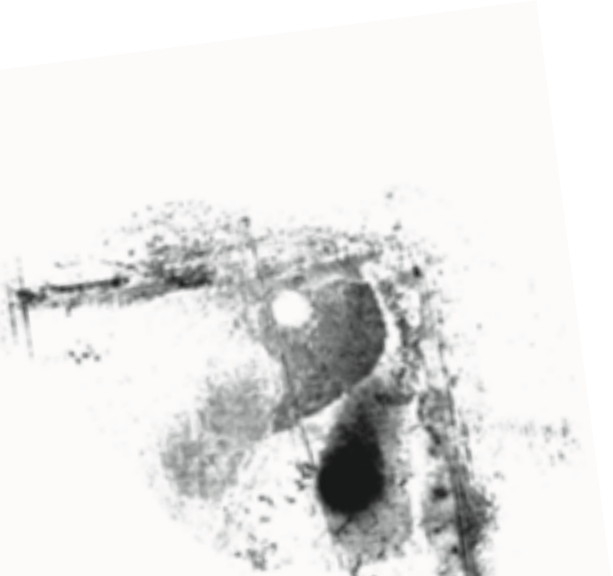
*I wore my workplace fatigues—white button-down shirt, black vest, black skirt, black tights, Doc Martens, red lipstick, dark shades. I carried my only available weapon—a Sony Walkman—in the bag slung over my shoulder and across my chest. It bounced against my hip. I held it steady. Met Foods loomed ahead on the right. As usual, a delivery van stood, double-parked, tailgate wide open, waxy boxes of lettuce supporting twenty-five pound sacks of carrots, mesh bags of onions, red and white, propping each other up. The men, arms slung over dollies, waited while the manager double-checked the order. I picked up the*

*pace, thinking today I might make it. But I was wrong. One of the deliverymen, bored, caught me in his sites. He nudged his cohort. "Hey." His voice launched across the traffic. "Baby. You lookin' good." His hand flew to the front of his jeans. "How 'bout some sugar?" In my mind, I stopped and turned. I struck the pose of the neighborhood women, one hand at the hip, the other running up and down gold chains whose charms bounced against cleavage. AS IF would be all I'd need to say. I'd suck at my teeth once, then turn on my heel and sashay away.*

*But I did not stop. COWARD, a voice inside my head said.*

*No, another whispered. VICTIM.*

*I thrust my hand into my bag,  
turned up the music,  
and silently burned.*





public anatomies

usually  
including  
vivisection

FINALLY HE TOOK A DOG... HE BOUND IT WITH ROPES TO A SMALL BEAM SO THAT IT COULD NOT MOVE; SIMILARLY HE TIED ITS JAWS SO THAT IT COULD NOT BITE. "HERE, DOMINI," HE SAID, "YOU WILL SEE IN THIS LIVING DOG WHAT THE FUNCTION OF THE NERVI REVERSI IS: YOU WILL HEAR HOW THE DOG WILL BARK AS LONG AS THESE NERVES ARE NOT INJURED. THEN, I SHALL CUT ONE NERVE, AND HALF OF THE VOICE OF THE DOG WILL DISAPPEAR; THEN I SHALL CUT THE OTHER NERVE, AND THE VOICE OF THE DOG WILL NO LONGER BE HEARD". AND HE DID SO; WHEN HE HAD OPENED THE DOG HE SOON FOUND THE NERVI REVERSI AROUND THE ARTERIES, AND ALL HAPPENED AS HE SAID. THE BARK OF THE DOG DISAPPEARED WHEN HE HAD BY TURN CUT THE NERVI REVERSI, AND ONLY THE BREATHING REMAINED.

