

Looking at Annibale Carracci's *The Butcher Shop*

by

Paloma Stasia Campbell

B.F.A., The University of British Columbia, 1998  
D.A.H.Y., The University of British Columbia, 2000

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTERS OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
(Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 2003

© Paloma Stasia Campbell, 2003

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

Date October 7, 2003

## ABSTRACT

An enormous painting produced by Annibale Carracci around 1583 teems with the visceral. The assemblage of bodies represented within the enclosed space of *The Butcher Shop* proliferates in both human and animal form. I will be looking at how a multitude of spatial, bodily, and temporal transitions and displacements are produced by the intermingling of living and dead bodies that surround the wooden table displaying pieces of meat. In spite of the proliferation of flayed and hanging carcasses within the painting and the representation of labour in an apparently uninterrupted sequence of time, there is an emphatic absence of blood. This disjunction may have something to do with the fact that the painting was produced at a time when the marketplace was becoming more regulated by sanitary laws. But I will argue that while the dripping and staining of blood is not present in the painting, it is suggested in more insidious ways. Red paint figures predominantly throughout in the form of clothing and the act of vision takes on the role of blood as it infiltrates, animates, and contaminates the bodies within the representation.

*The Butcher Shop* has been considered an anomaly in the work of Carracci. The size of the painting and what it represents have made it difficult to classify. All attempts to categorize it as genre confront the problem of its scale, which suggests a subject other than labour. As my thesis will show, this is not the only disjunction the painting presents. There are, in fact, a number of displacements within the painting that undermine attempts to come up with a single or stable reading of the image and what it represents. This project will consider the ways in which bodies are transformed through labour and vision.

What happens when the act of butchery has been replaced by the act of painting? My contention is that paint can be seen as flesh and that its very application unsettles the clear demarcation of bodies and attempts to return them to readability. It is the paint itself that makes the bodies and activities represented indiscernible.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE <i>The Butcher Shop as an Anomaly</i>	10
CHAPTER TWO     Studies of Violence and Labour	21
CHAPTER THREE   Blood Must Not Be Seen	31
CHAPTER FOUR    Sites of Sacrifice	39
EPILOGUE	47
FIGURES	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY	59

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Annibale Carracci, *The Butcher Shop*, c. 1583

Figure 2. Michelangelo, *The Sacrifice of Noah*, Sistine Chapel, 1509

Figure 3. Jost Amman, *Train of Soldiers*, n.d.

Figure 4. Bartolomeo Passerotti, *Two Butchers*, 1582

Figure 5. Agostino Carracci, *Seven Hands, Two of which are Joined Together*, n.d.

Figure 6. Annibale Carracci, *The Hanging*, n.d.

Figure 7. Annibale Carracci, *A Man Weighing Meat*, n.d.

Figure 8. Annibale Carracci, *Pianellaro* from the *Arti di Bologna* series, c. 1580s

Figure 9. Annibale Carracci, *Apollo Flaying Marsyas*, Farnese Gallery, c. 1600

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Rose Marie San Juan for her generous guidance at every stage of this thesis and for inspiring me to follow lines of flight in my thinking. I also thank Maureen Ryan for her support during my time as a graduate student and for providing such insightful criticism as a thesis advisor. My appreciation goes to the faculty, students, and staff of the Department of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory for facilitating an environment where the exchange of ideas was always exciting. I am especially grateful to Monika Szewczyk for our many conversations and David Alexandre for his thoughtful words. This thesis is dedicated to John and Rebecca Campbell with love.

## INTRODUCTION

But there are special places outside the town where all blood and dirt are first washed off in running water. The slaughtering of livestock and cleaning of carcasses is done by slaves. They do not let ordinary people get used to cutting up animals because they think it tends to destroy one's natural feelings of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516)

Although there is not a drop of blood to be seen, an enormous painting produced by Annibale Carracci in Bologna around 1583 teems with the visceral (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> The assemblage of living and dead bodies represented within the compressed space of *The Butcher Shop* takes both human and animal form. The space represented is one of production and exchange where animals are slaughtered, butchered, and sold. Yet this space is curiously unsettling. While the labour of cutting and measuring meat is located along the middle ground, an old woman seems to peer from the far side of an opening. This opening accords with the practice of receiving customers in sixteenth century Bolognese butcher shops. The implication is that she is the client. But what are we to make of the presence of the mercenary who reaches into his money pouch and occupies the same spatial plane as the workers in the butcher shop? Moreover, the central table displaying the meat cut and arranged for sale has been dramatically tilted away from the apparent customers and towards what must be the back of the shop. After all, this is where the pending slaughter of the sheep takes place. The table has been tilted towards the viewer and not the buyer. The viewer and buyer are no longer the same.

The table functions as a picture-within-a-picture and its frame appears as a miniature version of the outer frame of the painting. The visual relationship between

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Paul Turner (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1965), 81.



these two frames has the effect of pulling the viewer's eye towards the table while simultaneously drawing the eye back out towards the edge of the painting. Both frames fail to contain. The table may circumscribe the pieces of meat it displays, yet two hands reach past the edge of the table thereby rupturing the frame and bringing about the physical intermingling of living and dead bodies. In addition, a large area of the table is visually obscured by carcasses hanging in the foreground. The orderly arrangement of meat on the table is disrupted by a larger and more unruly display of flesh.

The outer frame of the painting is even more porous and results in an unclear demarcation between the inside and outside of the painting. This is particularly prevalent along the top of the frame where a leg from each carcass and the right hand of the central butcher extend past the edge of the painting. The most violent rupture is inflicted by the mercenary's poleax that slices past the upper frame of the painting. A similar violence is committed by the kneeling butcher whose knife pierces the bottom frame. The poleax and knife operate like indexes that point toward the boundary separating what lies within and outside of the image. It is significant that the weapons and tools used to cut and penetrate both human and animal bodies are represented rupturing what might be called the skin of the painting.

It is amidst this spatial uncertainty that the stages of butchery are put on display. A set of tasks leads the viewer through an apparently uninterrupted sequence of time. These activities can be read in a counter-clockwise rotation starting from the imminent slaughter of the sheep in the lower centre of the painting, moving to the hanging of the carcasses, and ending with the display and purchase of pieces of meat on the table. It is as if the sheep will soon be transformed into the pieces of meat. On this table the body of

---

<sup>2</sup> The painting is 185 x 266 cm.

the animal reappears neatly arranged in contrast to the cumbersome carcasses in the painting.

Significantly, no walls divide either the stages of labour or the bodies within *The Butcher Shop*. While the wooden beam that runs across the top of the painting appears as a barrier, the bodies within the space appear not only behind and in front of this beam but also reaching and extending beyond it. Legs and arms operate like lines of flight that lead the eye towards other areas of the image and to that which exists beyond the space of the painting. And while the table serves as a physical obstruction, the surrounding bodies reach over it or hang heavily in front of it. Their volume is suggested by the way one of the legs of the central carcass is splayed open, giving in to the pull of gravity. It is as though the life-size carcasses are about to fall out of the painting and land at our feet.

The unclear demarcation of space and the permeability of the architectural and pictorial frames allow for the intermingling of bodies and opens up numerous possibilities for physical interaction and social exchange. Labouring bodies, purchasing bodies, and bodies to be consumed visually overlap and come into contact throughout *The Butcher Shop*. No body remains untouched by another. There are places where it is difficult to determine where one body ends and another begins. This is exemplified by the butcher located on the far right of the canvas who is pressed up against a carcass he struggles to hang. The animal's flayed head and extended leg appear to complete the lines of the butcher's legs thus presenting an unsettling interchange between the living and the dead, on the one hand, and the human and the animal, on the other.

Bodies, then, are dismembered not only in this butcher shop but also in the painting *The Butcher Shop*. Two hands, which appear above the table, do not seem to

belong to the same body. The hands nonetheless merge visually as though they constitute a single body. The hand on the left has been visually severed by the vertical axis of the weighing instrument, bringing doubt to the possibility that the hand belongs to the old woman standing at the back of the painting. This hand, in fact, only serves to emphasize her ambiguous presence within the space of the shop.

While the other human figures in the painting are represented crouching, lifting, reaching, and leaning, the woman seems perfectly still. Her body is barely visible behind the butcher standing in the foreground. The wooden beam running along the top of the frame conceals the top of her head. In addition, only half of her face is illuminated. Hers is a body and face moving towards indiscernibility and becoming clandestine. She exists at the borderline between light and dark. In other words, she comes to typify the way in which the painting raises the question of visibility.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the old woman who occupies the liminal space between light and dark, the workers appear to be fully in the light. Their white aprons catch all the light while at the same time reducing their identity to their trade. Yet these very costumes also serve to distinguish them as human and thus different from the bodies of the animals. There are, however, a number of visual displacements between the clothed and flayed bodies. White is not only used on the aprons but also but also in the form of bone, cartilage, and fat. The upraised arm of the central butcher echoes the leg line of the carcass to his immediate right. The mercenary's codpiece finds its visual counterpart in the exposed genitalia of the carcass hanging to the right of centre. Furthermore, the v-shape of the necklines, the folded shirtsleeves, and the slits in the culottes find their

---

<sup>3</sup> For a more thorough consideration of the relationship between light and readability, see Gilles Deleuze, "Strata or Historical Formations: the Visible and the Articulate (Knowledge)," in

visual counterparts in the carcasses where openings, folds, and slashes abound. Like the clothing, the skin has been be opened and folded back to reveal that which lies beneath the surface. While the collars reveal skin, the opened carcasses reveal bones, muscles, and organs.

*The Butcher Shop* unsettles clear divisions between the living and the dead, the human and the animal, and the inside and outside of the body. The viewer is able to see simultaneously both the outside and the inside of the body and the painting. The carcasses in the painting have been opened so that one can look to see what exists beneath the skin. This is especially the case with the carcass on the far right whose spine is completely exposed. This is a body that has been opened up and emptied out in order to be cut up, sold, and consumed. This is a body without organs.

And yet all of this butchery has left no signs of blood. While there are many ways in which movement is signified, there is much to suggest separation and containment. The floor is clean. The small container visible on the wall between the two hanging carcasses is empty. The aprons are pristine white. The absence of blood is curious given that the space represented is one where bloodletting is a central act. In Carracci's portrayal of the transformation of flesh into meat, we are shown the before and after of bleeding but not the moment of bleeding itself. We are not shown the moment when the spurting, gushing, and dripping of blood would become most visible. The knife has not yet punctured the sheep's neck. The hanging carcasses have already been bled and flayed. The hands are now washed. The aprons are now cleaned. While the activities within the butcher shop are represented as a sequence, not all of the stages are included. Like the butcher's task of making meat bloodless, it would appear that the painter also took on the

---

*Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 47-69.

task of draining the blood from the painting.

The lack of blood suggests discontinuity in the sequence of tasks from the slaughter of the animal to the selling of meat. This is in spite of the spatial and bodily continuity that figures so prominently in the painting. The fact that the crucial moment of the kill is rendered invisible suggests that more goes on in this shop than meets the eye. The viewer knows that slaughter has and will take place but is prevented from actually witnessing the shedding of blood. There is not a drop of blood to be seen. I would argue, however, that contamination is present in more insidious ways through the process of viewing. Let us consider colour and movement in the painting. Red paint figures prominently throughout in the form of the shirt worn by the mercenary and the vest worn by the kneeling butcher. This colour is also reiterated in the various instances of exposed flesh. Even the brown tones that dominate the space recall blood that has dried and is in the process of decomposition. Moreover, the act of vision takes on the role of spilling blood in the ways that the image compels the eye to infiltrate, animate, and contaminate the bodies within the representation. The openings and folds visible at the edges of the white areas incite the eye to move in and around the living and dead bodies represented. Vision is not permitted to stay clean. This rhizomatic movement of vision is essential for the life of the painting.

