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The anatomical atlas: Govert Bidloo and Gerard de Lairesse's *Anatomia humani corporis* (1685)

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Citation

Li, W., & Deijl, L. van der. (2024). The anatomical atlas: Govert Bidloo and Gerard de Lairesse's *Anatomia humani corporis* (1685). In J. Noorman & F. Dietz (Eds.), *Studies in Early Modernity in The Netherlands* (pp. 27-53). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. doi:10.2307/jj.21155010.5

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

2 The Anatomical Atlas

Govert Bidloo and Gerard de Lairesse's *Anatomia Humani Corporis* (1685)

Weixuan Li and Lucas van der Deijl

Abstract

In 1685, Govert Bidloo and Gerard de Lairesse published their *Anatomia Humani Corporis*, an impressive anatomical atlas with 105 engravings of dissected bodies and body parts. It was published in a culture in which medical professors performed dissections in anatomical theatres, while regular theatres became spaces for knowledge transfer about human passions. Engaged in both sorts of theatres, Bidloo and Lairesse exemplify the interconnectedness of art, theatre, medicine and publishing in early modern Amsterdam. In this essay, we use the materiality of *Anatomia* as a key to unravel the entanglement of the city's cultural industries, tracing the social, intellectual, aesthetic and commercial connections linking Bidloo, Lairesse, the theatre, and the publishers involved in the production of the atlas.

Keywords: Govert Bidloo; Gerard de Lairesse; anatomical atlas; cultural industries; anatomical theatre

In 1685, three Amsterdam publishers issued *Anatomia Humani Corporis*, a masterpiece that embodied the rich material culture of the early modern book trade. This impressive anatomical atlas, containing 105 engravings or 'tabulae' spread across 241 grand folio pages (measuring 51 by 36 centimetres), emerged from the collaborative efforts of Mennonite poet, playwright and medical doctor Govert Bidloo (1649–1713) and painter and classicist art theorist Gerard de Lairesse (1641–1711). The engravings were based on drawings by Lairesse representing bodies or body parts dissected by Bidloo.

Noorman, Judith and Feike Dietz (eds), *Objects, Commodities and Material Cultures in the Dutch Republic. Exploring Early Modern Materiality Across Disciplines*.

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024

DOI: 10.5117/9789048562770_CH02

Bidloo annotated the images with a legend and brief explanatory comments, which were printed before the 105 *tabulae*. Several (anonymous) engravers and three different publishers were needed to transform their notes and sketches into a volume of monumental size and quality.

As a coproduction of a doctor, a painter, three publishers and several engravers, *Anatomia* exemplifies the cross-pollination among different cultural industries that was fundamental to the cultural market in early modern Amsterdam. In fact, the city's cultural flowering during the seventeenth century was largely driven by the 'interrelations between book production, graphic art, science, and painting'.¹ As a fast-growing town attracting large amounts of human and economic capital, Amsterdam became a cultural centre where institutions and professional networks could emerge and enhance each other. The availability and centralization of skills, capital and knowledge created a fruitful ground for the city's cultural industries. Thus *Anatomia*, requiring human capital from different fields for its production, offers a unique key to the entangled nature of Amsterdam's cultural industries in the 1680s.

The term 'cultural industry' (or 'culture industry') originates in the neo-Marxist critical tradition developed by the Frankfurt School, focusing on the relationship between economic conditions and mass culture. In this essay, we adopt Claartje Rasterhoff's interpretation of the concept, tailored specifically to the early modern period.² Rasterhoff highlights that all early modern cultural industries, despite their heterogeneity, were 'engaged in the creation of artefacts that are exchanged in commercial transactions but whose symbolic or aesthetic qualities are high relative to their utilitarian purposes'.³ Their prioritization of symbolic and aesthetic quality also means that the competition among producers of those artefacts was based more on 'novelty, differentiation, and quality' than on technological innovation or costs alone.⁴ Therefore, studies of cultural industries should take into account not just the economic and social conditions affecting the producers but also the aesthetics and materiality of their products. As a collaborative product, *Anatomia* can be read as a material trace of the economic, social, material and aesthetic interests involved in its production. Its materiality embodies the complex interplay among early modern cultural industries.

1 Rasterhoff 2017, 284.

2 Rasterhoff 2017, 21.

3 Rasterhoff 2017, 22.

4 Rasterhoff 2017, 22.

In unravelling this entanglement, one thread points to a central institution in Amsterdam's cultural landscape: the famous city theatre on the Keizersgracht known as the Amsterdamse Schouwburg. The Schouwburg created the conditions for what Rasterhoff calls 'knowledge spillovers' among the various cultural industries employed by and benefitting from the theatre, such as painting, publishing and literature.⁵ In *Podium van Europa*, his study of the Schouwburg, Frans Blom offers various examples of such spillovers, ranging from publishers like Abraham de Wees, Jacob Lescaille and Albert Burgh, who specialized in theatre editions, to translators like Jacobus Barocas, whose prose translations of Spanish plays enabled their Dutch adaptations, and painters like Rembrandt, who may have borrowed some of their compositions from the dramaturgy on stage. In this essay, we will first assess how such knowledge spillovers from the theatre affected the conditions under which *Anatomia* took shape.

The extensively studied association between anatomy and theatre is as old as the first anatomical theatres, modelled after the ancient theatres of Rome and Verona.⁶ Karel Vanhaesebrouck recently viewed Bidloo and Lairese's anatomical work in the context of the theatrical culture of the Dutch Republic, where representations of violence and cruelty using theatrical techniques were increasingly being commercialized – a process that Vanhaesebrouck and others have defined elsewhere as 'imagineering'.⁷ He argues that the 'history of anatomy in the Dutch Republic cannot be disconnected from the history of theatre': anatomical atlases, just like Jan Vos's gory Senecan plays, 'capitalized on the effects of the spectator, such as horror and fascination'.⁸ In this view, the theatre became part of a multimedia 'marketing of emotions', in which public executions, anatomical lessons and printed representations of violent events all depended on the same theatrical techniques to exploit the affective response to cruelty.⁹ Rina Knoeff, however, seems to disagree with this interpretation when she considers Lairese's designs for the engravings, with their apparent refusal to embellish the cruelty inflicted on the dissected body, from Bidloo's 'Mennonite fascination for martyr stories of torture and suffering'.¹⁰ Based on a similar intertextual (Foucauldian) approach to *Anatomia*, Vanhaesebrouck and Knoeff reach different conclusions about the meaning of its aesthetic form.

