

THE BODY RE-IMAGINED: THE BIZZARIE DI VARIE  
FIGURE AND PERFORMATIVE CYCLES OF PRINTS IN  
SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FLORENCE

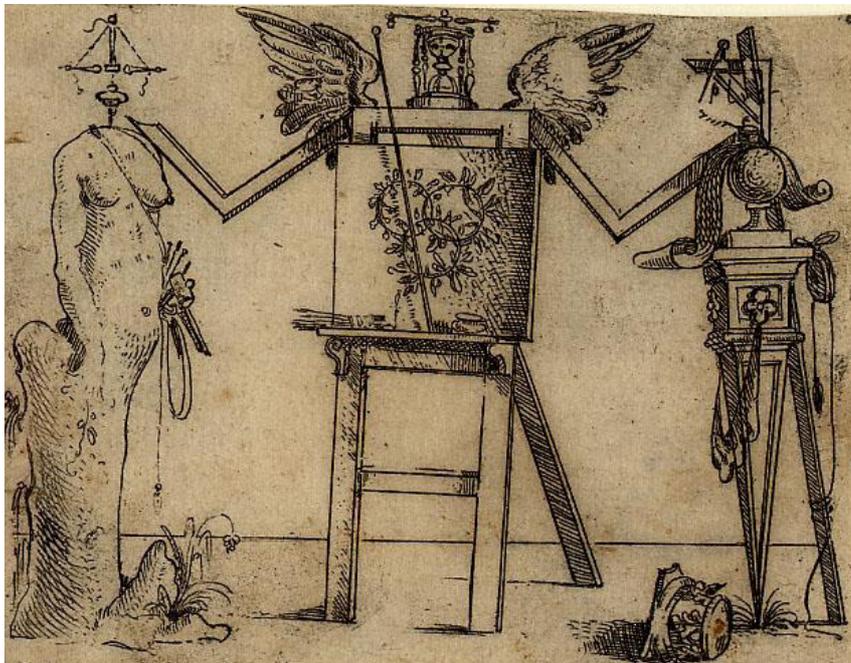
*Laura Scalabrella Spada*

There are images that seem to defy their place in time. The remarkable images in a collection of early seventeenth-century prints entitled *Bizzarie di Varie Figure* (1624), seemingly disavowing their own historical contingency, present such a challenge. Turning over the fifty plates of this album is like rotating a kaleidoscope, an experience that suggests limitless possibilities. A myriad of performative figures follow one another, they are unrestrained, transgressive, without apparent order or logic. As one skims through the leaves, a carnival of actors, dancers, and fencers display not only sheer expressiveness but also transformative potential in which human, mechanical and even kinetic forces intersect and become something else. This display of the body, conceptualized in transformative, apparently limitless forms, seems inconceivable for 1624, the date etched on the album's frontispiece. Appearing to emerge rather from improvised drawing than from their physical inscription on paper as tangible matter, these etchings confound the very medium in which they appear: the figures seem to overcome their inscription on paper and float from plane to plane outside of gravity (figures 1, 2 and 3). The process of etching, which involves the use of acids to corrode the plate, is less forceful than engraving; its expressive potential allowed artists to reach a higher level of detail within the images, to achieve a wider tonal range, and to produce vibrant figures.<sup>1</sup> These prints move towards the total undoing of the body's traditional frame, yet are anchored to a visual technology of repetition and aggregation, which asserts the body's final finished form, but also seems to constantly change it.