*The Butcher Shop* cannot be reduced to the flow of contamination or the attempts to contain it. My initial approach focused on the spatial and bodily confusion in the painting and the difficulties of coming up with a stable reading. Then I considered how the absence of blood points to decisive attempts to control and contain this confusion. I intend to argue that the act of vision takes on the role of blood, unsettling not only the

clear demarcation of bodies, but also the attempt to return them to readability.

Two recent theoretical arguments have been particularly important to this argument. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault considers the eighteenth century development of the prison system in Europe and suggests that this system marked the end of public executions. He presents a number of passages that articulate in detail what happened to the body of the accused during a public execution:

The condemned man was blindfolded and tied to a stake; all around, on the scaffold, were stakes with iron hooks. The confessor whispered in the patient's ear and, after he had given him the blessing, the executioner, who had an iron bludgeon of the kind used in slaughterhouses, delivered a blow with all his might on the temple of the wretch, who fell dead: the *mortis exator*, who had a large knife, then cut his throat, which splattered him with blood; it was a horrible sight to see; he severed the sinews near the two heels, and then opened up the belly from which he drew the heart, liver, spleen and lungs, which he stuck on an iron hook, and cut and dissected into pieces, which he then stuck on other hooks as he cut them, as one does with an animal. In the explicit reference to the butcher's trade, the infinitesimal destruction of the body is linked here with spectacle: each piece is placed on display.<sup>4</sup>

Here Foucault references an eighteenth century execution in Avignon in order to show how justice was deployed on the body of the criminal prior to the establishment of institutionalized modes of discipline and punishment. He draws disturbing parallels between a public execution and the butchery profession in the way the criminal was killed and his body parts put on display as if in a butcher shop. Foucault deems the splattered blood to be a "horrible sight" for onlookers.

The emergence of the prison not only signified a new form of social control but also an erasure of blood. The body of the accused was no longer publicly tortured and dismembered but rather confined within the walls of the prison. Bodies were separated in cells and regulated by a timetable. As Foucault writes, "The spectacle of the body and

---

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New

blood gave way. A new character came on the scene, masked.”<sup>5</sup> This new character can be defined as the permeating force of power that seeps into the capillaries of social interaction. The suggestion is that power and punishment left the domain of more or less everyday perception and entered that of abstract consciousness. It is through a consideration of Foucault’s writing on the intersection between the body and power that I will be looking at *The Butcher Shop*. A significant part of this project will be considering the ways in which the butchery profession itself was becoming more regulated and codified around the time that the painting was produced.

While Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari do not specifically reference the butchery profession, their theorizing of the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* opens up possibilities for thinking about representations in relation to the work of vision. The rhizome is that which “operates by variation, expansion, and offshoots.”<sup>6</sup> Blood can be theorized as a rhizomatic fluid in the way that it flows through multiple pathways in around and out of the body. Like the rhizome, blood is always in the midst of becoming. It flows from one place to another. It moves at different speeds. It is constantly forming connections. The act of vision is also always in the midst of becoming. It also moves at different speeds. It is also constantly forming connections. I want to consider the rhizome in relation to blood and the act of looking since the rhizome brings attention to multiplicities, lines of flight, and the movement that exists between one point and another.

My contention is that *The Butcher Shop* addresses the transformation of labour

---

York: Vintage Books. 1977), 51.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987), 21.

but displaces it onto vision and its ability to disrupt that transformation. Thus, while the disjunction between the size of the painting and what it represents has raised difficulties for its classification, the representation itself cannot be reduced to a coherent entity. The absence of blood suggests a move from contamination towards containment of the space and a separation of tasks. But the act of vision undermines any attempt to completely contain and compartmentalize the bodies and activities portrayed. Blood cannot be seen but it is in fact everywhere as the act of vision transgresses pictorial, architectural, and bodily frames. The transgression of each frame results in the formation of new connections.

This thesis will examine how *The Butcher Shop* represents labour and the production of commodity. What happens when the act of butchery is replaced by the act of painting? The table signals the presence of the viewer and opens up a particular viewing position whereby the movement of labour is replaced by the movement of vision. Bodies, therefore, are transformed not only through butchery but also through vision. I will argue that the sight of flayed, eviscerated, and dismembered bodies produces an anxiety in a viewer who is not permitted a safe distance either physically or psychically. The bloodless intermingling of fragmented bodies within the space of *The Butcher Shop* reveals how the abstraction of bodies for the market and for viewing comes at a price.



## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Butcher Shop* as an Anomaly

Presently on display in the Christ Church Gallery at Oxford University, little is known of the circumstances that brought about the making of *The Butcher Shop*. The painting has been dated to 1583 on the grounds of its style.<sup>7</sup> Some scholars have suggested that it was commissioned by the Conobi family of Bologna who rented out stalls to butchers in the city.<sup>8</sup> Others have posited that it was commissioned by the powerful guild of butchers in Bologna.<sup>9</sup> One scholar even attributes it to the Bolognese artist Bartolomeo Passerotti.<sup>10</sup> The earliest known record of *The Butcher Shop* exists in the inventory of paintings in the Gonzaga Collection in Mantua.<sup>11</sup> How the painting ended up in the Gonzaga Collection is unknown. What is known is that General John Guise purchased the painting from the Gonzaga and donated it to the Christ Church Gallery in 1765.<sup>12</sup>

What follows is an analysis of how *The Butcher Shop* has been interpreted by scholars that will focus especially on its unresolved status. As Donald Posner writes,

---

<sup>7</sup> Daniele Benati, "Annibale Carracci's Beginnings in Bologna: Between Nature and History," in *The Drawings of Annibale Carracci* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 49.

<sup>8</sup> Clare Robertson and Catherine Whistler, *Drawings by the Carracci from the British Collection* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1997), 96.

<sup>9</sup> Benati, "Annibale Carracci's Beginnings in Bologna," 49.

<sup>10</sup> See Charles Sterling, *Still Life Painting from Antiquity to the Present Time*, trans. James Emmons (New York: Universe Books, 1959). Sterling claims that *The Butcher Shop* was painted by Bartolomeo Passerotti. Donald Posner does not agree with Sterling's claim but does emphasize Carracci's relationship with Passerotti. He suggests that Carracci spent his formative years in Passerotti's studio in Bologna. See Donald Posner, *Annibale Carracci: A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting Around 1590* (New York: Phaidon, 1971), 6. Posner's book constitutes the first modern monograph on Carracci. The focus of his book is on the artist's activity as a genre painter and portraitist.

<sup>11</sup> Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 3. Posner notes that the painting was listed as "Un quadro grande dipintovi una beccaria opera del Caratio" in the Gonzaga inventory.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

*"The Butcher Shop* is a curious anomaly in the work of an artist famed for his elevated taste and for his devotion to the noble art of the ancients and of Raphael."<sup>13</sup> Scholars have divided Carracci's imagery into the category of classicism, on the one hand, and genre, on the other, starting with the 1672 biography by Giovanni Bellori, who labeled Carracci a classicist in opposition to Caravaggio's realism. This categorical divide has been ensconced in the discipline of art history ever since. While Carracci's career is regarded as a rational succession of stylistic phases depending on external influences, Caravaggio's is regarded as phases of psychological growth related to the circumstances of his life.

For Bellori, Carracci constituted the heroic artist who was single handedly responsible for the restoration of Roman painting after a period of decline following the death of Raphael in 1520. He begins his biography of the artist with the following passage:

It pleased God that in the City of Bologna, the mistress of sciences and studies, a most noble mind was forged and through it the declining and extinguished art was reformed. He was that Annibale Carracci of whom I now mean to write, beginning with his very rich nature from which sprang his happy genius, thus coupling two things rarely conceded to man: nature and supreme excellence.<sup>14</sup>

Bellori goes on to proclaim that Carracci "was vividly able to translate natural forms into drawings with that celebrated gift that always enabled him to express the spirit and intelligence of figures in just a few lines."<sup>15</sup> While he acknowledges Carracci's drawing practice, Bellori does not elaborate on the identity of these figures. He refers to the combination of nature and skill in relation to Carracci's work but makes no mention of

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>14</sup> Giovanni Bellori, *The Lives of Annibale and Agostino Carracci*, trans. Catherine Enggass (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), 6.

the artist's extensive production of genre imagery in the form of drawings, prints, and paintings. No mention of *The Butcher Shop* is made. Bellori's alludes to genre only in relation to Caravaggio who he criticizes for "merely copying the bodies as they appear to the eye."<sup>16</sup>

Bellori's biography on Carracci elaborates on details about the artist's childhood and his early religious commissions before focusing exclusively on the frescoes in the Farnese Palace in Rome. Between 1597 and 1603, Carracci and his brother were hired by Cardinal Odoardo Farnese to decorate the gallery in his family palace in Rome.<sup>17</sup> The gallery includes a large fresco representing *The Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*. Surrounding this image are mythological scenes painted in the lunettes and subsidiary compartments of the vault. In the upper bays, Carracci painted a series of medallions using the grisaille technique in order to evoke works from Antiquity.<sup>18</sup>

At the most literal level, the subject of the ceiling frescoes is the loves of the Greek gods based primarily on the writings of the Latin poet Ovid. "Omni vincit amor" or "love conquers all" has been the dominant interpretation of the frescoes since Bellori published his biography of Carracci. For Bellori, the frescoes in the Farnese Gallery embodied a form of ideal beauty and represented a recuperation of classicism through paint. Many scholars, however, have since debated the iconography of the frescoes and proposed widely divergent interpretations. Gail Feigenbaum suggests that the vault has

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>17</sup> Much of the ceiling decoration includes allusions to the collection of antiquities owned by the Farnese family. See Gail Feigenbaum, "Annibale in the Farnese Palace: A Classical Education," in *The Drawings of Annibale Carracci* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 111. Feigenbaum notes that the Farnese family had amassed a collection of antiquities that was among the greatest in Rome. See also Robertson and Whistler, *Drawings by the Carracci from the British Collection*, 32.

no narrative sequence or single optimum viewpoint: “The viewer is invited to look at the ceiling in any order desired thus permitting a wandering eye.”<sup>19</sup> This interpretation is productive in that it brings attention to the way in which the organization of the frescos induces a kind of rhizomatic vision theorized by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. This reading also signals a move away from the more programmatic mode of looking endorsed by Bellori.

Bellori’s authoritative interpretation of Carracci has largely determined the later assessment of his work. The construction of the artist as a classicist has made it difficult for scholars to know what to do with his large production of genre imagery. This imagery was adamantly ignored among scholars of Carracci when he came to be viewed as the savior of the tradition of history and religious painting. It was only in the twentieth century that scholars began to study his genre works. In spite of its subject of labour, *The Butcher Shop* does not fit neatly into the category of genre due to its immense size. The painting exists within the categorical divide between genre and classicism making it particularly troublesome to interpret. For this reason, the painting has either been completely ignored or mentioned in passing in relation to the categories of artist biography, naturalism, eclecticism, or the burlesque.

One tendency among scholars has been to read Carracci’s genre imagery in relation to family circumstances. That his uncle was a butcher has been mentioned in connection to *The Butcher Shop*.<sup>20</sup> Some scholars have even gone so far as to suggest that the painting is a group portrait of the Carracci family. Rudolf Wittkower suggests that the

---

<sup>18</sup> Feigenbaum, “Annibale in the Farnese Palace,” 112.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>20</sup> Robertson and Whistler, *Drawings by the Carracci from the British Collection*, 96. The authors claim that Carracci would have had plenty of first-hand experience in such a shop since his uncle

painting is a portrait of the Carracci, his brother Agostino and his cousin Ludovico in the guise of butchers.<sup>21</sup> This interpretation is endorsed by John Martin who makes reference to an anonymous account written in 1761 when the painting was on display in the London home of General Guise.<sup>22</sup> In this account, the unknown author claims that *The Butcher Shop* is a family portrait of the Carracci.