5 Rasterhoff 2017, 293.

6 Cf. Klestinec 2011, 28.

7 Korsten et al. 2021, 1.

8 Vanhaesebrouck 2020, 264 and 261.

9 Vanhaesebrouck 2020, 269.

10 Knoeff 2007, 130.

These intertextual studies are crucial to understanding the relationships between individual cultural objects and the discourses that created them, but they tend to pay little attention to the materiality of those objects. Both Vanhaesebrouck and Knoeff attribute the visual and theatrical form of *Anatomia* mostly to Bidloo's religious and artistic disposition. But Bidloo was only one of the many artists and artisans involved in *Anatomia*'s production. Books of this size in particular, printed on expensive paper and illustrated with many large engravings, would have involved several competing interests: not just ideological, artistic and scientific, but also commercial and financial. After all, only those within a limited group of wealthy customers could afford to spend so much on a single book, and publishers had to find ways, one way or another, to profit from printing and selling books like *Anatomia*. Moreover, the atlas was shaped not just by what we might call 'discursive' factors but also by the institutions involved, either directly or indirectly, in its material production, such as the Schouwburg and Amsterdam's publishing industry. We need to understand those institutional factors to assess the curious case of *Anatomia*, and vice versa: understanding the complexities of a single object like *Anatomia* helps us grasp how cultural industries functioned in the Dutch Republic.

Therefore, in this essay, we aim to reconstruct the position of *Anatomia* within both the discursive and the material conditions in which the atlas took shape. We first argue that the cultural domain of the theatre contributed to those conditions in three ways: as a meeting place; as a model for art and medicine; and as a visual template for anatomical images. Second, we demonstrate the function of a second institution, the book trade, as a marketplace for medical knowledge. We substantiate our argument by tracing the social, intellectual, aesthetic and commercial connections linking Bidloo, Lairesse, Amsterdam's theatre society *Nil Volentibus Arduum* and the networks of publishers that shaped the atlas. Our reconstruction reveals how Bidloo, Lairesse and their publishers managed to align particular economic interests, artistic ideals and anatomical knowledge from various disciplines and fields of expertise. By adopting the materiality of *Anatomia* as our vantage point, we underscore the significance of material culture, hailed by Gerritsen and Riello as 'one of the most fertile areas of collaboration'.¹¹ This collaborative approach is evident not only in our own interdisciplinary research but also in the materialization process of *Anatomia*, which brought together contributions from various actors across distinctive fields within Amsterdam's cultural milieu. Our investigation into the materiality of

11 Gerritsen et al. 2021, 10.

Anatomia blurs disciplinary boundaries, illustrating how historical objects can serve as conduits, connecting discrete fields in early modern society.

Social Circles: The Theatre as a Meeting Place

The linkage of art, theatre, medicine, and publishing in early modern Amsterdam is reflected first and foremost by a large overlap in underlying social circles. The Schouwburg functioned as an important intersection of those domains, providing a meeting place for doctors, painters, playwrights, printmakers and booksellers. Navigating the fields of theatre, painting and medicine, the individual careers of both Bidloo and Lairese show the key social role the Schouwburg had come to play.

Bidloo started working as a surgeon in Amsterdam during the 1670s. He learned the profession by attending the anatomical lessons taught by Frederik Ruysch, later one of *Anatomia*'s most vocal critics.¹² After defending his dissertation at the University of Franeker on 5 May 1682, Bidloo was promoted into the ranks of medical doctors. In 1688 he accepted a position to teach anatomy in The Hague, a year before joining the stadholder's court as William III's personal physician. Crowning these achievements was his appointment as a professor of anatomy and medicine at Leiden University in 1694.¹³ Alongside his successful career as a medical doctor, Bidloo became a prominent literary figure, with several plays staged at the Schouwburg, including *Karel, erfprins van Spanje* (1679) and *Fabius Severus* (1680). He earned a seat on the theatre's board of directors in 1684 amid ongoing controversy about the rise of French classicism fuelled by Nil Volentibus Arduum (Nil), which was mocked in Bidloo's satirical play *De muitery en nederlaag van Midas, koning onverstand, of Comma, punct, parenthesis* (first printed posthumously in 1723).¹⁴

Lairese, meanwhile, was building a reputation as a successful classical painter whose workshop produced more than 270 works between 1665 and 1689, including large decorative paintings, ceiling paintings, grisailles and works in other genres.¹⁵ Like Bidloo, Lairese was closely connected to prominent literary circles in Amsterdam: he received commissions

¹² Kooijmans 2011, 224 and 228–229.

¹³ Fournier 1985, 190.

¹⁴ Contrary to what Vanhaesebrouck claims, Bidloo never became a member of Nil Volentibus Arduum (Vanhaesebrouck 2020, 265). His plays were criticized by Nil member Andries Pels, which seems to have sparked Bidloo's bitterness towards Nil (Pels 1978, 80–81).