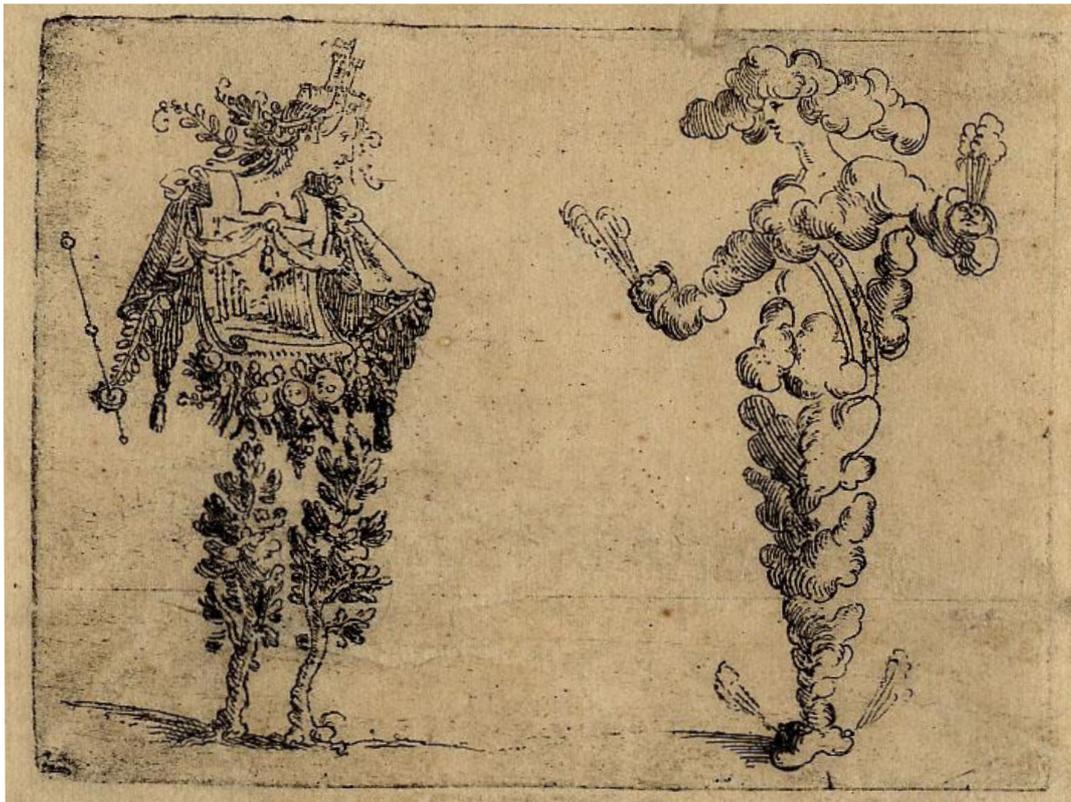
Only two complete copies of this album are known to exist today (one in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and the other in the Library of Congress in Washington), and while both copies include the same number of prints, they are in a different order, a point on which the sparse scholarly literature



**Figure 1** Giovanni Battista Braccelli, *Bizzarie di Varie Figure*, 1624. Etching, 8 × 10 cm. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.



**Figure 2** Giovanni Battista Braccelli, *Bizzarie di Varie Figure*, 1624. Etching, 8 × 10 cm, British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum.



**Figure 3** Giovanni Battista Braccelli, *Bizzarie di Varie Figure*, 1624. Etching, 8 × 10 cm, British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum.

is curiously silent.<sup>2</sup> The album remained essentially ignored by contemporary scholars and critics: its time has emerged later, in retrospect. In the first half of the twentieth century, Surrealist and Dada artists rediscovered the album; they believed they found in it a kindred soul, a father, even a martyr for their own artistic ideas.<sup>3</sup> Tristan Tzara saw in the *Bizzarie* an anticipation of the metaphysical paintings of Carlo Carrà and Giorgio De Chirico; in a comment written in 1963, he offers a lyrical description of some of the images, interpreted as subtly erotic, and situated in a fantastic world where geometry and physics reign but have no meaning.<sup>4</sup> Even more recently, it has entered scholarship through discussions of the bodies of cyborgs and digital technology.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I do not seek to provide historical and iconographic information on Giovanni Battista Braccelli and his *Bizzarie*; I aim, instead, through the analysis of a specific image from the collection, a very unusual depiction of Adam and Eve (figure 1), to broaden the scholarly discussion

regarding this album. In the limited space of this article, I will consider the collection solely in the context of early modern natural philosophy; more precisely, my aim is here to examine how natural philosophy had important implications for notions of creativity and imagination, and how these implications reverberate in this print. While it is commonplace to think about drawing as a tool of natural philosophy, what has not been considered is how theories of alchemy, nature and creativity from natural philosophy also expanded the possibilities of artistic practice and creativity.<sup>6</sup> It is well known that the early modern understanding of the natural world was not arranged around unmoveable categories; the production of meaning through images and establishing of laws was a fluid process.<sup>7</sup> However, this notion has not consistently been used in the analysis of images that reproduce nature. Starting from this proposition, then, the main argument of this article is that this print, as many others from Braccelli's *Bizzarie di Varie Figure*, represents an unexpected site of experimentation on the production of figures and form, a site for the construction of knowledge of nature. Unlike images belonging to anatomical treatises, botanical books or even fencing or dancing manuals, where objects and bodies are categorised, regulated, normalised, these bodies, while appropriating similar visual strategies, remain indeterminate, open to a multiplicity of perceptions and interpretations. In short, what I aim to show is how this collection presents bodies that do not claim to be a truthful representation of reality, but instead represent a space for experimenting on the potentials of figuration. As if emerging directly on paper through the interaction of etching technology and surface, the *Bizzarie* figures exist in a weightless, mobile reality, inconsistent and puzzling. Production, generation and transformation of forms, bodies and materials are issues confronted in these images, and, I suggest, are directly related to early modern conceptions of nature.