Posner, however, argues against such a reading of the painting and asserts that it can be read more as a representation of a profession rather than a portrait of the Carracci.<sup>23</sup> He writes:

Annibale's broad, summary handling tends to suppress the individual character of the people represented. It is significant that Annibale chose to pose two of the butchers in such a way, with their heads at sharp angles or in lost profile, that physiognomic individualization was all but impossible. The types that Annibale created are recognizable members of a social class and a profession, but they are given no personal psychological identity. They serve to illustrate the range of activities in the marketplace.<sup>24</sup>

The statement is key in that it moves the painting away from a biographical reading to one that considers how the figures are rendered in relation to the subject of labour.

In his 1989 biography of the artist, Roberto Zapperi reveals how Carracci's uncle was accused of short weighing meat in 1588 and publicly beaten as punishment.<sup>25</sup> This information gives the appearance of explaining the painting when in fact the

---

was a butcher in Bologna.

<sup>21</sup> Rudolph Wittkower, *The Drawings of the Carracci in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle* (London: Phaidon Press, 1952), 17.

<sup>22</sup> John Martin, "The Butcher Shops of the Carracci," *Art Bulletin* XLV (1963): 264.

<sup>23</sup> Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 9. Posner suggests that it is no longer necessary to suppose a personal motive for the creation of *The Butcher Shop*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Roberto Zapperi, *Annibale Carracci: Ritratto di artista come giovane* (Turin, 1989), 28. This information is based on sixteenth century archival records documenting the activities of Bolognese guilds.

condemnation occurred after the painting was produced.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, D. Stephen Pepper lauds Zapperi for “documenting the cutting edge realistic observation with which Carracci imbues his work and transforming a rather general definition of naturalism into a vivid recognition of a very specific reference to daily life.”<sup>27</sup> Pepper implies that the information about Carracci’s uncle provides the painting with some kind of verisimilitude when I would argue that the painting displays far more than an unmediated reflection of daily life.

And yet the category of naturalism has been used by a number of scholars as a way to explain *The Butcher Shop*. For these scholars, this category is seen as a necessary alternative to Bellori’s influential interpretation. Denis Mahon suggests that “The emphasis on the classic interpretation developed by Bellori only gave part of the story. Its frequent repetition and wide acceptance has resulted in a distorted view of Carracci’s work.”<sup>28</sup> His point is that the classicist interpretation has resulted in the artist’s naturalistic tendencies being overlooked.<sup>29</sup> However, Mahon does not actually reference any of Carracci’s genre images and the ways in which these works display such “naturalistic tendencies.”

A more critical analysis of the category of naturalism and Carracci’s placement within it is taken up by Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey who assert that:

Naturalism can be understood not as a style but rather as an attitude with respect to representation, one expressed according to changing conventions and within contexts that also have their own histories—we allude to a butcher’s shop painted by Passerotti or Annibale. But students of seventeenth century painting still tend to see naturalism as a sort of spontaneous originating expression, or else as

---

<sup>26</sup> According to Zapperi, Carracci’s uncle was accused and punished sometime in the late 1580s.

<sup>27</sup> D. Stephen Pepper, “Progress in the Field of Carracci,” *Apollo*, no. 346 (December 1990): 426.

<sup>28</sup> Denis Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971), 203. Mahon discusses only the Farnese Gallery in relation to Carracci.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

conventionalized within specific genres such as landscape or still life.<sup>30</sup>

This is indeed how *The Butcher Shop* has been read. We only have to look at A.W.A. Boschloo's account of Carracci's life in Bologna.<sup>31</sup> Boschloo alludes to *The Butcher Shop* only briefly to suggest that the rough and spontaneous brushwork of the painting reflect direct observation on the part of the artist.<sup>32</sup> The author does not provide any analysis of how the painting constructs the space of the butcher shop or how the figures interact in that space. He simply claims that the painting reflects the artist's interest in "common man" and the making of "flesh and blood" images.<sup>33</sup> While these are suggestive points, Boschloo does not elaborate on how the image specifically represents the figure of the "common man" or how "flesh and blood" are made visible through the application paint.

S. J. Freedberg is another scholar who has discussed *The Butcher Shop* in relation to the category of naturalism.<sup>34</sup> He suggests that the painting illustrates how taking on genre subjects enabled Carracci to explore the possibilities of naturalism. Freedberg attempts to historicize the artist's naturalist tendencies by referencing a treatise on art that was circulated in Bologna by Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti in 1582.<sup>35</sup> Entitled *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane*, the treatise promoted an appreciation of the

---

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey, "The State of Research in Italian Painting of the Seventeenth Century," *The Art Bulletin*, no. 4 (December 1987): 507-8.

<sup>31</sup> A.W.A. Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent* (New York: Abner Schram, 1974). Boschloo charts the development of Carracci's life in Bologna.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-5.

<sup>34</sup> S.J. Freedberg, *Circa 1600: A Revolution of Style in Italian Painting* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 8. Freedberg's focus is on Carracci's religious commissions in Bologna and Rome.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

imitation of nature in art and the power of art to achieve direct and emotionally affecting communication. The Counter-Reformation tenor of the treatise is likely due to the fact that Paleotti was a reforming archbishop in the city. While Freedberg claims that Carracci's genre imagery can be read as a direct response to this treatise, he does address how *The Butcher Shop* can be read as an example of "direct" and "emotionally affecting communication."

Charles Dempsey also discusses *The Butcher Shop* in relation to naturalism. But rather than showing how the painting exemplifies naturalism, Dempsey writes about how the painting reflects Carracci's early attempts to perfect the aesthetic of naturalism. He points to the foreshortened hand of the meat-weighing butcher in the painting and observes that the hand "seems soft and swollen and does not connect well with the arm behind it. Moreover, the plane descending from the knuckles towards the wrist is poorly understood."<sup>36</sup> These observations imply that *The Butcher Shop* can be situated in Carracci's training as a painter and his development towards classicism.

While *The Butcher Shop* has been framed within the discourses of artist biography and naturalism, there are those scholars who have discussed the painting in relation to the category of eclecticism.<sup>37</sup> Both John Martin and Carl Goldstein have argued that the painting does not reflect a naturalist drive but rather an appropriation of elements from both the classical and Renaissance traditions. In his 1963 article on the painting, Martin claims that Carracci appropriated numerous elements from Michelangelo's Sistine

---

<sup>36</sup> Charles Dempsey, *Annibale Carracci and the Beginnings of Baroque Style* (Glückstadt: J.J. Augustin Verlag, 1977), 37

<sup>37</sup> The term "eclecticism" can be defined as the artistic appropriation or stylistic borrowing from other works of art.



Chapel fresco entitled *The Sacrifice of Noah* (1509) (fig. 2).<sup>38</sup> Martin's aim is to remove *The Butcher Shop* from everyday life in Bologna and relocate it in the tradition of fresco painting. Making a number of figural equations, Martin neatly resolves *The Butcher Shop* as a metaphor for Christian sacrifice. He suggests that the depiction of the sacrificial sheep in the foreground and the central figure of Noah behind the altar can be seen as figural precursors to the ones that appear in Carracci's painting.<sup>39</sup>

Carl Goldstein also argues that *The Butcher Shop* can be read in terms of artistic appropriation. He disputes a naturalistic reading of the painting by asserting that Carracci looked more to other Renaissance works than to nature. He writes, "There is obviously much more than direct observation in the oeuvre of the Carracci."<sup>40</sup> Rather than focusing solely on the parallels between *The Butcher Shop* and *The Sacrifice of Noah*, however, Goldstein compares the mercenary in Carracci's painting to a print produced by Jost Amman entitled *Train of Soldiers* (fig. 3). Goldstein's claim is that this print depicting a group of German Lansquenets is the source for the figure of the mercenary in *The Butcher Shop*.<sup>41</sup>

But Goldstein does not elaborate on the differences between the two works. He does not mention the fact that the mercenary in the painting is depicted in an interior space of social exchange unlike the soldiers in the print who have been grouped together in an ambiguous landscape. It is clear that Goldstein is more interested in locating artistic

---

<sup>38</sup> Martin, "The Butcher Shops of the Carracci," 263. See also Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 16, who claims that the scale of *The Butcher Shop* was directly influenced by the monumentality of Michelangelo's fresco image.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Carl Goldstein, *Visual Fact over Verbal Fiction: A Study of the Carracci and the Criticism, Theory, and Practice of Art in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1988), 37.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 185.

precedents for Carracci's mercenary than with how the mercenary is actually situated within the space of the painting. The lack of visual analysis results in a reading of *The Butcher Shop* as an image constructed solely out of a series of influences rather than in drawing on precedents that produce new connections.

While most scholars have framed *The Butcher Shop* in terms of artist biography, naturalism, and eclecticism, Barry Wind insists that *The Butcher Shop* can be read in terms of the burlesque.<sup>42</sup> He argues that the painting is similar to Bartolomeo Passerotti's *Two Butchers* (1582) (fig. 4) in that both paintings exploit the butcher shop as a metaphor for wantonness and carnality.<sup>43</sup> He suggests that the butcher's booth is filled with licentious implications and that the two butchers in Passerotti's image embody lustfulness in their "lewd toothless grins" and their "roguish gazes."<sup>44</sup>

Wind then points to certain features within Carracci's image that supposedly signify erotic craving such as the mercenary's bulbous codpiece and the old woman reaching for a piece of meat.<sup>45</sup> The woman is described as "a hatchet-faced hag who is enflamed by lust and points to her select cut."<sup>46</sup> This statement overlooks the complexities of the woman. While *The Butcher Shop* may make certain allusions to sexuality and desire, Wind's moralistic reading forcefully reigns in the spatial and visual confusion made visible through paint.

---

<sup>42</sup> Some scholars, however, argue against reading *The Butcher Shop* merely in terms of the burlesque. See Benati, "Annibale Carracci's Beginnings in Bologna," 50, who writes: "The scene in *The Butcher Shop* is presented without any trace of comic grotesque intentions or mocking allusions with the working classes that characterize the paintings of Passerotti."

<sup>43</sup> Barry Wind, "Annibale Carracci's 'Scherzo': The Christ Church *The Butcher Shop*," *Art Bulletin* LVIII (March 1976): 93.

<sup>44</sup> Wind refers specifically to the way the younger butcher holds a knife upright with one hand while touching the fleshy parts of the boar's prominent snout with the other.

<sup>45</sup> Wind, "Annibale Carracci's 'Scherzo'," 95.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Even though both of the above paintings represent an abundant display of meat in the space of a butcher shop, Passerotti's image positions the viewer more clearly as a customer. The two butchers look out from behind a counter. The one on the left openly solicits the viewer with a large piece of meat. The viewer is thus caught in a moment of exchange emphasizing the face. The space depicted in *The Butcher Shop*, in contrast, is one not only of display and exchange but also of production. The butchers do not make eye contact with the viewer. They are all too absorbed in their various tasks. It is the table, in fact, that turns to face the viewer.

The scholarship around *The Butcher Shop* has sought to locate the painting within such categories as artist biography, naturalism, eclecticism, and the burlesque. It is as though locating the painting within these categories will somehow resolve the many disjunctures present in terms of how the bodies are represented and the ways in which vision is compelled to move. The division between classicism and genre has been particularly troublesome to the interpretation of the painting. What follows is a discussion of how this division can be located in the so-called Carracci Academy where the study of bodies transformed through violence and labour constituted a significant part of the program.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Studies of Violence and Labour

*The Butcher Shop* was produced around the same time that the Carracci Academy was jointly formed in Bologna by Carracci, his brother Agostino, and their cousin Ludovico. This academy established an institutional framework for the instruction, study, and production of art. A number of scholars have noted the ways in which the Carracci Academy combined under one roof the activities of a workshop and intellectual debate. Posner points out that Ludovico joined the Bolognese painters' guild in 1578 and that the academy maintained close contact with this guild.<sup>47</sup> Mahon also claims that this academy was a flourishing joint workshop in Bologna that imitated certain outward forms of the literary academies then prevalent by assuming the impressive name of *Accademia*.<sup>48</sup>

That the social mobility of artists up and out of the ranks of manual labour was very much at stake in the foundation of the first art academies is well known. Sheila McTighe makes the crucial point that "Bologna was highly aware of the shifting borders between work and class as a university centre and a city in which the peculiar legislation of inherited titles had fostered an unusual amount of overlap between the feudal nobility and a merchant class."<sup>49</sup> She goes on to assert that "the link between social mobility and the intellectual *métiers* is an essential context for understanding the foundations of the artistic academies in the late sixteenth century and the Carracci Academy in Bologna in

---

<sup>47</sup> Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 4 and 37. This guild was officially called the Company of Painters or the *Compagnia de' Pittori*. The Carracci Academy joined this guild when Annibale Carracci departed for Rome in 1597. According to Posner, the Company of Painters offered the academy stability.