¹⁵ Li 2020, 5, table 1.

from Nil Volentibus Arduum and created several large stage sets for the Schouwburg between 1678 and 1681. As of 12 May 1676, Lairesse even became the longstanding host of Nil Volentibus Arduum's weekly meetings – until 1680, when the society began a long hiatus.¹⁶

We cannot ascertain when Lairesse and Bidloo crossed paths, but their biographies indicate their involvement in the same circles within Amsterdam's cultural elite, whose members held key positions in different Dutch cultural industries. The overlap in their social networks suggests that the artist and the doctor might have known each other for almost a decade before the publication of *Anatomia*. On 15 October 1675, Bidloo was an incidental attendee at one of Nil Volentibus Arduum's meetings.¹⁷ By then, its central figures – Andries Pel and Lodewijk Meijer – had been friends with Lairesse for years. As early as 1668, Lairesse etched a series of illustrations for Pel's tragedy *Didoos doot* (1668) and his comedy *Julfus* (1668). Since these etchings are the only book illustrations in Lairesse's oeuvre, it is assumed that the series was made as a courtesy to a friend and was not part of an economic transaction.¹⁸ In addition to possibly having links through Nil, Lairesse and Bidloo had served similar sorts of high-end clients in Amsterdam and beyond. For instance, Lairesse received commissions from the rich and powerful De Flines brothers, whose art collection was lauded by Bidloo in at least one of his poems.¹⁹ Their clientele continued to overlap after the publication of *Anatomia*: Lairesse made several engravings for Bidloo's employer William III and received large commissions to decorate the Soestdijk Palace and, later, the Binnenhof.

Lairesse's introduction to Amsterdam's literary elite also connected him to the city's medical circles, because medical doctors pervaded the theatrical domain both behind the scenes and on stage. More than half of Nil's members mentioned in its meeting minutes were medical doctors or surgeons: Lodewijk Meijer, David Lingelbach, Joannes Antonides van der Goes, Johannes Bouwmeester, Anthonius van Koppenol, Moesman Dop, Reinier Diephout, Johannes de Stoppelaar, and Rudolf van Zijl. Physicians also featured in the story worlds created by Nil Volentibus Arduum. In

16 Dongelmans 1982, 150.

17 Dongelmans 1982, 139–140.

18 De Vries 1998, 166.

19 See Bidloo's poem to Philip de Flines: 'Eerzangen aan den heere Filips de Flines op zyne kunstkamer van beelden, medaliën, schilderyen, tekeningen, en preten' (Bidloo 1719, 173–185). Bidloo wrote another poem celebrating the wedding of Rebeca de Flines (1667–1707) and Willem Blaeu (1660–1701), the grandson of the famous publisher Willem Jansz Blaeu (1571–1638), in 1683 (Bidloo 1719, 32–40).

1680 Nil adapted Molière's 1666 farce *Le médecin malgré lui*, translated as *Fielebout, of dokter tegens dank*. Nil's version tells the story of the worthless drunk Fielebout, pretending to be a doctor and summoned to heal Lusyntje, who is pretending to be sick. Lusyntje's lover Volkert presents Fielebout as her last resort after four greedy, bungling physicians have failed to agree on how to treat her. This satirical commentary on the incompetence and pedantry widespread among medical charlatans must have appealed to the learned members of Nil, who would have cherished their university degrees. *Fielebout* thus reminds us that Nil Volentibus Arduum was not just a theatre society; it also functioned as a discussion group for physicians with literary ambitions. Lairesse may well have been the logical choice to produce the sketches for *Anatomia* because of his central position in Amsterdam's literary and medical milieu.

Intellectual Conditions: The Theatre as a Model for Art and Medicine

In addition to the social links fostered by the literary domain, the theatre also served as a space where new ideas could be exchanged and debated. Bidloo, Lairesse and the members of Nil were confident intellectuals, each presenting themselves as prominent reformers and authorities in their fields. All of them ended up writing instructive manuals and manifestos for their peers and pupils – Bidloo and Lairesse's 1685 *Anatomia Humani Corporis* (anatomy), Lairesse's 1707 *Het groot schilderboek* (painting) and *Nauwkeurig onderwys in de tooneel-poëzy* (theatre) edited by Pels and Meijer, first printed posthumously in 1765 – hoping to advance the arts and sciences in accordance with new poetic, artistic and scientific principles. Their theoretical reflections share an intellectual common ground where medicine and anatomy became associated with the arts. We will discuss three ways in which theatre poetics and recent developments in medicine led to knowledge spillovers between the two fields.

First, Bidloo, Lairesse, Pels and Meijer all described the didactic effect of their own discipline in explicitly theatrical terms. Their writings resonate with the Horatian requirement – articulated in the Roman poet's *Ars Poetica* – for poetry to be both pleasant and useful (*dulce* and *utile*). Lairesse's definition of the proper use of painting holds that the visual arts should aspire to '*vermaak en nuttigheid*' (pleasure and usefulness).²⁰ A similar ideal

²⁰ Lairesse 1707, 106.

can be found in *Naauwkeurig onderwys in de tooneel-poëzy*, where Pels and Meijer maintain that if a work of literature is pleasing it will of necessity be useful, and vice versa.²¹ Bidloo also describes anatomy to be an ‘art’ (*kunst*) at once functional (*noodzaakelyk*) and entertaining (*vermaakelyk*).²² The anatomy lesson thus becomes more than just a necessary aspect of medical training. According to Bidloo, it also takes the viewer on an expedition into a landscape of vessels and muscles containing more marvellous wonders (*‘vermaakelyke wonderen’*) than one would encounter in a journey around the entire globe.²³ This metaphorical description indicates that anatomy could simultaneously educate and entertain.