An initial, unavoidable question in starting this discussion is how to address the relationship between the print's initial production and its subsequent potential, since the scholarship is sparse and the historical archive almost silent. Giovanni Battista Braccelli is the name that appears on the title page, but it proves as elusive as the images. In the second page of the album, which contains a rather wordy dedication to the Duke of Livorno, the author describes himself as 'pittore fiorentino': this detail, however small, is probably the most reliable information we have about him.<sup>8</sup> Filippo Baldinucci tells

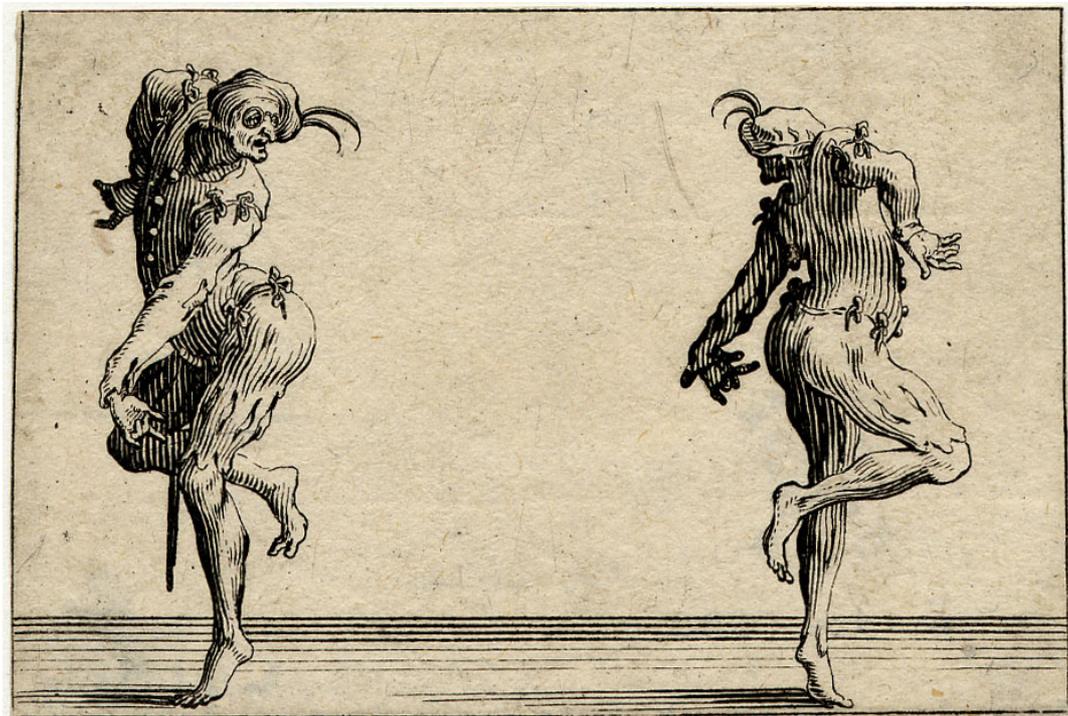
us in his *Notizie de' Professori del Disegno da Cimabue in Qua* that Braccelli, born in Genoa in 1584, studied with Giovanni Battista Paggi and that he died in 1609.<sup>9</sup> But we also know he was a certified member of the Florentine Accademia del Disegno between 1619 and 1635.<sup>10</sup> This confusion is certainly due to the fact that in the same period a different Genoese painter of the same name was working in the same area. Furthermore, Braccelli was also known as 'Brazzè' (a shortened version of his surname) and was sometimes referred to as 'il Bigio' (the gray one).<sup>11</sup> Even this nickname seems to foretell his uncertain presence in history. A set of etchings of figures with musical instruments from about 1630 produced in Rome, and an *Alfabeto Figurato* (c. 1630) also bear his name. The alphabet, composed of expressive and uninhibited nude bodies variously rearranged to reproduce letters in inventive, original ways, was printed in Naples, perhaps due to censorship in the papal city.<sup>12</sup> This *Alfabeto* is not only unconventional in its representation of the body, but also innovative in linking bodily experience to language. According to Gaudio's argument developed in *Engraving the Savage* (2008), letters, the privileged site of knowledge, became in the early modern period the chief means of transforming the body from experience to meaning, in a sort of hierarchical organization of knowledge.<sup>13</sup> In this *Alfabeto*, instead, there is an insistence on the conjoining of embodiment and text, so that each component is viscerally related to the other, in a fluid and perpetual exchange of significance.