<sup>48</sup> Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 228.

<sup>49</sup> Sheila McTighe, "Perfect Deformity, Ideal Beauty, and the *Imaginaire* of Work: The Reception of Annibale Carracci's *Arti di Bologna* in 1646," *The Oxford Art Journal* 16, no. 1 (1993): 81.

particular.”<sup>50</sup> The suggestion here is that the Carracci Academy served as a site where the shifting role of the artist from labourer to intellectual was negotiated.

A significant part of this negotiation took place at the level of drawing. Many scholars have noted how the drawing of the human body was of particular interest to the academic program of the Carracci Academy. These drawings were produced for varying reasons and marketed in a number of ways. Some were based on the study of past works of art while others on direct observation. The drawing of the human body became a means to explore the body in terms of its internal makeup. As Ann Summerscale writes:

Unwilling to stop at what the surface of the nude reveals to the eye, the Carracci wanted to understand what was hidden underneath. This meant learning the names of the bones and the points of connection, the attachment and ligaments of muscles, the function and effect of nerves and veins; and to this end they did detailed anatomical dissections.<sup>51</sup>

The emphasis was on observing the materiality, veracity, and mutability of the body transformed through violence and labour. Agostino Carracci was particularly concerned with the physiognomic study of the human figure. Many of his studies consist of body parts drawn repeatedly on single sheets of paper. In his drawing *Seven Hands, of which Two are Joined Together*, a series of disembodied hands are portrayed in various gestures and activities (fig. 5).<sup>52</sup> Some are represented in pairs while others in the singular. It is difficult in some cases to tell if they belong to male or female bodies. Goldstein claims that drawings such as this one were intended to be copied in order to achieve a proficiency in representation through constant practice. Similarly, Claire Robertson and

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ann Summerscale, *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci: Commentary and Translation* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 119. See also Goldstein, *Visual Fact over Verbal Fiction*, 3, who claims that the course of study in the Carracci Academy included a thorough investigation of human anatomy and the ways in which the body was constructed and operated.

Catherine Whistler suggest that Carracci's drawings were made with a view to forming a drawing manual and were subsequently engraved as such.<sup>53</sup>

In both *Seven Hands, of which Two are Joined Together* and *The Butcher Shop*, multiple hands are represented engaged in various activities. In the drawing, however, the hands hover within the space demarcated by the white sheet of paper. Their volume is signified by crosshatched shadows. Interestingly, there is a detachment between the hands and their corresponding bodies. Each hand is cut off at either the wrist or the forearm. While most of the hands represented in the painting are attached to bodies visibly engaged in production and exchange, the pair in the centre appear cut off from any particular body. This separation of hands from bodies has the effect of abstracting and alienating the modes of production and consumption within the space of the butcher shop.

An interest in the physical qualities of the body in the Carracci Academy extended beyond physiognomic studies. In a small pen drawing entitled *The Hanging*, Annibale Carracci represents the public execution of two anonymous men (fig. 6).<sup>54</sup> This drawing represents the transformation of a body from life to death in a specific social context. The public nature of the event is suggested by the multiple faces that appear on the other side of a high wall peering in the direction of the gallows. The pikes of several soldiers can be seen in an uneven line at the top of the wall and resemble the poleax being carried by the mercenary in *The Butcher Shop*. Boschloo has suggested that executions

---

<sup>52</sup> A reproduction of this drawing appears in *The Illustrated Bartsch Italian Masters of the Sixteenth Century*, vol. 18, ed. Diane De Grazia Bohlin (New York: Abaris Books, 1972), 348.

<sup>53</sup> Robertson and Whistler, *Drawings of the Carracci from the British Collection*, 29.

<sup>54</sup> See Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna*, 107, who describes the drawing as a "sober report."

took place in full public view in the central square of Bologna.<sup>55</sup> But what are we to make of the wall in the drawing? It suggests the attempt to render public executions less visible and emphasizes the isolation of the condemned as does the closed door visible beneath the row of pikes. This clear separation of bodies is in contrast to *The Butcher Shop* where a physical barrier does not divide bodies. The living and the dead are represented coming into direct physical contact and intermingling within the space.

The executed body hangs heavily in the drawing. His hands have been tied tightly behind his back and are now useless in death. These bound hands recall the way a rope binds the legs of the sheep in *The Butcher Shop*. A small pouch that has been tied to his waist falls just below his left foot. The top of the pouch tilts to the left like the head that tilts dramatically down towards the tips of the pikes. The end of the noose has been wrapped around the beam of wood and spirals outwards above the head. This movement contrasts with the verticality of the dead body and the wooden structure which frames it.

Another rope can be seen coiled around the same beam in anticipation of the second condemned man who is being dragged up the ladder by his neck. This beam is similar to the one in *The Butcher Shop* in that it serves as a support on which to hang bodies. And yet the reasons for hanging differ in each case. The method of hanging in the drawing not only induces death but also make visible the punishment of criminals. The method of hanging in the butcher shop facilitates the draining of blood and the removal of skin from the body of the dead animal.

Both images represent bodies that hang in death and the stages leading up to this state. The hanging figure in the drawing foreshadows the fate of the figure being pulled up the ladder just as the pieces of meat that appear on the table foreshadow the fate of the

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

sheep in the foreground of the painting. While both representations reveal stages leading up to death, the stages are presented as bloodless ones. *The Hanging* does not represent the same kind of execution so vividly described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* where the executioner is splattered with blood.

The Carracci Academy was not only interested in representing the body marked by violence. There was also an avid interest in representing bodies transformed through labour. This is particularly the case with Annibale Carracci. In his red chalk drawing entitled *A Man Weighing Meat*, a singular butcher holds a weighing instrument identical to the one represented in *The Butcher Shop* (fig. 7).<sup>56</sup> This figure is considered to be a study for the central butcher in the painting.<sup>57</sup> But while their poses and clothing are similar, the painted butcher has a knife and sharpening steel hanging from his belt. These instruments hint at the fact that he does more than just weigh meat. Like the butcher kneeling in the foreground, he has the capacity to stun, bleed, and flay animals brought into the shop for slaughter.

It is significant that both images emphasize the weighing of meat. This emphasis can perhaps be related to the communal interdicts regarding the adulteration of the weights that Zapperi discusses in his biography of Carracci.<sup>58</sup> And yet the meat in the drawing is represented as a series of indefinable oval shapes. This is in contrast to the piece of meat being weighed in the painting, which becomes a point of intense realism set

---

<sup>56</sup> The weighing instrument includes scales or *stadera* on which the meat is hung in such a way that the counterweight or *romano* running the length of the horizontal pole registers the weight.

<sup>57</sup> Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 15. The author claims that this drawing was based on a live model. See also Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna*, 34, who refers to this drawing in order to argue that *The Butcher Shop* was painted with care. He writes, "Whatever the original intention behind the painting, it is no hastily improvised scene, in spite of the rough and spontaneous brushwork."

<sup>58</sup> Zapperi, *Annibale Carracci*, 28.



in close proximity to the head of the kneeling butcher. The piece of meat hangs heavily and calls up the pouch hanging from the belt of the executed figure in *The Hanging*. The presence of hanging meat is reiterated throughout the painting from the looming carcasses to the smaller pieces of meat nailed to wooden beams in the shop.

While both images avoid the representation of blood, the bodily fluid is implied. The red hues of the drawing are reminiscent of blood. The dark stain that appears to the immediate right of the weighing instrument resembles a drop of blood that has dried on the piece of paper. Directly beneath this stain is a sketch of part of a forearm. This disembodied limb not only resembles the exposed forearm of the central butcher in the painting but also recalls Agostino Carracci's physiognomic studies of hands. This arm also foreshadows the proliferation of body parts that are displayed throughout the painting in animal form.

Both images contain the direct bodily presence of the artist in the lines of red chalk and brushstrokes of pigment. These lines and brushstrokes speak of the labour involved in the production of each representation. And yet the time and physical energy required for their production would have varied considerably due to their vast difference in scale.<sup>59</sup> The transferal of the figure and the body parts in *A Man Weighing Meat* reveals the steps involved in the making of *The Butcher Shop* but this linkage between the two images does not make the painting more cohesive.

While some of Carracci's drawings served as studies for his paintings, others were transferred into print form. In contrast to drawings and paintings that retain the direct bodily presence of the artist, prints represent a detachment of the hand from the

---

<sup>59</sup> The dimensions of the drawing are 26 x 17 cm while the dimensions of the painting are 185 x 266 cm.

representation through a means of mechanical reproduction. Prints do not make visible the trace of the hand that operated the print screen or set the printing press in motion.

During the late 1580s and early 1590s, Carracci produced a series of approximately seventy-five drawings of market workers and itinerant tradesmen in Bologna. These drawings were transformed into a series of prints known as the *Arti di Bologna* or *Trades of Bologna* that exists as a kind of typology of individual street labourers. Scholars have debated this series since its representation of market workers does not conform to the image of Carracci as an idealizing classicist.<sup>60</sup> Bellori never mentions these prints in his biography of the artist. The tendency has been to categorize these prints as life studies that reflect the legacy of the Carracci Academy and its training in drawing. Robertson and Whistler suggest that the drawings in the *Arti di Bologna* served as a basis for Carracci's genre paintings.<sup>61</sup> Posner claims that these prints can be seen as a by-product of Carracci's early absorption in genre subjects.<sup>62</sup> He writes:

Annibale's concern was to define the special visual character of merchant types and their trades. Like his butchers, Annibale's merchants appear as characteristic representations of their trades. Their merchandise is represented as an integral part, or even extension, of themselves.<sup>63</sup>

This appears to be the case in Carracci's drawing of a *pianellaro* or clog seller from the series (fig. 8). The figure is represented standing alone in an empty white space marked only by a crosshatched shadow and a horizontal line signifying the ground. The

---

<sup>60</sup> McTighe, "Perfect Deformity, Ideal Beauty, and the *Imaginaire* of Work," 76.

<sup>61</sup> Robertson and Whistler, *Drawings of the Carracci from the British Collection*, 29. The authors make no mention of *The Butcher Shop* or the fact that it was produced prior to the *Arti di Bologna* series.

<sup>62</sup> Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 17. See also Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna*, 34-5, who claims that the series reveals "Annibale's interest in people without rank or status, such as market shoppers, street musicians, beggars, and peddlers."

<sup>63</sup> Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 17.

name of his trade has been written in the lower left corner of the image. It is notable how manual labour is left out in this print. With one hand planted on his hip, the man gazes out at the viewer. This self-aware display is in contrast to the painting of workers who are too absorbed in their tasks to look up. Similar to the butchers in Passerotti's painting, the clog seller directly confronts the viewer as he would a possible buyer in the marketplace. The nature of his profession is made visible by the multitude of clogs he carries on a pole balanced on his shoulders. The length of this pole is visually emphasized by the fact that it extends beyond the left and right sides of the drawing. Like the pieces of meat in *The Butcher Shop*, the clogs have been hung for easy handling and display.