Second, Bidloo not only cast the effect and function of dissection in theatrical terms, but also expected to inform and improve the arts. Five decades earlier, printmaker Jacob van der Gracht had already proclaimed that his 1634 anatomical atlas *Anatomie der wtterlicke deelen van het menschelick lichaem* would serve ‘painters, sculptors, engravers and even surgeons’.²⁴ Bidloo adds: ‘This entertaining art [i.e., anatomy] gives light and reason, to and for many other exercises and arts’.²⁵ In his dedicatory poem to Bidloo, Pieter Verhoek proposes a similar application of Bidloo’s *Anatomia*: ‘I see the arts deriving wisdom from Anatomy’.²⁶ That anatomical knowledge possesses artistic value is acknowledged by Lairese, who recalls that he has used the corpses dissected by Bidloo for his teachings on human proportions.²⁷

Anatomical atlases traditionally met an artistic demand because painters and playwrights needed anatomical knowledge to depict the body itself as well as emotions expressed via the body. After all, if moral improvement were to be achieved through artistic means, the artwork needed to move the viewer emotionally. The arts became ‘useful’ only when they produced a moral effect in their audience, and knowledge of the human body was crucial if an artist were to achieve such effects. Large sections of *Het groot schilderboek* and *Naauwkeurige onderwys in de tooneel-poëzy* are dedicated to descriptions of the nature, function and depiction of passions. For example,

21 ‘alzo daar in het nut zelf vermaak, en ‘t vermaak noch daarenboven nut veroorzaakt’, Pels et al. 1765, 27, 62–65.

22 In a lecture from 1688 appended to the 1690 Dutch edition of *Anatomia Humani Corporis*: Bidloo 1690, fol. *5v.

23 Bidloo 1690, fol. *5v.

24 Cf. Kooijmans 2011, 9.

25 ‘Deeze vermaakelyke kunst geeft licht en aanleyding, in- en tot veele andere oefeningen en kunsten’, Bidloo 1690, fol. *5v.

26 ‘Ik zie de kunsten, uit de Ontleding, wysheid haalen’, Verhoek in: Bidloo 1690, fol. *4v.

27 Lairese 1707, 21. Cf. De Vries 1998, 95–96.

Lairesse advises his reader to obtain proper knowledge of the ‘passions and the features of the passions, not just to be able to give your images their natural movement, but also to know from where they emerge’.²⁸

Third, the field of anatomy appropriated the rituals and the architecture of the theatre. *Anatomia* was published in a culture where surgeons *performed* dissections in anatomical theatres, while traditional theatres became spaces for knowledge transfer about human passions and rational behaviour. Public stages for the performance of anatomical lessons emerged in Leiden, Delft, Amsterdam, The Hague and elsewhere, inspired by the first anatomical theatre in Padua.²⁹ During these lessons, a surgeon or medical professor dissected the corpses of convicted criminals or people with terminal illnesses whose families donated or sold their bodies for this purpose. Dissections usually took place in winter and within a day or two post-mortem, before the body’s decomposition would become too advanced. Because the body decays rapidly, anatomists needed to be skilled and resolute, which gave the performance a spectacular, even theatrical quality.³⁰ Bidloo himself had probably been dissecting bodies for years when *Anatomia* was published. In 1677, at age 28, he sent the Amsterdam burgomasters a request for bodies, presumably to be used for the dissections drawn by Lairesse.³¹ He also performed public dissections in the 1690s: according to an announcement in the *Oprechte Haerlemsche courant* on 28 April 1693, two deserters executed by the high court martial were to be publicly ‘anatomized’ in The Hague by ‘Professor Bidloo’ the following day.³²

The anatomical theatre both exemplified and stimulated the gradual rise of empiricism in medicine during the seventeenth century. Anatomical discoveries by scientists such as William Harvey and Antoni van Leeuwenhoek increasingly challenged the medical paradigm based on the classical theories of Aristotle and Galen. Anatomy lessons enabled viewers to witness the discrepancies in classical knowledge with their own eyes. The anatomy lesson’s visual and theatrical qualities thus affected the epistemological

28 The full sentence reads: ‘[Hier in komt u eerst vóór een grondige kennis der gestalten of proportie, en] der passïen of kenteekens der hertstogten te hebben, op dat gy aan uw beelden, niet alleen haar natuurlyke beweging weet te geeven, maar ook waar uit dezelve ontstaan’, Lairesse 1707, 10.

29 Kooijmans 2011, 11.

30 Kooijmans 2011, 10.

31 Kooijmans 2011, 156.

32 ‘Deselve staen op morgen door den Heer Professor Bidloo publijck geanatomiseert te werden’, *Oprechte Haerlemsche courant*, 28-04-1693. URL: <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:011226905:mpeg21:p002> (last accessed 1 November 2023).

status of medical knowledge. Bidloo explicitly adheres to the empirical school: 'Just as mathematical truths [rely upon] through reasoning with numbers and lines, anatomical [truths] are only discovered by individual empirical observation'.³³ His request for new drawings by Lairese is apparently in the service of his self-fashioning as an autonomous thinker who insists on using his own senses first and foremost in his work: 'Yes I show nothing, I repeat nothing, based on drawings from someone else: I hate the slavish act of copying'.³⁴ Several critics contested this claim, but Marian Fournier concluded, after a careful analysis of Bidloo's preparations and legends, that many of his descriptions were indeed mostly based on his own observations made via the microscope.³⁵

Aesthetics: The Theatre as a Visual Template for Anatomical Images

Anatomia not only emerged within the social context and intellectual conditions of the literary domain; it was also shaped by the aesthetics of the theatre. Lairese's design of the 105 drawings in *Anatomia* adapted the visual and narrative forms of the (anatomical) theatre. The artist – a Dutch classicist painter accustomed to drawing in his work's beholders – put his illustrations on a stage of display and performance, rather than adhering exclusively to the didactic functions of a scientific treatise. In the frontispiece (fig. 2.1), Lairese depicted a typical, allegorical composition in which Father Time, with his hourglass and scythe, draws aside a large curtain to reveal the scene as if it were a *tableau vivant*. Behind the curtain is a stage where a female personification of Anatomy is enthroned upon a sarcophagus, while Fame, in the background, blows her trumpet. Although Bidloo's dissection for this book probably did not take place in an anatomical theatre, the performance of such a dissection is now envisioned in *Anatomia*.³⁶ In the

33 'Gelyk de wiskunstige waarheden door vertoogen van getallen en lynen, zoo werden de ontleedkundige alleen door het zelf zienelyk bevinden ontdekt', Bidloo 1690, fol. *4r.