*~ eyewitness account to one of Vesalius' early public anatomies*

*Every day, I walked under those sharp, piercing eyes. And not the same eyes. Every day brought different men, all with the same sexist response. I began to conceive of men, not as individuals, but as instantiations of patriarchy, objects with power over me. I could imagine taking men on one by one. Once, I even found the courage to flick the heckling men off, but afterwards, heart pounding, I didn't feel stronger. I felt small and negligible. Tomorrow there would only be more men, and the day after that, even more. My voice had no power. Patriarchy, the great anatomist, had cut me wide open and, with two quick snips, robbed me of speech.*

"FINALLY," HE SAID, "I SHALL PROCEED TO THE HEART, SO THAT YOU MAY SEE ITS MOVEMENT, AND FEEL HOW GREAT ITS WARMTH IS, AND THIRDLY SO THAT YOU MAY FEEL HERE, AROUND THE ILIUM, THE PULSE OF THE ARTERY WITH ONE HAND, AND THE MOVEMENT OF THE HEART WITH THE OTHER, AND YOU MAY TELL ME WHAT ITS MOVEMENT IS..."

*~eyewitness account*



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I leaned heavily on my elbows and kept my face down, guarding myself at the bar. I stared at a knot in the wood. I'd come alone to the Roaring Twenties. A voice that sounded like my mother's had whispered, "Nice girls don't", but I'd come anyway. I eavesdropped on the conversations building around me as the pub filled, but I never turned my head.

Still, he tried to engage me.

I mumbled half-hearted answers, not wanting to be entirely rude, but I always turned back to the bar. I traced the knot with my thumb.

He snagged me with a challenge.

"You know the real story about the Potato Famine?"

I turned to look at the forty-something man still in his paint splattered work clothes. Where did he pull that line from? Shocked, I took the bait and bought him a drink.

He bought the rest of the evening. Not my idea. The bartender stopped taking my money.

I liked this guy with his light brogue and witty intelligence. I thought what a good story this will make for my housemates—Allison, the feminist, wary of strange men, forced to confront her mistrust after an evening of conversation about politics, religion, work, and life in America.

I checked my watch. Past midnight. Time to go.

I thanked my new friend and shook his hand. He stood up and grabbed his coat. My heart skipped a beat. I didn't want an escort. I called, "Good night," and pushed my way out the door. I walked quickly, my feet keeping time with my racing heart, afraid to look back, afraid to run, knowing both actions would admit to fear. But I could hear him. By the time I reached my stoop, he'd caught up.

"A kiss then. Just a kiss."

My heart leapt from my chest and lay panting on the stoop. I worried for it. It would get dirty sitting there on the concrete; gravel and dirt would cling to its slick exterior. Would I ever get it clean? Could you rinse a heart out in the sink?

I crouched over it and spoke soothingly, but I was too late.

The panting faded; the pulsing stopped.