Important to consider is how both the prints and the painting may have been circulated and viewed at the time of their production. While little is known about the painting, perhaps a consideration of the prints will shed some light on the question of historical viewership.<sup>64</sup> McTighe claims that the drawings that formed the basis for the *Arti di Bologna* series were individually produced for sale in the open market in Bologna.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Posner suggests that the prints were initiated for commercial reasons.<sup>66</sup> The subsequent transformation of drawings into prints opened up the possibility for greater circulation and viewing. This is especially relevant in relation to the space of the market where bodies intermingled and modes of vision were bought and sold.

---

<sup>64</sup> I am not thinking of a particular individual but rather the processes of vision that would have been possible at the time the painting and prints were produced.

<sup>65</sup> McTighe, "Perfect Deformity, Ideal Beauty, and the *Imaginaire* of Work," 75. Yet this was not the context within which they were published. It was not until 1646 that the prints were published as a series in Rome.

<sup>66</sup> Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 17.

McTighe maintains that there was a market demand for such images of labour.<sup>67</sup> She argues that the success of images depicting types of labourers had more to do with a slippage, instability, and public uneasiness about the place of manual work in the order of things at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>68</sup> How then did images of easily identifiable market workers assuage this public uneasiness? What are we to make of the fact that manual work is generally left out in the *Arti di Bologna* series just as blood is effaced in *The Butcher Shop*? The prints present anonymous figures individually contained within the frame. Their small scale results in miniaturized and, therefore, less threatening versions of the actual bodies that would have laboured in the market. In contrast, the numerous bodies assembled in the painting rival the size of the viewer thereby setting up a very different relationship between the body in representation and the body of the viewer.

We can speculate about who bought the prints but who had access to *The Butcher Shop*? Posner suggests that the paintings produced by Carracci early on in his career must be considered in relation to the market. He writes:

Carracci was forced to work for the open market, painting pictures in anticipation of buyers and hoping that his name would come to the attention of those connoisseurs who were in a position to commission or to influence the commissioning of major works.<sup>69</sup>

Posner goes on to assert that his paintings were either sold to individual buyers or ambulant picture merchants.<sup>70</sup> But he does not allude to *The Butcher Shop* and how its size would have made it very difficult to transport and display in the space of the market.

---

<sup>67</sup> McTighe, "Perfect Deformity, Ideal Beauty, and the *Imaginaire* of Work," 78.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>69</sup> Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 24. Posner notes the decline of Carracci's genre imagery when he started receiving commissions for important religious and historical paintings.

An emerging interest in representing labour is evident in both *The Butcher Shop* and the *Arti di Bologna* prints. However, each brings labour into representation in different ways. The prints constitute a new form of technology that separates and categorizes labour from production in a way that the painting does not. I will now discuss *The Butcher Shop* in relation to the situation of the butchery profession in Bologna at the time the painting was produced. A number of shifts were occurring in the marketplace in terms of the production and sale of meat. The painting negotiates these shifts by offering up meat in the form of paint.

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 23.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Blood Must Not Be Seen

*The Butcher Shop* presents a scene of production where the various processes of butchery are put on view. The painting was produced at a moment when the butchery profession in Bologna was becoming more regulated in terms of where animals were slaughtered and how meat was sold. Of particular concern was the disposal of waste in the form of blood, entrails, and skin. In his study of sanitary legislation in sixteenth century Bologna, Robert Laures discusses how the butchery profession was under scrutiny at this time.<sup>71</sup> The public display of slaughter was replaced by more discrete modes. According to Laures, the slaughter of animals was restricted to the confines of the butcher shop rather than being permitted on the street.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, butchers were required to build ditches and cesspools next to their shops in order to prevent the disposal of animal waste from polluting the streets and waterways.

*The Butcher Shop* suggests some of these regulatory measures. The piece of paper visible in the upper right corner of the painting most likely states the butchery regulations to be followed by those working in such a space.<sup>73</sup> This notice would serve as an assurance to customers that the shop was legally approved and therefore sanitary. But while a notice in this kind of shop would have been displayed for the client, here it faces the viewer of the painting.

The presence of the mercenary in the painting calls up the civic authority

---

<sup>71</sup> Robert Laures, "A Medieval Response to Municipal Pollution" (paper presented at the Mid-America Conference on History, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, September 1992), 2-3.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the role of such notices in the regulation of commercial exchange within the space of the market, see Rose Marie San Juan, *Rome: A City Out of Print*

responsible for enforcing marketplace regulations. His poleax resembles the pikes present in *The Hanging*. But what are we to make of the fact that he appears to be reaching into his money pouch? According to John Hale, the sixteenth century saw the rise of the professional soldier as an international commodity and that “no other occupational group, apart from merchants, was shown by artists so frequently in circumstances involving money as were soldiers.”<sup>74</sup> Soldiers, then, were only in the business of killing but also in the business of buying. The inclusion of the money pouch in *The Butcher Shop* overshadows the disciplinary potential of the mercenary and marks him out as a potential buyer. Moreover, his position in between the foreground and background of the painting further emphasizes his ambiguous status within a space that contains the act of slaughter.

The absence of blood in the painting can be seen as another sign of regulation. The space of the shop has been cleaned and the aprons have been washed. Both the act of slaughter and the spilling of blood have been rendered invisible. This absence stands in marked contrast to the visibility of blood in earlier times. According to Piero Camporesi, blood was a daily reality and people knew its aroma and its viscosity.<sup>75</sup> Camporesi brings together diverse religious, medical, and legal treatises produced in various Italian cities between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries in order to explore changing attitudes towards blood and the human body. He writes:

---

(Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2001), 42-3.

<sup>74</sup> John. R. Hale, “The Soldier in Germanic Graphic Art of the Renaissance,” in *Art and History: Images and Their Meaning*, eds. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 92. Hale’s study focuses on the representation of German and Swiss soldiers in drawings and prints produced during the Renaissance. He points out that “soldiers were commonly portrayed as cocksure and aggressive, with a swaggering stride and a codpiece more suggestively jutting than those shown in civilian costume.” It is notable how the protruding codpiece of the mercenary in *The Butcher Shop* stands in marked contrast to the flatly rendered aprons worn by the butchers.

<sup>75</sup> Piero Camporesi, *Juice of Life: The Symbolic and Magic Significance of Blood*, trans. Robert R.

From birth to death, the sight and smell of blood were part of the human and social pilgrimage of each and all. Gallows and scaffolds, executioners' carts smoking along the streets, heads impaled on stakes or nailed to doors, corpses left to rot and putrefy in the tower cages, cadavers hung on windows with hooks, "quarters" abandoned at crossroads, and the butcher shop that hacked up persons merged imperceptibly with the one that slit open the throats of bulky beasts slaughtered in the open.<sup>76</sup>

This passage reminds us that blood was once much more visible and that the slaughtering of animals took place in the open. Blood was not stigmatized and avoided as it is today.

Camporesi also discusses the turn from public displays of slaughter to more obscure administrations of death in the following terms:

The present generation, which has "abolished" death, as though it were something indecorous and dirty, is also at pains to abolish the slaughterhouse kitchen where animals were slit open, skins were scraped and what was left was minced. But now cellophane isolates this impure matter, ennobles it and redeems it. Blood must not be seen, the edible substance must not in any way remind us of death, suffering, and the visceral.<sup>77</sup>

Camporesi articulates a significant shift in terms of how slaughter is perceived today.

In her study of contemporary slaughterhouses, Noëlie Vialles notes the separation that now occurs between the slaughtering of animals and the selling of meat.<sup>78</sup> She writes:

Nowadays, slaughtering has become an invisible, almost clandestine activity. We know it goes on, of course, but in an abstract kind of knowledge. We demand an ellipsis between animals and meat. Advertisers are well aware of this and take scrupulous account of it.<sup>79</sup>

---

Barr (New York: Continuum, 1995).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 27. Camporesi argues, "the bygone culture of blood saw in bloodletting a great, necessary purge or purification of the blood that is life, a renewal of the vital liquid."

<sup>77</sup> Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh: Body Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore*, trans. Tania Croft-Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 16.

<sup>78</sup> Noëlie Vialles, *From Animal to Edible*, trans. J. A. Underwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 58. While *From Animal to Edible* focuses on the development of the slaughterhouse or *abattoir* in France from the seventeenth century through to the end of the twentieth century, it has been a useful reference in terms of thinking about how the butchery profession has changed over the last three hundred years.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 5. Vialles writes about how the dressing of the carcass in the contemporary



Vialles asserts that the banishment of slaughter had to do with a shift in sensibilities whereby people no longer wished either to witness slaughtering or acknowledge that the relationship between meat and a dead animal.”<sup>80</sup> *The Butcher Shop* does not present such an ellipsis between animals and meat. Both are represented within the same space. The sheep in the foreground is a vivid reminder of the life that exists before the transformation into meat takes place. However, the absence of physical blood foreshadows the ellipsis to come. As Vialles points out:

The effect of standards and of conformity to standards is to render invisible what used to be a bloody spectacle. At the same time the colour of blood has everywhere been ousted by white: white walls, white accessories, white clothing from head to foot.<sup>81</sup>

White appears throughout *The Butcher Shop* most predominantly in the form of the aprons that signify both a profession and cleanliness. As Vialles writes: “Clean, white linen was an eminent sign of cleanliness and a good butcher made it a point of honour that his clothing be perfectly white.”<sup>82</sup> The abundance of white clothing in *The Butcher Shop* makes it possible to read the painting as a commemorative portrait of the butchery profession. These butchers may live by slitting the throats of animals but there is no blood visible beneath their fingernails.

The production and sale of meat in *The Butcher Shop* is represented in a series of stages that resemble film stills. There is a visual flow from task to task in the painting. No barriers divide the labouring bodies. The butchering of an animal entails a sequencing of

---

slaughterhouse has been separated into a number of tasks that are divided among a group of individuals, each doing a small, specialized part.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 66.

bleeding and dressing. Dressing entails the flaying, beheading, and evisceration of the carcass after it has been bled. It is, in fact, a kind of “undressing” whereby the body becomes separated from anything too obviously reminiscent of the animal itself in terms of the hide that enveloped it and the excrement that crudely testified to its active physiognomy. What is striking about *The Butcher Shop* is how the processes of bleeding and dressing are implied but not actually represented.

The absence of particular stages points to an underlying control and containment of the space through paint. The table that turns to face the viewer epitomizes the attempt to control and contain vision. Karl Marx alludes to such a table when he describes the sudden emergence of the commodity within the space of the marketplace.<sup>83</sup> He writes:

The table not only stands with its feet on the ground, but in relation to all other commodities. It stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than table-turning ever was.<sup>84</sup>

The implication is that the self-aware table changes into something transcendent as soon as it steps forth as a commodity. In *The Butcher Shop*, the table does not stand to face commodities but rather the viewer. It stands for the ultimate form of market regulation: the production of commodity. The table serves to open up a viewing position while simultaneously controlling and containing what is made visible. Viewing can only take place once labour has been fragmented and commodified. The movements of labour have been replaced by the movements of vision.

Marx defines the commodity as:

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>83</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Friedrich Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 71. Marx focuses on the emergence of commodities in nineteenth century industrializing Europe and considers the complex relationship between labour and the production of commodities.

An object outside of us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference.<sup>85</sup>

The meat displayed on the table in *The Butcher Shop* can be seen as a commodity that will not only satisfy the stomach but also the eye. The pieces of meat have ultimately been offered up to vision. They enter into the body of the viewer through the eyes rather than the mouth.