The title of the album offers other clues, in particular the concept of *bizzarie*, a word for which we have no clear etymology. Probably derived from Spanish (with the meaning of brave, spirited) the Italian term takes on various connotations: *bizarro* means not only extravagant, but also capricious, quick-tempered, extreme.<sup>14</sup> Braccelli himself, using a similar play on words, defines the album in the dedication plate as a collection of 'capricci di varie figure': the word *capricci*, other than meaning 'capricious', 'random' refers to *capro*, goat, an animal symbolizing whimsical behaviour, especially of changeability, a feature pertaining both to humans and nature itself.<sup>15</sup> This term eventually came to identify a specific genre of artistic practice that served to challenge official modes of representations and became an emblem of artistic audacity and creative freedom.<sup>16</sup> The genre of the *capriccio*, associated not only with caricature but also with witty mixtures, metamorphoses and aberrations, was profoundly interconnected with the concept of the grotesque. This term derives from *grottesche*, referring to the grottoes in

which a mode of decoration, consisting of fanciful transformative images that combine animal, human and plant forms, was found in the late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century excavations of Roman sites such as Nero's Domus Aurea.<sup>17</sup> Early modern artists did not simply recycle the *grottesche*, but rather they combined it with established traditions, and reinscribed it as a means of extending possibilities of representation.<sup>18</sup> Still, the grotesque, associated with unrestrained creativity, remained at the margins, the traditional place of ornament. In the *Bizzarie di Varie Figure* the move towards the grotesque, combining both monstrous and wondrous, is also a move from the margins, to the centre. The boundary, still prevalent in contemporary figurations, between ornamental accessory and principal subject is blurred. In *The Truth in Painting* (1987), Jacques Derrida questioned Kantian notions about aesthetics and the autonomy of the work of art, challenging the aprioristic, transcendental quality of representations and their framing devices as mere ornament.<sup>19</sup> In a similar way, these etchings, experimenting with various possibilities of imagining bodies, complicate dominant binaries of form and matter, inside and outside.

In an attempt to deal with the concept of 'bizarrie', the album has been interpreted as 'reminiscent of the marvellously imaginative allegorical heads that Giuseppe Arcimboldo composed of fruits, flowers, vegetables, and the tools of the sitter's trade – for example, books or from farming implements'.<sup>20</sup> According to Maxime Préaud, who wrote a short comment on the *Bizzarie* in 1975, these images are in fact no more than an 'arcimboldesque' exercise, where every figure is allegorical, as it resembles objects or instruments in relation to the given allegory.<sup>21</sup> Arcimboldo's portraits are anthropomorphic, but they have also been interpreted as witty pictorial inventions informed by the complicated political and intellectual environment of the Habsburg court.<sup>22</sup> The figures of the *Bizzarie* album include anthropomorphic relations, but these relations are not concerned with individual subjectivity or the exploration of interiority. Instead, the relation of the body to the world, the very centre of anthropomorphism, is actively challenged, and with it the relation of the body to space and even to the printed page. While in Arcimboldo's portraits the exchange between bodies and objects remains univocal, rigidly fixed on an already established path, the *Bizzarie* figures seem engaged in an ever changing process, where combinations and perceptions are endlessly multiple.

Having said that, there is some overlap in their engagement with courtly performance, and this brings me to the third component that can be deduced from the album, the format of the prints. In the majority of the images, the figures are displayed in pairs engaged in various activities, such as fencing or dancing, and each enacting their dynamic performance in relation to the other. Jacques Callot's engravings, for instance the *Caprices* engraved in Florence in 1617–18 (figure 4), use a comparable format to present witty and compelling encounters<sup>23</sup> that combine extreme grotesque extensions of the body with a sense of elegant performance.<sup>24</sup> According to Préaud, Braccelli's album is strongly connected to themes of festival, *commedia dell'arte* and popular culture.<sup>25</sup> These figures are, indubitably, reminiscent of theatrical street theatre and popular dances but, like Callot's, they combine expressive human bodies with both popular and courtly performance, unhinging any simple notion of the distinction of high and low. The *Bizzarie* and the *Caprices* share not only the performance of paired figures, but also a peculiar playfulness, enacted within a grotesquely contorted body. Thus, as well as blurring divisions of high and low, they bring confusion to the very decorum



**Figure 4** Jacques Callot, *Caprices*, 1617–18. Etching, 5,8 × 8,2 cm. British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum.