*death awaits us.*

*we are disturbed.*

*and so we flee.*

*we attempt to outpace*

*our vulnerability. we grope*

*for the stable, the unflappable,*

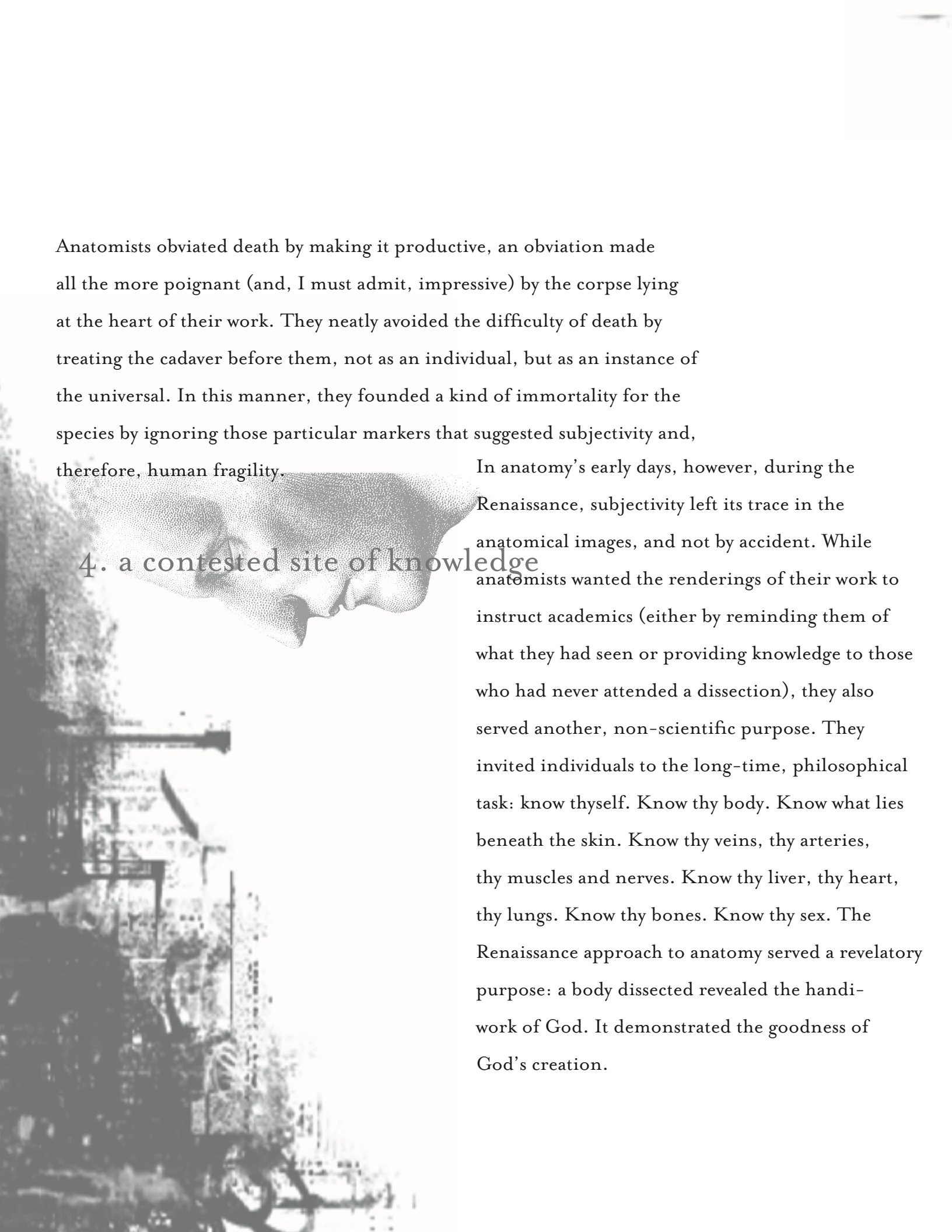
*the specimen*

*pinned forever*

*beneath*

*the safety*

*of glass.*

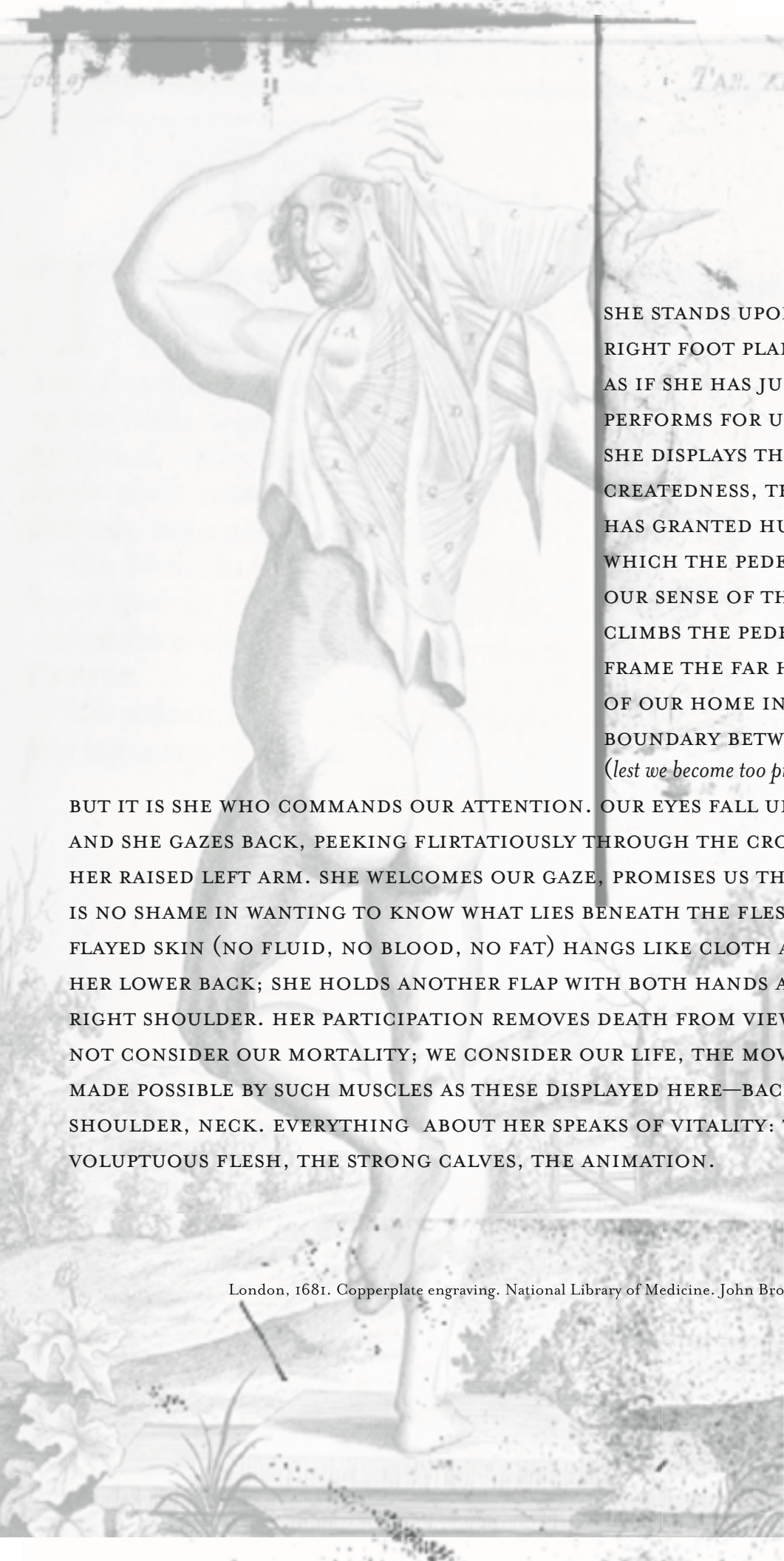


Anatomists obviated death by making it productive, an obviation made all the more poignant (and, I must admit, impressive) by the corpse lying at the heart of their work. They neatly avoided the difficulty of death by treating the cadaver before them, not as an individual, but as an instance of the universal. In this manner, they founded a kind of immortality for the species by ignoring those particular markers that suggested subjectivity and, therefore, human fragility.

#### 4. a contested site of knowledge

In anatomy's early days, however, during the Renaissance, subjectivity left its trace in the anatomical images, and not by accident. While anatomists wanted the renderings of their work to instruct academics (either by reminding them of what they had seen or providing knowledge to those who had never attended a dissection), they also served another, non-scientific purpose. They invited individuals to the long-time, philosophical task: know thyself. Know thy body. Know what lies beneath the skin. Know thy veins, thy arteries, thy muscles and nerves. Know thy liver, thy heart, thy lungs. Know thy bones. Know thy sex. The Renaissance approach to anatomy served a revelatory purpose: a body dissected revealed the handiwork of God. It demonstrated the goodness of God's creation.