34 'ja ik vertoon niets, ik zegge nochmaal niets, naar de tekening van andere: ik haat het slaafsche werk van uittrekken', Bidloo 1690, fol. *4r. In fact, Lairese had also consulted the images in Van der Gracht's edition (De Vries 1998, 95–96).

35 Fournier 1985, 207.

36 It is unlikely, however, that the dissection by Bidloo for this book occurred in an anatomical theatre, for such public demonstrations were mostly controlled by Bidloo's rivals, Frederick Ruysch and his group. Kooijman wrote that: 'During the medical strife of 1677, Govert Bidloo had asked the burgomasters if he "could have a corpse or two", in connection with "certain work



Figure 2.1 Abraham Bloteling, *Frontispiece for Anatomia Humani Corpori*, 1685, print, 478x303 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv.no. RP-P-BI-1870.

pages that follow, Lairese starts out with one male and one female classical nude (figs. 2.1 and 2.2), whose beauty and flawless figures contrast with the cruelly realistic dissection that is to come.³⁷ These images intensify the theatrical effect that a reading of *Anatomia* might elicit, where spectators are invited to peek behind the curtain and where the ‘characters’ are introduced in the first act, unaware of the decay ‘they’ will face after the inevitable fall. These theatrical techniques can be understood within the context of the early modern culture of theatricality described by Vanhaesebrouck, who argued that these techniques ‘install a breach with daily life and [...] turn reality into a stage (with the accompanying scenography, role-playing, and dressing) in order to be able to look at reality and also at one’s own body with a different eye’.³⁸

Paralleling what transpires in the anatomical theatre, Lairese’s drawings in *Anatomia* reveal, layer by layer, scene after scene, the internal structure of two cadavers through successive stages of invasion and fragmentation.³⁹ And yet the striking contrast between life and death, between the living human presence and the violent dissection process, pervades the pages that follow. In plate 28 (fig. 2.2), for instance, the subject appears to sit – in fact, to be seated – in a relaxed, natural way, leaning backwards, lifting one arm while resting on the other. The smooth skin of her arms is a stark foil to her raw, dissected back. The flayed skin and other external cladding that expose the inner sheath of muscles evoke death and bodily ruin – but, at the same time, death and decay are defied via the tender rendering of the seated woman as if she were still alive.

Lairese approaches his designs as a painter, the kind of artist who, not unlike a playwright, uses the human body to convey stories and evoke emotion. Therefore, his anatomical demonstration offers not just a static map of the body for a scientific treatise but rather provides a stage on which the protagonists (and their body parts and the anatomist) can perform. And yet, Lairese did not do what Andreas Vesalius had done in his renowned treatise of 1543, translated into Dutch in 1568: there the towering skinless cadavers are eerily brought back to life, posturing before landscapes. In Lairese’s

he had undertaken, in which he intended to portray all the parts of the human body in their true size”, Kooijman 2011, 156.

37 Kuretsky 2015, 28. In contrast Lairese, in his *Schilderboek*, used realistic representations of human bodies whose proportions were measured during his work for *Anatomia*.

38 Vanhaesebrouck 2020, 269.

39 Challenging the notions of ‘ad vivum’/‘naar het leven’ on the title page, Fend shows that the production of Lairese’s lifelike image was a complex process of observation, interpretation and pictorial imagination (Fend 2019).



Figure 2.2 Pieter van Gunst after Gerard de Lairesse, *Anatomical Study of the Back and Arm Muscles of a Woman* (plate 28 from *Anatomia Humani Corpori*), 1685, print, 340x513 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv.no. RP-P-OB-70.645.

Anatomia, the dead remain manifestly dead, with only subtle allusions made to the living body.⁴⁰ Nevertheless in certain cases, as Susan Kuretsky has remarked, Lairesse also dramatized these images of the dissected body by

⁴⁰ Kuretsky 2015, 34; Vesalius 1568.



Figure 2.3 Pieter van Gunst after Gerard de Lairesse, *Anatomical Model of a Human Skeleton* (plate 87 from *Anatomia Humani Corpori*), 1685, print, 276x443 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv.no. RP-P-OB-70.703.

invoking an unseen anatomist.⁴¹ The audience's gaze is directed, just as it would be in an anatomical theatre, towards the cadaver, its focus rendering the anatomist invisible in a blind spot. In *Anatomia*, Lairesse fixed the reader's gaze on paper in this performed dissection, leaving Bidloo invisible yet present via his resounding instructions and explanations voiced from the texts.

Lairesse's theatrical approach to the anatomical illustrations is further revealed at the beginning of the book's second half, in plates 87 and 88 (figs. 2.3 and 2.4) detailing the book's skeletal makeup. In plate 87 (fig. 2.3),

⁴¹ Kuretsky 2015, 32–34.



Figure 2.4 Pieter van Gunst after Gerard de Lairese, *Anatomical Model of a Human Skeleton (back side)* (plate 88 from *Anatomia Humani Corpori*), 1685, print, 275x441 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv.no. RP-P-OB-70.704.

Lairese depicts a skeletal figure who stands beside an open sarcophagus as if it were just arising from its perpetual sleep. This figure raises its right hand, showing us a running hourglass – a common allusion to the passage of time – against a backdrop of Italianate architecture and a landscape with another sarcophagus. The drapery that may have wrapped itself around its earthly body has now fallen onto the edge of the sarcophagus, and the figure seems to be reaching towards the fallen drapery with its open left hand. In the following plate (88, fig. 2.4), the skeletal figure, now with drapery in its hand, turns away from the viewer, lifting one leg with its toe atop the ledge, about to return to the open grave. Plate 88 is set under a rustic brick arch that frames the view of an arcadian landscape with an obelisk-like

monument in the distance. Only the lettered labels on these two plates remind readers that they are looking at an anatomical study instead of a *vanitas* inviting the contemplation of the brevity of life and the certainty of death. Nonetheless Lairesse, within the rubric of a scientific treatise, uses these two introductory plates to set the stage for the following scenes showing detailed fragments of a human body's skeletal structure. In this way, Lairesse's drawings reinforce the theatrical aspect of the medical world.