For Jacques Derrida, the commodity table theorized by Marx resembles “a head strong dog that gets up on all four paws, ready to face up to its fellow dogs.”<sup>86</sup> *The Butcher Shop* presents both a table and dog that turn to face the viewer. The result is a double confrontation.<sup>87</sup> The dog’s presence is all the more unsettling given the fact that it has been domesticated but not for the purpose of consumption like the livestock present both in living and dead form. Derrida’s analysis of the table is productive in that he considers the work of vision in relation to the commodity in a way that Marx does not. He likens the table to an apparition:

One must see, at first sight, what does not let itself be seen, and this is invisibility itself. For what first sight misses is the invisible. If one does not give oneself up to this invisibility, then the table-commodity, immediately perceived, remains what it is not, a simple thing deems to be trivial and too obvious.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>86</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). This text is based on two plenary addresses given by Derrida during the 1993 conference “Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective” that was held at the Center for Ideas and Society at the University of California, Riverside. Resurrecting Marx in ghostly form, Derrida makes a compelling case for a reconsideration of Marxist thinking today.

<sup>87</sup> Posner refers to this dog as “a reticent spectator.” See Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 13.

<sup>88</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 149.

The apparition of the table in *The Butcher Shop* rises up to face the viewer.<sup>89</sup> It pulls the eye in towards the centre of the painting while the surrounding bodies and activities work to pull the eye away from the table. This movement of vision enables the viewer to see what is involved in the production of meat as a commodity.

Marx asserts that “commodities and the products of labour which stamp them as commodities have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and the materials arising therefrom.”<sup>90</sup> The insinuation is that commodities are constituted by their separation from the hands that produced them.<sup>91</sup> But this is not the case in *The Butcher Shop* where the pieces of meat are surrounded by activities that reveal how an animal is transformed from a living entity into cuts of meat ready for sale and consumption. Meat does not magically appear on the table. The painting also emphasizes the representation of hands in various acts of labour. One hand even touches a piece of meat on the table as if to remind the viewer of the bodies behind the production and circulation of this particular commodity.

It is important to point out that *The Butcher Shop* was produced before the emergence of the factory system in Europe and the organization of labour according to the assembly line and time clock.<sup>92</sup> The growing demands of a new market economy had

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 151. Derrida suggests that the commodity haunts and that this haunting “displaces itself like an anonymous silhouette.” The anonymous pieces of meat in *The Butcher Shop* verge on the spectral in the way they hover within the frame provided by the table.

<sup>90</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 72.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> It is interesting to note that the yearly and monthly calendar was changed at around the time the painting was produced. In 1582, Pope Gregory VIII of Bologna instituted a papal bull declaring the formation of a new calendar in order to accommodate the movable feast of Easter. The ecclesiastical calendars of Christian churches are based on cycles of movable and immovable feasts. Christmas is the principal immovable feast and Easter is the principal movable feast. Easter is important in that it determines all other movable feasts. The shifting of the equinox resulted in Easter drifting away from its springtime position. The Church made intermittent attempts to solve the question of Easter but without reaching a consensus. By the sixteenth

particular effects on how labour and the labouring body were regulated. As Marx writes with Friedrich Engels:

The feudal system of industry, which under industrial production was monopolized by closed guilds, now no longer sufficed for the growing wants of the new markets. The manufacturing system took its place. Division between the different guilds vanished in the face of the division of labour in a single workshop.<sup>93</sup>

*The Butcher Shop* represents a move towards a division of labour for the purposes of capital. Marx defines capital as “dead labour that lives by sucking living labour.”<sup>94</sup>

Framing the relationship between capital and labour in such vampire-like terms serves to emphasize the way in which labour is sacrificed for capital. *The Butcher Shop* reveals how labour is not only sacrificed for capital but also for vision. The next chapter will consider how the painting mediates the complex theme of sacrifice and its effects on the viewing body. Central to this consideration will be the role of the table as the locus for both viewing and sacrifice.

---

century, Easter had shifted by ten days. The reformation of the Julian calendar entailed the deletion of ten days from the calendar so that October 4 was followed by October 15. The new calendar was used to regulate the cycles of Christian holidays and was immediately promulgated throughout the Catholic world. The rules of the Gregorian calendar continue to be observed throughout the world. For an analysis of the history of the Gregorian calendar, see Edward Richard, *Mapping Time: The Calendar and its History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>93</sup> See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 35. Originally published in 1848, this publication defended the rights of the working class within the capitalist system.

<sup>94</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 72.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Sites of Sacrifice

There is a long tradition of comparing *The Butcher Shop* to *The Sacrifice of Noah*.<sup>95</sup> Integral to this comparison is the idea that the butcher shop can be seen as a metaphor for Christian sacrifice. But rather than limiting the implications of sacrifice to a religious reading, my aim is to think about how the painting frames Christian sacrifice in relation to labouring bodies and the act of looking. While there may be formal parallels between the two paintings, there are a number of key differences especially in terms of how the theme of sacrifice is represented. *The Butcher Shop* does not locate the sacrificing of animals in relation to a divine event or distant past. He presents sacrifice in relation to the butchery profession and the space of the marketplace. Noah has been replaced by an anonymous butcher and the altar has been replaced by a table used to display the commodity of meat. The suggestion is that animals are being slaughtered not to appease God but rather to produce meat.

Michelangelo's chapel fresco is a visual translation of an Old Testament passage that recounts the sacrificial offering Noah made to God immediately after the Flood:

And Noah built an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savor; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake.<sup>96</sup>

This biblical passage reveals how the transformation of beast and fowl into flesh becomes

---

<sup>95</sup> John Martin makes the most adamant case for a reading of *The Butcher Shop* as symbolizing the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. See Martin, "The Butcher Shops of the Carracci," 263.

<sup>96</sup> *The Holy Bible* (New York: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1941), Genesis 8:20-21.

an essential factor in making Noah's piety visible.<sup>97</sup> Even though the animals have not been killed for the purposes of human consumption, their cooked flesh is described in sensual terms thus pointing to the paradoxical relationship between piety and carnality.

For Camporesi, every act of sacrifice contains both pious and carnal aspects. The blood of the divine Lamb is not only connected to notions of purity but also to death and bodily decay. Blood is fluid and does not remain fixed in either the realm of the sacred or the profane. As Camporesi writes:

Carnality and piety find in blood the congealing element to justify an ongoing exchange of pertinent symbols. Vehicle of purity and impurity, principle of putrefaction and at the same time of regeneration, of sacrifice as of rot and despicability, blood enters inexorably into the sacred and profane imagination, borne there by the idea of divine sacrifice, regeneration through wounds, torture, bloodletting. The blood of the divine Lamb becomes the exemplar and instrument of purity, and at the same time of revenge and the stagnant, foul, rotting waters of death.<sup>98</sup>

The point here is that the flow of blood is a crucial factor in making sacrifice visible. But like Carracci, Michelangelo does not reveal a trace of blood in spite of the fact that some of the bodies on display have been opened up.

The sheep in the foreground of *The Sacrifice of Noah* has been killed and its innards are being passed up to the altar. The activities represented in the fresco circulate around the orange fire burning brightly on the altar. The figure on the far right carries a large bundle of logs presumably to feed the fire. These logs rupture the otherwise seamless frame of the painting. The kneeling figure that peers into the opening at the bottom of the altar appears to be stoking the fire.

---

<sup>97</sup> This sacrifice recalls how Abel sacrificed a lamb to God in order to make visible his devotion.

<sup>98</sup> Camporesi, *Juice of Life*, 21 and 102. He writes that "It is along the frontier of blood, on the red line between pure and impure, that the inexhaustible drama between the sacred and the profane is played out: between the history of the divine, and the history of the human element that would struggle to be free of the human."

The altar occupies the centre of the image and is where the transformation of flesh into a divine offering takes place. Yet the vertical orientation of the altar makes it almost impossible for the viewer to see what is being sacrificed. This is contrast to the tilted table in *The Butcher Shop* that openly makes visible a new kind of sacrifice: the severance of labour from the labouring body. The painting reveals how this severance is a necessary factor in the production and sale of commodities.

A comparison of *The Sacrifice of Noah* and *The Butcher Shop* thus reveals an incisive shift from piety to the commodity. But I would suggest that a consideration of sacrifice can be extended beyond the bible and the marketplace and into the realm of fantasy and the workings of the psyche. I turn to Didier Anzieu's provocative suggestion that the "observation of animals being slaughtered and prepared for the table" can produce in some the masochistic fantasy of being flayed.<sup>99</sup> The implication is that butchery has the capacity to produce both meat and fantasy. Anzieu uses the image of the butcher shop to suggest that visions of flayed bodies have particular effects on the human psyche and can trigger not only anxiety but also desire.

Of particular interest to Anzieu is the relationship between the skin and the

---

<sup>99</sup> Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 42. The way that Anzieu frames the fantasy of being flayed has a number of parallels with Jacques Lacan's earlier theorization of the fantasy of the body in bits in pieces. Lacan suggests that this particular fantasy most often surfaces in dreams showing the separate parts of the body of a human or an animal in disorderly array. For Lacan, both imaginary and real images of the fragmented body induce an anxiety in the psyche of the viewing subject. The insinuation is that the body in bits in pieces represents the collapse of an imaginary alignment. See Jacques Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1953): 13. For an insightful critique of Lacan, see Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*. London: Routledge, 1996, 20-22. Silverman asserts that Lacan's notion of the body in bits and pieces is problematic since it implies that there is such a thing as a whole and coherent body in the first place. She goes on to postulate that the fantasy of the body in bits and pieces is only one way of apprehending the heterogeneity of the corporeal ego, and one which is inextricably tied to the aspiration towards "wholeness" and "unity." *The Threshold of the Visible World* has been a most productive text in helping me think through the what it mean to see and how our look is always impinged upon by our desires and



psyche. He suggests that the psyche is reliant on the functions of the skin and the Ego for its formation and development.<sup>100</sup> The skin and the Ego make it possible for the psyche to negotiate the interchange between the inside and outside of the body.<sup>101</sup> Skin is crucial since it simultaneously functions as a container, barrier, and filter. A failure in any one of these functions results in anxiety and even death.<sup>102</sup>

The act of flaying represents, therefore, a violent destruction of life. As Anzieu writes, "Of all the sense organs skin is the most vital. One can live without sight, hearing, taste or smell, but it is impossible to survive if the greater part of one's skin is not intact."<sup>103</sup> Anzieu refers to the Greek myth of Marsyas in order to analyze the psychic effects of a representation where the act of flaying is central. The myth tells the story of a satyr named Marsyas who challenges Apollo and his lyre to a musical contest with his flute. Apollo agrees on the stipulation that the winner can inflict whatever punishment he pleases on the loser. The contest proves to be an equal one until Apollo challenges Marsyas to play his flute and sing at the same time. Marsyas loses the contest and is flayed alive by the victorious Apollo. While the satyr's death is represented in terms of an individual sacrifice, it nonetheless reverberates in collective terms. The flow of his blood mixes with the tears all the satyrs and fauns who are lamenting his death. This mixture of bodily fluids eventually forms what comes to be known as the Marsyas River.

For Anzieu, the myth serves to illustrate the way in which the destruction of the skin can be seen as the sacrificing of the Ego. Marsyas is punished for his egotism by being flayed like an animal. His challenge to Apollo ultimately threatened the hierarchy

---

anxieties and mediated in complex ways by representations.

<sup>100</sup> Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 4.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 and 101.

established between gods and mortals. His punishment is all the more cruel given the fact that he is kept alive while being flayed. Even animals in butcher shops and slaughterhouses are killed before their skins have been removed.

A scene from this myth is represented in one of the medallions in the Farnese Gallery (fig. 9). *Apollo Flaying Marsyas* depicts the moment when Apollo makes the first incision into Marsyas' skin. The penetration of the knife into the thigh heightens the homoerotic undertones in the myth. Marsyas is pictured frontally hanging by his arms from a pine tree.<sup>104</sup> The visibility of his face is in contrast to the anonymity of the executed figure in *The Hanging*. Marsyas twists his upper body and lifts one of his legs as if anticipating the excruciating pain to come. His body curves to remain within the confines of the circular frame. The two nude figures flanking either side of the medallion echo Marsyas' twisting movements. Yet the pink hues of their skin are in dramatic contrast to the over overall grey of the medallion. The colour and classical subject matter of the medallion has the effect of containing the horror of the scene being represented.<sup>105</sup> The viewer is spared from having to witness the red flow of blood.