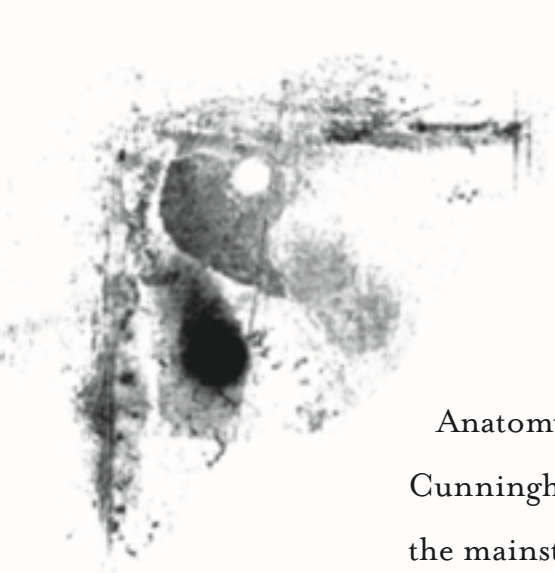




SHE STANDS UPON A PEDESTAL, BACK TO US,  
RIGHT FOOT PLANTED, LEFT FOOT RAISED,  
AS IF SHE HAS JUST LEAPT TO THE STAGE. SHE  
PERFORMS FOR US OUR VERY OWN MYSTERY;  
SHE DISPLAYS THE WONDER OF OUR  
CREATEDNESS, THE NATURE THAT GOD  
HAS GRANTED HUMANITY. THE LANDSCAPE IN  
WHICH THE PEDESTAL IS FOUND REINFORCES  
OUR SENSE OF THE NATURAL: VEGETATION  
CLIMBS THE PEDESTAL'S BASE; LOW HILLS  
FRAME THE FAR HORIZON; A COTTAGE SPEAKS  
OF OUR HOME IN NATURE; A GATE MARKS THE  
BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE GIVEN AND THE MADE  
(*lest we become too proud*).

BUT IT IS SHE WHO COMMANDS OUR ATTENTION. OUR EYES FALL UPON HER,  
AND SHE GAZES BACK, PEEKING FLIRTATIVELY THROUGH THE CROOK OF  
HER RAISED LEFT ARM. SHE WELCOMES OUR GAZE, PROMISES US THAT THERE  
IS NO SHAME IN WANTING TO KNOW WHAT LIES BENEATH THE FLESH. THE  
FLAYED SKIN (NO FLUID, NO BLOOD, NO FAT) HANGS LIKE CLOTH ABOUT  
HER LOWER BACK; SHE HOLDS ANOTHER FLAP WITH BOTH HANDS ABOVE HER  
RIGHT SHOULDER. HER PARTICIPATION REMOVES DEATH FROM VIEW. WE DO  
NOT CONSIDER OUR MORTALITY; WE CONSIDER OUR LIFE, THE MOVEMENT  
MADE POSSIBLE BY SUCH MUSCLES AS THESE DISPLAYED HERE—BACK,  
SHOULDER, NECK. EVERYTHING ABOUT HER SPEAKS OF VITALITY: THE  
VOLUPTUOUS FLESH, THE STRONG CALVES, THE ANIMATION.

London, 1681. Copperplate engraving. National Library of Medicine. John Browne [anatomist].



Anatomy is not so homogenous, then. Andrew Cunningham, a historian of medicine, challenges the mainstream approach within his discipline, which believes that, “since Antiquity onwards, just one project of anatomy has been undertaken by all anatomists, to which each anatomist has made such contributions as he was able” (7). In place of this single monolithic history, Cunningham discovers several different modes

Ia. a philosophical activity and practice which sought to reveal the wonder and goodness of God’s creation through dissection of the human body

of inquiry compelling anatomists to the dissecting table. And each mode of inquiry utilizes its own method of anatomy. And each method of anatomy produces its own body.

...we have hitherto assumed that all anatomists were looking, or trying to look, at one and the same body—the human body as we now take it to be—and that their success or lack of success in doing so can be assessed according to what we now take that human body to be truly like... But what we can take to be ‘really there’ in Nature does not depend simply on Nature but on who is doing the looking: how a given person looks largely determines what can be seen (ibid).







And so I look again, I inquire  
from a new point of view.

I discover and produce a new body.