Economic Interests: The Bookshop as a Marketplace for Medicine

Mapping the social, intellectual and aesthetic relationships linking theatre, art and medicine helps us understand *Anatomia's* intellectual purpose and visual design. However, we have not yet reached the critical step that gave *Anatomia* its unusual material form. To fully grasp the atlas's materiality, we need to embed the discussion within the commercial world of the era's publishing industries. Notable contemporary authors such as Johan van Beverwijk, Stephan Blankaart and Cornelis Bontekoe demonstrated that quarto or octavo editions of anatomy and medical books could be profitable ventures.⁴² Were the publishers similarly motivated by commercial gain in publishing *Anatomia*? What do we learn from the interconnection between publishing and medicine?

Based on the existing studies of the book market, it might be hard to imagine that the publishers were solely motivated by *Anatomia's* potential commercial success.⁴³ Often such projects, prestigious though they were, did not make money. For books of this size and quality, like other large Latin scholarly books, the economics were much more daunting than in the unglamorous market for cheap small books. Further dampening the economic outlook of *Anatomia* was Bidloo's strained relationship with the medical community. In 1677, while preparing *Anatomia*, Bidloo became embroiled in a major medical controversy in Amsterdam that exposed deep discord within the city's medical circles. A pamphlet war ensued, pitting Bidloo and his allies against an opposing group of physicians.⁴⁴ Soon there were personal attacks, directed in many pamphlets at Bidloo's character and

42 Pettegree et al. 2019, 354–355.

43 Pettegree et al. 2019, 22.

44 Kooijmans 2011, 118–122. Bidloo himself was not the centre of this controversy; he joined his friend Jan Coenerding on the side of Bonaventura van Dortmond in the dispute between Van Dortmond and Andries Boekelman (allied with Frederik Ruysch).

his work-in-progress. Upon hearing of Bidloo's plans for *Anatomia*, Andries Boekelman, a man spearheading the opposition, made a biting comment that proved to be prophetic: 'Most of the praise will go to the draughtsman and the engraver'.⁴⁵ After this quarrel, it must have been clear to people in the publishing industry – who were responsible for printing and circulating the pamphlets – that Bidloo's pompous character had tainted his position as an anatomist.⁴⁶ His poor reputation and the rifts with target customers in the medical world made the already grim economics of *Anatomia* even bleaker.

Despite these circumstances, three publishing houses pooled their capital and shared the costs and risk of this preeminent but possibly unprofitable project: (the heirs of) Jan van Dyck; Joannes van Someren; and Hendrick Boom and his brother Dirck. Their names appeared on the frontispiece of the *Anatomia* from 1685 and its 1690 Dutch translation, the latter reissued in 1728 and 1734. The wealth tax of 1674 (*Kohier* 1674) suggests that these firms were far from the most successful publishing houses in Amsterdam's book trade. These publishers – especially Hendrick Boom, who retained ownership of the copper plates, did not prosper as much as other successful publishing houses.⁴⁷ Publishers such as Abraham Wolfgang, the Blaeu family, and (the widow of) Johannes Jansonius Waesbergen operated larger businesses and possessed greater wealth than the Boom brothers.⁴⁸ To secure their market position, the Booms seem to have tried various economic strategies, many with significant risks. As early as 1669, Hendrick was reported to the court

45 Kooijmans 2011, 121 cited from Boekelman 1677, 71. Another text from 1677 states that 'the newly engraved plates of the scraggy Vesalius contain as few mistakes as there are lice in a beggar's coat' (Van den Bosch and Cyprianus 1677, 56). Medical bibliography often held *Anatomia* in high regard for its aesthetic value but utterly dismissed its scientific quality. This opinion dates back to the earliest efforts to define the study as a distinct genre in the works of Albrecht von Haller (1708–1777), James Atkinson (1759–1839) and Johann Ludwig Choulant (1791–1861). See also: Von Haller 1778; Atkinson 1834; Choulant 1990.

46 Several mostly small publishers participated in the printing, including Lescaille and Jan Rieuwertsz, and Hieronymus Sweerts. URL Dutch Pamphlets Online: <https://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/dutch-pamphlets-online> (last accessed 21 January 2022). For the participation of publishers in the pamphlet printing business, see: Pettegree et al. 2019.

47 Van Someren and the Booms appeared in the 200th-penny wealth taxation record in 1674. Joannes van Someren was taxed *f*25 and Dick Boom and Hendrick Boom *f*7:10. Bidloo himself appeared in the same register and paid *f*20. Based on the tax rate, Van Someren possessed *f*5,000 in wealth, the Booms *f*1,500, Bidloo *f*4,000. SAA Archief 5028, inv. 662 (*Kohier* van de 20oste penning), 1674, fol. 206 (Boom) and 218 (Van Someren), 411v (Bidloo). Jan van Dyck and Lairese did not appear in the register; presumably their wealth, respectively, was less than the threshold of taxation (*f*1,000).

48 Abraham Wolfgang was taxed *f*47:10 on *f*9,500 (fol. 68v) in wealth, and Johannes Jansonius Waesbergen *f*50 (fol. 174v), and the widow of Johan de Blaeu *f*75 (fol. 174v).

for selling censored books.⁴⁹ Around 1680, the authorities were in contact with J. Lijserus about the publication of his works on polygamy. These accusations came to a climax with their publication and distribution of the controversial memoirs of the French diplomat Louis Aubery, which caused them to be brought to trial in 1680. They were punished with a hefty fine of 500 gulden in 1681.⁵⁰ *Anatomia* may have offered them an opportunity to restore their reputation and reverse the damage to their business caused by this turmoil.