The absence of blood in the medallion is peculiar given Ovid's detailed account of how the blood poured from Marsyas' body as he was being flayed.<sup>106</sup> Ovid writes:

As he cried the skin was stripped from the surface of his limbs,  
and he was nothing but a wound; blood flowed from everywhere,

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 49. Anzieu notes how verticality is reinforced in the myth of Marsyas and how this reinforcement relates to the vertical posture of humans. This posture is in contrast to the horizontality of animals. But what are we to make of the fact that Marsyas' status as a satyr marks him out as half human and half animal? This is not something that Anzieu addresses.

<sup>105</sup> The colour of Marsyas' skin in the medallion resembles the skin of one who has already died.

<sup>106</sup> The medallion is based on the writings of Ovid. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 13 vols., ed. and trans. D.E. Hill (London: Arts and Philips. 1992).

the sinews were uncovered and lay open and the veins without any skin trembled and throbbed; you could count the pulsating organs and the glistening tissues in the breast.<sup>107</sup>

This account provides an explicit description of the body in pain. There is an emphasis on the gory anatomical details of flaying when Marsyas becomes one single “wound.” The reader is invited to “count” Marsyas’ vital organs and muscles just as *The Butcher Shop* invites the viewer to look in and around already flayed and eviscerated bodies.

Bellori briefly references *Apollo Flaying Marsyas* and claims that the medallion represents “the wisdom of removing the bestial outer skin from the soul.”<sup>108</sup> This interpretation does not address the more corporeal aspects of the image. Dempsey writes that “the medallions in the vault continue the theme on the fables of the loved of gods through playfully inventive and witty variations.”<sup>109</sup> I would argue that *Apollo Flaying Marsyas* can be interpreted differently particularly when read in relation to *The Butcher Shop*. Both images represent bodies that have been hung for the purpose of flaying. But the reasons for flaying are markedly different. Marsyas is flayed as a form of punishment while the carcasses in the butcher shop are flayed for the production of meat. Unlike the carcasses in the painting, Marsyas’ corpse will not be eviscerated, dismembered, weighed, and sold as a commodity.

The act of flaying in the myth constitutes the climatic point of victory for Apollo whereas the act of flaying in a butcher shop represents just one of many steps in the production and preparation of meat. The medallion shows Apollo looking intensely at Marsyas’ thigh as he slices into the seamless surface of skin. The absorption with which

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 53. This passage occurs from line 387 to 391.

<sup>108</sup> Bellori, *The Lives of Annibale and Agostino Carracci*, 51.

<sup>109</sup> Dempsey, *Annibale Carracci*, 25.

he goes about his task resembles the ways in which the butchers in the shop go about their tasks apparently oblivious to the effects of slaughter that surround them.

A number of bodies have been sliced open and their skin peeled off in *The Butcher Shop*. Their flesh has been rendered by thick paint that verges on the sculptural. As Posner observes, "The rapid and rough brushstrokes and thick dabs of paint compose figures and objects in *The Butcher Shop* and transcribe areas of light and shade that reveal the textures of surfaces and suggest the solidity of forms."<sup>110</sup> The thick brushstrokes and rough painterly surface induce a kind of vision that is analogous to touch.<sup>111</sup>

While Anzieu argues that the Ego constitutes itself upon a tactile foundation, I would suggest that vision also constitutes itself upon a tactile foundation. In the case of *The Butcher Shop*, the sense of touch is mediated by the sense of sight. The impasto technique compels the viewer to step up to the painting and look closely at how paint has replaced flesh. As Mieke Bal writes:

The substance of paint as flesh affects every aspect of the dead body. Its roughness not only conveys the making of the work but the looseness of the boundaries of the body.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 14.

<sup>111</sup> Here I am thinking about the ways in which Svetlana Alpers has theorized a kind of vision that stands in for touch. See Svetlana Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise: The Studio and the Market* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 14. Alpers differentiates two ways of painting that were described at the time Rembrandt was working during the seventeenth century: "Writers, invoking ancient precedent, commonly distinguished between two modes of painting: a smooth and a rough one, or a finished and a less finished one, loose or free one. In Vasari's account, the rough and unfinished manner of Titian offered a display of imagination over and above mere manual skill." This description relates to the way in which rhizomatic vision has the capacity to produce multiple connections in the viewer.

<sup>112</sup> Mieke Bal, "Dead Flesh or the Smell of Painting," in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, eds. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 373. Bal is writing in reference to Rembrandt's *Slaughtered Ox* (1655). She reworks Alpers' notion of vision operating as touch to argue that vision and touch are not the only senses implicated in relation to the painting. She argues that the painting metaphorically calls up the smell of rotting flesh and that this smell contaminates the

If the paint is like flesh then the frame of the painting is like skin. The permeability of the frame mirrors the permeability of the flayed bodies represented throughout the space of *The Butcher Shop*. The bleeding that occurs between the inside and outside of the painting opens up the possibility for contamination not only at the visual but the psychic level. The looming carcasses in the foreground appear as though they are about to fall out of the painting and land at our feet. This is particularly unsettling considering the size of the painting. The transgressions that occur along the frame produce an anxiety in the viewer who is made aware of the physical and psychological effects of looking at such an image.

*The Butcher Shop* presents a dramatic reworking of sacrifice. Sacrifice is alluded to not in terms of an individual offering to God but rather in terms of a collective offering to the market. The sacrificial remains are offered up as commodities that are necessary for the life of the market. What is ultimately sacrificed is the linkage between labour and the labouring body for the purposes of producing commodities. Vision plays a crucial role in this sacrifice. It is through the act of vision that the meat on display is incorporated. The pieces of meat on the table are consumed not through the mouth but rather the eyes of the viewer.

---

representation.

## EPILOGUE

I began this thesis with a passage from Thomas More's *Utopia* in order to draw attention to some of the anxieties I see at play in *The Butcher Shop*. Written almost seventy years before the painting, More's book is a cautionary tale in which utopia separates the slaughtering of animals from the community. The work is performed by "slaves" in "special places outside of town."<sup>113</sup> The butchering of animals and the preparation of meat is thus performed outside of the civic space by those who are not considered citizens. The slaughtering of animals and the cleaning of carcasses is deemed dangerous at both the physical and moral levels since it has the capacity to destroy "one's natural feelings of humanity."<sup>114</sup> There is clearly a price to be paid for slaughtering animals and yet it is necessary.

What happens when the act of butchery, conceived as a kind of sacrifice, is replaced by the act of painting? How might we read More's text in relation to *The Butcher Shop*? There are a number of interesting differences between the two in terms of how the space of butchery is represented. The painting does not locate butchery outside of town but in an enclosed space where those that kill come into contact with those from the street. And yet evident in More's text and Carracci's painting is a concern with contamination. Attempts to prevent contamination in utopia are signified by the isolation of slaughter outside the town and the washing off of all blood and dirt with running

---

<sup>113</sup> More, *Utopia*, 81.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. See also Vialles, *From Animal to Edible*, 77, who writes: "Back in the days when slaughtering was done in the middle of towns, the butchers who worked and lived on terms of familiarity with blood were credited with possessing a violent and brutal character. Whatever their means and whatever their skill, butchers lived by slitting the throats of animals and always had, even if it was only metaphorically, blood under their fingernails." This passage echoes the

water. The absence of blood in the painting gives the impression that what is being expelled is contained. But this impression is disrupted by the act of vision that replaces the movement of blood and transgresses bodily boundaries and frames.

The viewer is located at the back of the shop and directly confronted with the processes of butchery in an apparently uninterrupted sequence of time. The viewer is not marked out as a buyer of meat but rather a buyer of a particular kind of vision that both contains and displaces. The presentation of flayed carcasses and pieces of meat on the table remind the viewer what has to be sacrificed for the market and how viewing comes at a price. What is on the table puts everything around it in motion, all conjoined in the multiple tasks of producing a commodity. The table signals the presence of the viewer and opens up a particular viewing position whereby the movement of labour is replaced by the movement of vision. This movement from labour to vision affects not only the way we think about bodies transformed through work but also how bodies are transformed through vision. The sight of flayed, eviscerated, and dismembered bodies produces an anxiety in the viewer both physically and psychically.

All studies of the painting I have encountered fail to deal directly with the processes and embodiment of vision in relation to *The Butcher Shop*. The tendency has been to locate the painting within such categories as artist biography, naturalism, eclecticism, and the burlesque. I contend that the image cannot be reduced to one category and that it is in the process of viewing that attempts to stabilize and categorize the painting are called into question. Unlike the singular, classified bodies represented in the *Arti di Bologna* series, the collectively positioned figures in *The Butcher Shop* are not isolated and contained in the same way. Labouring bodies, purchasing bodies, and bodies

---

sentiments declared in *Utopia* regarding those who are given the task of slaughtering animals.

to be consumed come into contact and are represented in various activities and states of dismemberment. There are places in the painting where it is difficult to ascertain where one body begins and another ends. While the painting represents the space of the butcher shop as a site of bodily transformation and social exchange, it also presents the uneasy conjunction between contamination and sacrifice in spite of the fact that not a drop of blood can be seen. It is not a question of the indiscernability between the bodies and activities represented in the painting, but rather the conditions under which visibility is produced.





Figure 1. Annibale Carracci, *The Butcher Shop*, c. 1583



Figure 2. Michelangelo, *The Sacrifice of Noah* in the Sistine Chapel, 1509



Figure 3. Jost Amman, *Train of Soldiers*, n.d.





Figure 4. Bartolomeo Passerotti, *Two Butchers*, 1582



Figure 5. Agostino Carracci, *Seven Hands, Two of which are Joined Together*, n.d.

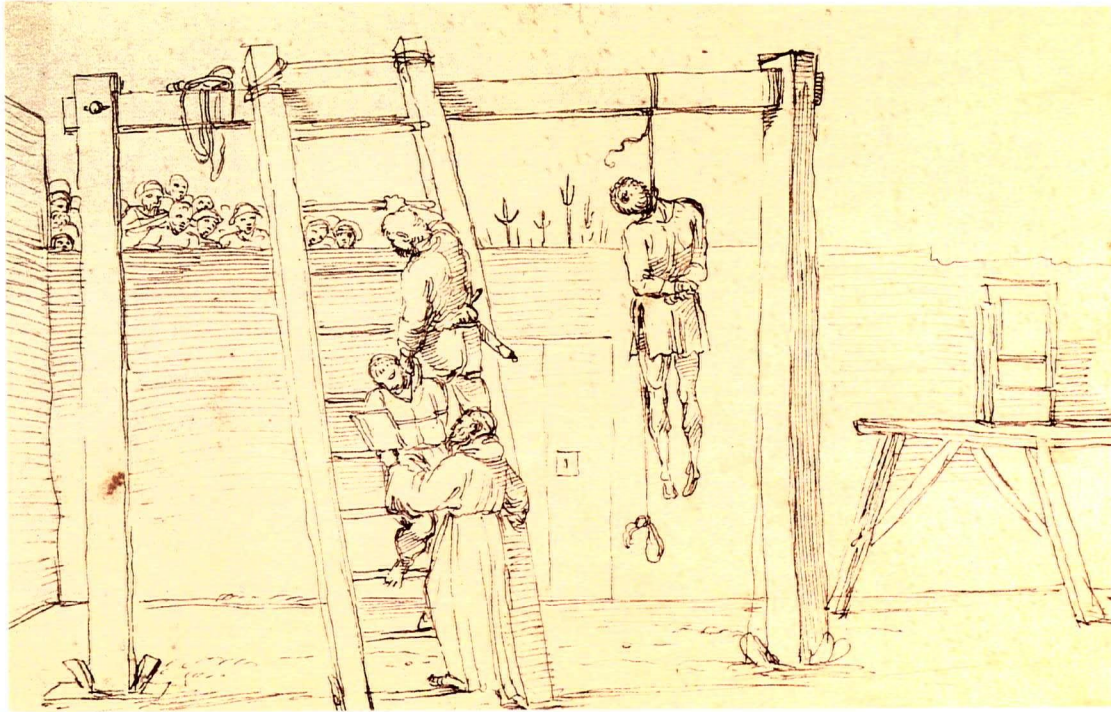


Figure 6. Annibale Carracci, *The Hanging*, n.d.