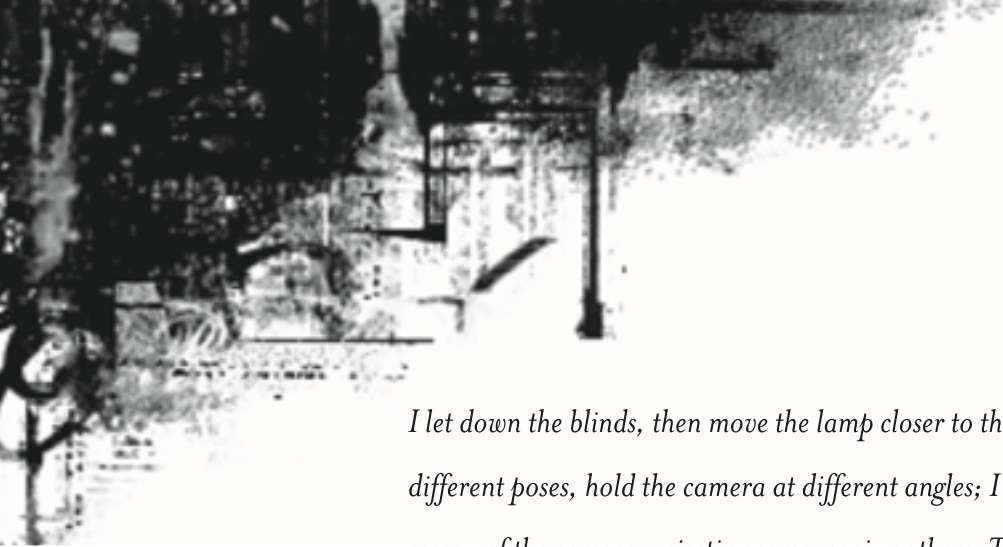
*I got the digital camera out today. Valentine's Day fast approaches, and since Kevin and I still find ourselves separated by five hundred some miles, I want to gift my body to him. In truth, I do it for myself as well. For so long I refused my body as an erotic body because isn't that exactly where patriarchy wanted me? To note the shape of my mouth, then, to apply red lipstick, to play my t*

*(woman as sex object) to structure (red harlot lips). Today I reclaim purpose as a powerful if contingent force. Today I have a tongue meant to tease and turn on the one whom I love. Tomorrow perhaps it will return to a tasting tongue, one that lingers over the last bite of dark chocolate, or a sharp tongue, one that criticizes scientific medicine for its unproblematized desire to perfect the body. But today, in this photo shoot, my tongue lingers at the corner of my mouth and waits for my lover's response.*

Will I be able to do my own anatomizing without rendering subject object? Not entirely.

In our culture, where the gaze has been linked to the desire for control and concomitant violence of immobilizing the mobile, photography is dangerous. It takes apart the whole experience,

cuts it up in order to frame certain choices. Some subjectivity is always lost. You should pay attention to this loss; you should turn to your own body, your own experience, to discover that which exceeds what I am able to describe. It is in this interaction between you and me—a recognition of irreducible differences—where slippage occurs and agency becomes possible. I cannot do it for both of us. The possibility and limits of your agency are yours. I can only exploit the flaws in my own performance (*Price and Shildrick 241*).



*I let down the blinds, then move the lamp closer to the day bed. I start taking pictures. I move; I try different poses, hold the camera at different angles; I remove more clothes. I study the photos in the screen of the camera, rejecting some, saving others. There is pleasure in the details, in the close up.*

The issue is not that a determinate challenge

*Each part—the eyes, the lips, the collarbone, the breasts, the belly—entices in its own way.*