Although we cannot ascertain exactly why, it came to pass that despite the inauspicious economics, the Boom brothers, Van Someren and Van Dyck were persuaded to publish *Anatomia*. Existing evidence points to a few possible explanations. First, *Anatomia* simply suited their expertise. Many of Boom's publications were in Latin (39%), and Van Someren was already an experienced publisher of illustrated books on medicine.⁵¹ This experience enabled them to make an informed estimate of the revenue they could expect to take in. Second, Lairese's illustrations might have presented additional incentives to publish because of his name and the quality of his designs. Above all, the publishers may have used *Anatomia* as an instrument for self-promotion. They must have known the economic 'law' that 'big books made reputations, but small books and broadsheets made money'.⁵² These smaller publishers, perhaps keen to make or strengthen their reputations, may therefore have been willing to possibly forsake financial reward for the prospect of fame within the Dutch Republic and beyond. Dirck Boom was known to have travelled to Frankfurt, presumably for the book fair, aiming at the international market.⁵³ To this end, Bidloo's ambitious project, aided by Lairese's masterful illustrations, may have fed directly into the publishers' thirst to better their reputations.⁵⁴ Their strategy, if we can call it that, seems to have been successful: soon after *Anatomia* hit the market, the Booms and

49 Kleerkooper et al. 1914, vol 1, 67–83.

50 Van Eeghen 1960, vol. 3, 33. None of the large established publishing houses had as many violations as the Booms.

51 The data from the Short Title Catalogue Netherlands (STCN) show that 39% of books published by the Booms were in Latin. Joannes van Someren (and later his widow) had published illustrated books in medicine/biology in 1671, 1672 and 1678, and continued to do so after publishing *Anatomia*. And Van Someren, together with the Booms, published Gerardus Leonardi Blasius's *Anatome animalium* in 1681, although the book did not contain many illustrations. See the Short Title Catalogue Netherlands (STCN) for further details.

52 Pettegree et al. 2019, 22.

53 Kleerkooper et al. 1914, 71.

54 The Booms had published the money-making *Mercure Hollandois* for over a decade (1672–1684).

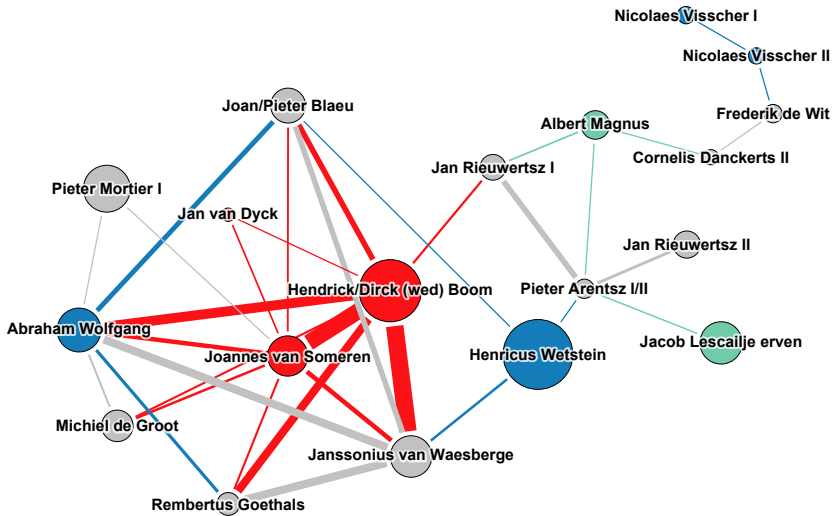


Figure 2.5 Collaboration network of Jan van Dyck, Joannes van Someren and Hendrick and Dirck Boom.

Van Someren were accepted by the leading publishers – Wolfgang, Blaeu, and Waesbergen – as partners.⁵⁵

Consequently, Joannes van Someren and Hendrick and Dirck Boom became deeply embedded in the social world of the publishing industry, as can be visualized in a network graph (fig. 2.5). This visual representation shows the collaborations among the three publishers of *Anatomia* (red), the publishers of Laisse's work (blue), the publishers of the dramatic editions by Nil Volentibus Arduum (green) and their intermediate collaborators (grey). The node sizes represent the number of titles published during their careers. A link is assumed between the two publishers if they collaborated at least once. The thickness ('weight') of each link represents the intensity of the corresponding collaboration, measured by the number of titles jointly published by the two publishers. This network indicates that *Anatomia's* publishers – Van Someren and the Booms – were later integrated into an interconnected community of booksellers, working closely with the most successful publishing houses in Amsterdam's book trade, including Wolfgang and Waesbergen.

⁵⁵ See, for instance, the price catalogue *Catalogus librorum* often issued by the Blaeu-Wolfgang-Boom-Waesberghe-Goethals-Van Someren company, and *Bibliothèque universelle et historique* (Amsterdam: Wolfgang, Waesberghe, Boom, and Van Someren, 1686–1693). For more about their collaboration, see: Van Eeghen 1960, vol. 3, 25–26.

Alas *Anatomia*, though its publication helped promote up-and-coming publishers, was a commercial failure. Lairesse's designs had drawn accolades for their artistic achievement, but their anatomical accuracy was questioned. Bidloo was of little help in this regard, as his accompanying text in the book was too short to be instructive.⁵⁶ As Beekman points out, the book was unsatisfactory for anatomists and too expensive for amateurs.⁵⁷ Although the sales price for *Anatomia* in seventeenth-century bookstores is not certain, it is known that books in folio were generally more expensive, and such a large atlas, filled with illustrations, would have occupied the top tier of the price list. A comparable set of books sold by the Booms included an atlas of 150 plates, offered for 50 gulden in a newspaper advertisement from 1690.⁵⁸ In addition, the 1698 edition of *The Anatomy of Human Bodies* by British anatomist William Cowper (1666–1709) – a plagiarized version of Bidloo's *Anatomia* in England – fetched 27 gulden when Bidloo's library was auctioned after his death in 1713.⁵⁹ Both references suggest a reasonable sales price of about 30 gulden for *Antatomia*: a considerable sum that may have kept off most buyers in a market where books or standing tickets at the theatre could be bought for a few stuivers.⁶⁰