Figure 7. Annibale Carracci, *A Man Weighing Meat*, n.d.

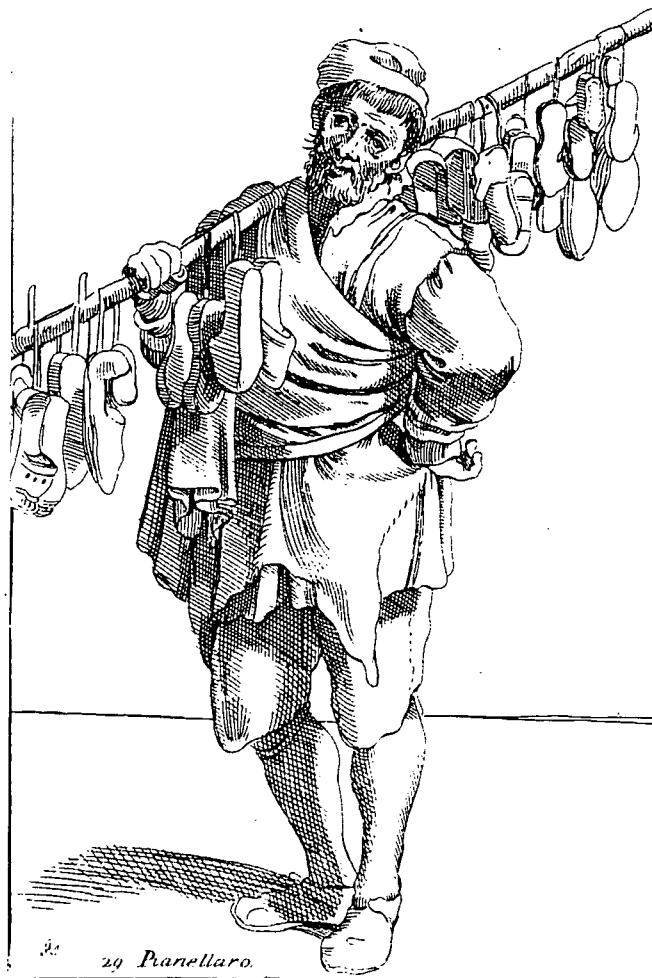


Figure 8. Annibale Carracci, *Pianellaro* from the *Arti di Bologna* series, c. 1580s



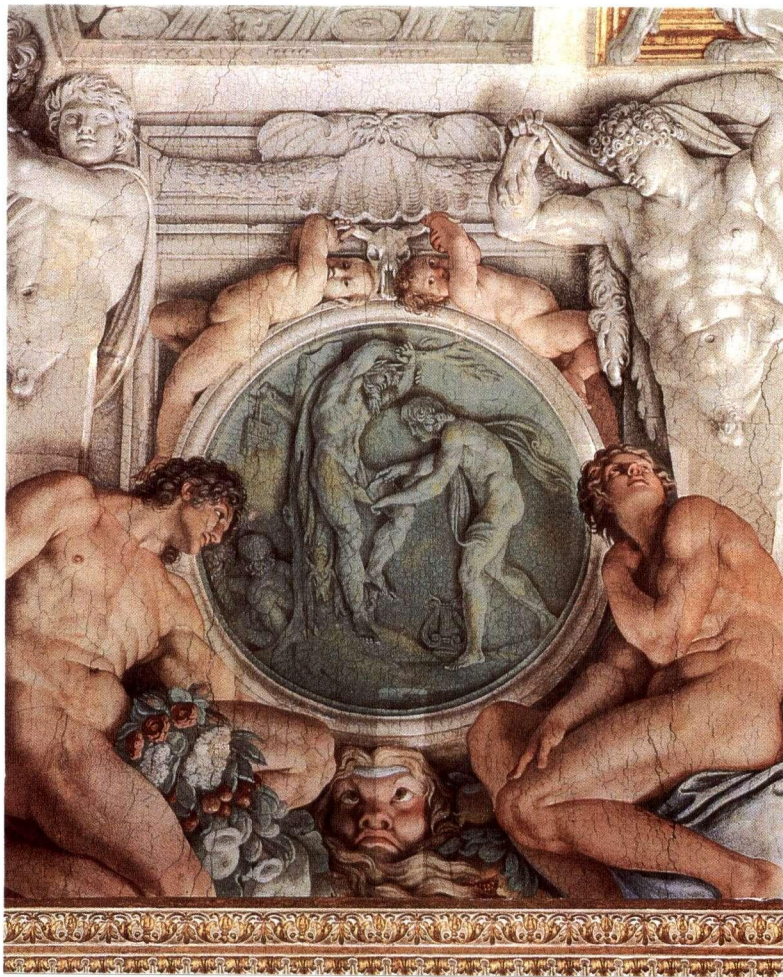


Figure 9. Annibale Carracci, *Apollo Flaying Marsyas* in the Farnese Gallery, c. 1600

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alpers, Svetlana. *Rembrandt's Enterprise: The Studio and the Market*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988.
- Anzieu, Didier. *The Skin Ego*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Bal, Mieke. "Dead Flesh, or the Smell of Painting." In *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, edited by Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey, 365-383. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.
- . "White Historiography." In *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, 45-76. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Bellori, Giovanni. *The Lives of Annibale and Agostino Carracci*. Translated by Catherine Enggass. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968.
- Benati, Daniele. "Annibale Carracci's Beginnings in Bologna: Between Nature and History." In *The Drawings of Annibale Carracci*, 41-107. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000.
- Bissell, R. Ward. "Book Review of Donald Posner's *Annibale Carracci: A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting around 1590*." *The Art Bulletin* LVI (March 1974): 130-133.
- Bohn, Babette. "Annibale Carracci." In *The Illustrated Bartsch. Italian Masters of the Sixteenth Century: Bartolomeo Passerotti, Domenico Tibaldi, Camillo Procaccini, Ludovico Carracci, and Annibale Carracci*, 159-160. New York: Abaris Books, 1983.
- Boschloo, A.W.A.. *Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent*. New York: Abner Schram, 1974.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York and London: Routledge, 1993.
- Camporesi, Piero. *The Incorruptible Flesh: Body Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore*. Edited by Tania Croft-Murray. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- . *Juice of Life: The Symbolic and Magic Significance of Blood*. Translated by Robert R. Barr. New York: Continuum, 1995.
- Cavalli-Björkman, Görel. "A Bolognese Portrait of a Butcher," *The Burlington Magazine*, no. 1156 (July 1999): 418-419.

- Cropper, Elizabeth and Charles Dempsey. "The State of Research in Italian Painting of the Seventeenth Century." *The Art Bulletin* LXIX (December 1987): 494-509.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Translated by Tom Conley. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- . *Foucault*. Translated by Seán Hand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Dempsey, Charles. *Annibale Carracci and the Beginnings of Baroque Style*. Glückstadt: J.J. Augustin Verlag, 1977.
- Dempsey, Charles. *Annibale Carracci: The Farnese Gallery, Rome*. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1995.
- . "The Carracci Academy." In *Academies of Art: Between Renaissance and Romanticism*, edited by Anton W. A. Boschloo, Elwin J. Hendrikse, Laetitia C. Smith, and Gert Jan van der Sman, 33-43. Gravenhage: SDU Uitgeverij, 1989.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Feigenbaum, Gail. "Annibale in the Farnese Palace: A Classical Education." In *The Drawings of Annibale Carracci*, 109-199. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, 2000.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.
- . *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.
- Freedberg, S. J. *Circa 1600: A Revolution of Style in Italian Painting*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Goldstein, Carl. *Visual Fact over Verbal Fiction: A Study of the Carracci and the Criticism, Theory, and Practice of Art in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1988.
- Hale, John. R.. "The Soldier in Germanic Graphic Art of the Renaissance." In *Art and History: Images and Their Meaning*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, 85-114. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

- The Holy Bible*. New York: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1941.
- The Illustrated Bartsch. Italian Masters of the Sixteenth Century*, vol. 18, edited by Diane De Grazia Bohlin. New York: Abaris Books, 1983).
- Kristeva, Julie. "Approaching Abjection." In *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, 1-13. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Lacan, Jacques. "Some Reflections on the Ego." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1953): 13.
- Laures, Robert. "A Medieval Response to Municipal Pollution." Paper presented at the Mid-America Conference on History, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, September 1992.
- Loisel, Catherine. "A Portrait of Ludovico Carracci at Christ Church, Oxford: His Early Chronology Reconsidered." *Apollo*, no. 457 (March 2000): 22-27.
- Mahon, Denis. *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971.
- Martin, John. "The Butcher's Shop of the Carracci." *Art Bulletin* XLV (1963): 263-165.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 1. Edited by Friedrich Engels. Translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. New York: International Publishers, 1967.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954.
- McCorquodale, Charles. "Book Review of A. W. A. Boschloo's *Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality after the Council of Trent*." *Apollo*, no. 156 (February 1975): 148-149.
- McTighe, Sheila. "Perfect Deformity, Ideal Beauty, and the *Imaginaire* of Work: the Reception of Annibale Carracci's *Arti di Bologna* in 1646." *The Oxford Art Journal*, no. 1 (1993): 75-91.
- More, Thomas. *Utopia*. Translated by Paul Turner. London: Penguin Books, 1965.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. 13 vols. Edited and translated by D.E. Hill. London: Arts and Philips, 1992.
- Pepper, D. Stephen. "The Aftermath of the Correggio / Carracci Exhibitions: A New Early Chronology of the Carracci." *Apollo*, no. 310 (December 1987): 409-413.

- . "Book Review of Charles Dempsey's *Annibale Carracci and the Beginnings of the Baroque Style*." *The Art Bulletin*, no. 3 (September 1984): 531-533.
- . "Progress in the Field of the Carracci." *Apollo*, no. 346 (December 1990): 426-428.
- Perniola, Mario. "Between Clothing and Nudity." *Zone* (1989): 237-265.
- Posner, Donald. *Annibale Carracci: A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting Around 1590*. New York: Phaidon, 1971.
- . "Book Review of A. W. A. Boschloo's *Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent*." *The Art Quarterly*, no. 1 (Autumn 1977): 125-128.
- Robertson, Clare and Catherine Whistler. *Drawings by the Carracci from the British Collection*. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1997.
- San Juan, Rose Marie. *Rome: A City Out of Print*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2001.
- Silverman, Kaja. *The Threshold of the Visible World*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Stallybrass, Peter. "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed." In *Rewriting the Renaissance. The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, 123-142. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Sterling, Charles. *Still Life Painting from Antiquity to the Present Time*. Translated by James Emmons. New York: Universe Books, 1959.
- Stewart, Susan. *On Longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Summerscale, Anne. *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci: Commentary and Translation*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.
- Van Tuyll, Carel. "Circa 1600. A Revolution of Style in Italian Painting." *Burlington Magazine*, no. 972 (March 1984): 161-162.
- Vialles, Noëlie. *From Animal to Edible*. Translated by J. A. Underwood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Wind, Barry. "Annibale Carracci's 'Scherzo': The Christ Church Butcher Shop." *The Art Bulletin*, no. 1 (March 1976): 93-96.

Wittkower, Rudolf. *The Drawings of the Carracci in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle*. London: Phaidon Press, 1952.

Zapperi, Roberto. *Annibale Carracci: Ritratto di artista come giovane*. Turin, 1989.