should or could be mounted to categorical

oppressions, but that we should foster awareness

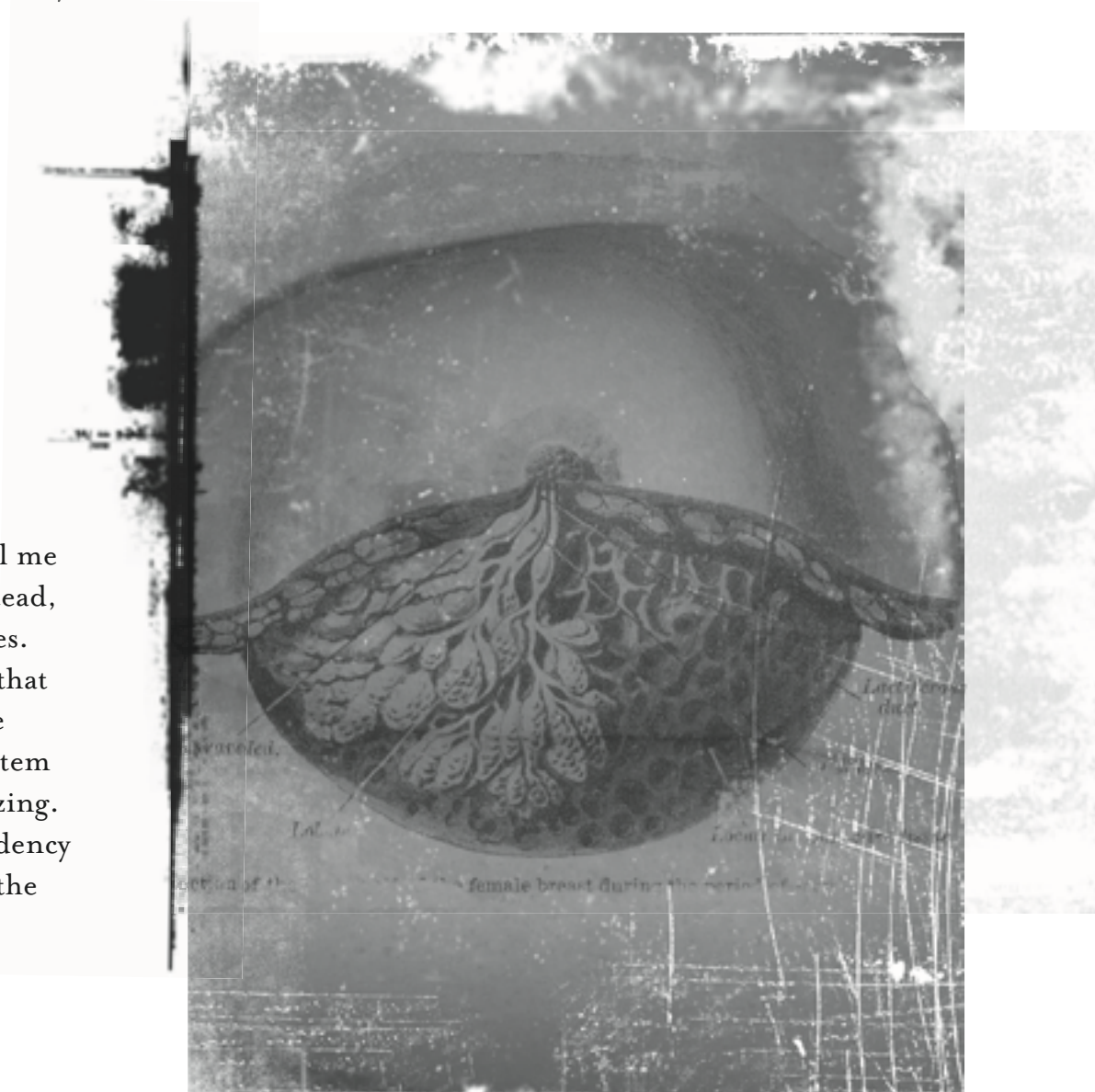
of the final indeterminacy of all embodiments

(Price and Shildrick 241).

When we describe what we see, we say far more about the way in which we see than we do about the subject before us.

Patriarchy does not tell me who I am after all; instead, it displays its own values. So it is not patriarchy that I need to fight, but the tendency to see any system of oppression as totalizing. To relinquish that tendency is already to diminish the power of patriarchy.

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*When photographing the belly, I choose my pose carefully. I don't want to show a pouch, a paunch, a bulge. I know that I should know better. And I want to affirm my body in all its excess, but I live in this culture, too. I go to a university gym where eighteen-year-old bodies have yet to make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. I live in a culture where the adolescent girl has been made over as the new adult: where twelve-year-olds wear makeup and mini skirts while thirty, forty, fifty, sixty-year-olds mold or hold their bellies flat.*



*And so my photo session is troubled. I register my troubled consciousness, but I do not let it stop me because everything we participate in is dangerous. I know now that I must welcome risk. Privileging safety above all other values led me to the need for control, but in a world of organic bodies (each one ruled by change), control is the last thing possible. Instead we have eruptions and leakage, a fine mess. Better then to learn how to be responsive rather than rigid. I position my body anew; I introduce my right hand into the composition, which introduces activity, motion, direction. The hand draws the viewer's eyes across the page, off the page, points their gaze to the hidden, the yet-to-be disclosed. There is more to this body, it promises. There are always revelations to be made.*

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