The publication of the Dutch translation in 1690 was possibly an attempt to increase sales by attracting readers outside scholarly circles. This Dutch-language edition, however, seems to have sold equally poorly. This market debacle likely prompted the publishers to sell the engravings as loose sheets in an effort to recoup their investments. In a series of letters written in 1698, Bidloo reveals that Hendrick Boom, who owned the copper plates and retained the right to publish the engravings, made an agreement

56 The reception of Bidloo's text is discussed in Beekman, 1935, 119–121 and Choulant 1920.

57 Beekman, 1935, 121, 126; Bidloo 1700, 5–6, 8–9.

58 'Wert bekent gemaect, dat, soo iemand genegen is, te willen hebben een of meer Exemplaren van het Latijns Stedeboeck van Savoyenen Piemont, bestaende in 2 Stucken, Atlas groote, en met omtrent 150 groote Platen met alle de Steden, Forten, Palleyenen Gebouwen aldaer verciert, die schoonder zijn, als oyt in een Boek gesien of gevonden werden, deselvevoor 50 Guldens contant Gelt te bekomen zijn tot Amsterdam in de Boeckwinckels van Wolfgangh, Waesbergen en Boom', *Oprechte Haerlemsche courant*, 12 September 1690. URL: <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:011226350> (last accessed 21 January 2022)

59 *Bibliotheca et museum Bidloianum*, 3. Oddly, Bidloo did not own a copy of his own *Anatomia*. The only book in folio under his name was '19 G. Bidloo, *Dissertatio de antiquitate anatomes*, Ludg, bat, 1694', which was sold for a meagre sum of eight stuivers (!), cheaper than another one in quarto for f.1:18 ('God. Bidloo, *Exercitationum Anatomico Chrugicarum Decades duae*, Lugd. bat. 1708 cum fig') (pages 2 and 22). It may have been one of the pamphlets Bidloo wrote in his dispute with Cowper. An auction in 1772 listed the Dutch translation of *Anatomia*, but it did not mention the price it fetched.

60 For the common book prices, see: Pettegree et al. 2019, 17–22.

with British printers Smith and Walford to provide 300 impressions of the engravings, likely at the request of Bidloo's British counterpart William Cowper.⁶¹ This British anatomist used the plates in his 1698 *Anatomy* and pasted his name and title over Bidloo's in the frontispiece.⁶² To make things worse, Cowper made no acknowledgement of Bidloo's authorship and was critical of the Dutch anatomist's work in his new and more extensive text that was now given in *Anatomy*. Infuriated, Bidloo banned his publisher from selling additional impressions and attacked Cowper with a pamphlet accusing the latter of copyright infringement.⁶³ An ordinary business move from the publisher's side thus, in a strange quirk of history, instigated the first international copyright dispute, which ended in a bitter storm of wrath. Despite this consequence, we can hardly blame Boom for tapping the international market in an attempt to recover some of his losses due to disappointing domestic sales.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have reconstructed the interconnections linking art, theatre, medicine and publishing embodied in the anatomical atlas by Bidloo and Lairese. Whereas previous studies often approached *Anatomia* from an exclusively discursive perspective or from a specific disciplinary angle – from art history, medical history or book history – our interdisciplinary approach shows the interrelatedness of the cultural industries shaping the materiality of *Anatomia*. This case study highlighted the multifaceted function of the theatre vis-à-vis *Anatomia*: as a meeting place, as a model for the arts and sciences and as a visual template for anatomical images. Furthermore, it pointed to the economic interests of another important institution: the publishing industry. This synthesis complements the existing sociological picture of the 'embeddedness' of Amsterdam's cultural industries in two ways.⁶⁴

First, our reconstruction suggests that the social circles in which Bidloo and Lairese operated not only created opportunities for collaborations across disciplinary boundaries but also fostered knowledge spillovers between intellectual traditions and between the aesthetic

61 For the method of acquisition of the engraving/plates, see: Sanders 2005, 7; Santoni-Rugiu et al. 2007, 32.

62 Beekman, 1935, 119.

63 Bidloo 1700, 59–60. Boom wrote to Smith and Walford in 1699, telling them that Bidloo had banned the publisher from selling imprints. See: Conlin 2019, 126, note 284.

64 Rasterhoff 2016, 365.

conventions of those disciplines. The anatomical atlas was promoted as an educational tool for anatomists and for artists. Its self-proclaimed ability to simultaneously educate and entertain echoed claims found in early modern poetics about the moral function of the theatre. Furthermore, Lairesse's stylized, dramatized depictions of dissected bodies mirrored the visual language of the theatre while capturing the theatrical aspect of public dissections. *Anatomia* thus illustrates that the 'theatre' as an artistic domain not only served as a driving force for the city's cultural markets but also provided visual templates for painting and medicine, informed by poetic ideals.

Second, *Anatomia* underlines the fact that anatomical knowledge and imagery were put to work in various discourses beyond the medical domain. Given this impact of medical knowledge on the arts, the field of anatomy should perhaps also be studied as part of the 'cultural industry', as Rasterhoff has defined it. After all, *Anatomia's* symbolic and aesthetic qualities were far more important than its utilitarian purposes. The book's utilitarian (and therefore commercial) potential was sacrificed because its material qualities were more important. We argued that the team of publishers responsible for the atlas accepted the considerable financial risks involved in printing *Anatomia* because the book's symbolic status was expected to strengthen or restore the publishers' reputations in the Dutch publishing industry. Financially, it was a flop, but symbolically the atlas may have served its purpose. *Anatomia* stands as a testament to the delicate balancing of artistic ideals, scientific principles, theatrical aesthetics and economic interests – with the latter, in this interplay of factors, bearing the burden of compromise.

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