of theatrical performance. However, while Callot represents *commedia dell'arte* actors in recognisable attitudes from actual street performances, Braccelli's repertoire of figures is much less definable; attempts to describe the figures tend to be reduced to 'tumblers, acrobats, duellists, tennis players, and composite and metaphorical figures in a strange and capricious fashion'.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the *Bizzarie di Varie Figure*, unlike the *Caprices*, do not use landscape, or urban space as setting, and do not include the categorizable figures of particular types of dancers, peasants or aristocrats.<sup>27</sup> Callot's images are disconcerting in their relation to the street, whether they are theatrical or pertaining to everyday life, but Braccelli's have seemingly moved elsewhere to produce their remarkable encounters, focusing more on the body's relation to space and especially to the representational space of the print.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps a closer parallel is presented by Stefano Della Bella's cycles of prints and drawings that display imaginative scenes with no discernible thematic unity, stylistic point of view, nor apparent purpose (1617–18, figure 5).<sup>29</sup> Braccelli, Della Bella and Callot have in common the adherence to a peculiar publishing format: the collection of individual prints, unaccompanied by text, that deal with the imaginative extension of the body. These collections of prints, I suggest, responded to an urge to experiment in terms of both content and structure, an urge which, judging by the production of the albums in Florence in the first decades of the seventeenth century, was taken up by publishers and collectors. Stefano Della Bella's *Raccolta di Diversi Capricci* shares with Braccelli the spontaneity of figures that seem to be captured in a moment of transition, and does so by manipulating the possibilities of etching. Etching, by retaining not only the impulse of the drawn line, but also a visible link with its own generative process, builds spatial complexities while preserving a distinction from the paper, so that each sign, while maintaining a definite shape and rhythm, seems to possess a fleeting, almost ethereal vibrancy. Like Braccelli's images, Stefano Della Bella's arrest the figures at, to quote De Vesme and Massar, 'the exact moment when the body's active yet balanced stance suggests the immediately succeeding pose, implying motion and eliciting a kind of kinesthetic response from the viewer'.<sup>30</sup> This is a very different conception of animation from that usually deployed in anatomical engravings, which seek to bring mobility to the body while drawing on the medium of engraving to define form, substance and solidity. While in these engravings there is an additional movement from the bodies' outer layers to



**Figure 5** Stefano della Bella, *Capricci*, 1647. Etching, 8 × 9,9 cm. British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum.

their inner components, in Braccelli's images it is the very medium that is manipulated to produce a different notion of transition and timeliness.

It is perhaps useful, at this point, to return to Michael Gaudio's influential argument about how engraving inscribes savage bodiliness into the printed paper through the engraved line and the way the ink bleeds into the paper. According to Gaudio, who examines early modern representations of 'savage' tribes encountered in West Virginia by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century explorers, it is precisely through the interaction of the physical tools of printing and the visual content of the image that a narrative of 'otherness' can be constructed.<sup>31</sup> In Braccelli's etchings, there is perhaps the opposite relation between body and medium. These etchings do not fix the materiality of the body within the print itself, but deliberately shift the focus from corporeality to the possibility of overcoming inscription and producing an image on the very surface of the paper.



**Figure 6** Giovanni Battista Braccelli, *Bizzarie di Varie Figure*, 1624. Etching, 8 × 10 cm. British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum.

The experimental, subversive quality of the *Bizzarie* is evident not only in the exploration of the potential for creativity and transformation in the format of the print, but also in the arrangement of the album itself. The first images of the *Bizzarie* function as a frame for the whole collection, and while they do not offer a narrative that ties the prints together, they must nevertheless be analysed, as they provide meaningful clues. The album starts with an allegory of the three arts, sculpture, architecture and painting (figure 2), followed by the four alchemical elements, fire, water, earth, air (figure 6 and figure 3). Immediately we are confronted with the relation of artistic creation and nature, and even with natural philosophy, which argued that creativity is not simply the domain of the human but also of nature. This foregrounding of production and transformation of material, and the active role of nature, is suggestive of a set of images primarily concerned with the human body.

But before taking up the human body, the album presents yet another framing image, the main case study of this article: a unique, unprecedented representation of Adam and Eve. On the left and right side of the print (figure 1), like stage curtains, Adam and Eve stand transfixed, but are they human bodies or a proliferation of trees? Eve's features can be discerned but Adam is barely recognisable, his human appearance almost invisible. Perhaps most conventional is the serpent, coiled around a stump, and appearing as a human female from the waist up. The foliage of the trees, extending upwards, streaks the scene like veins in a human body. The facial features emerge and disappear within foliage, bark and branches, so that the conjoining of human and nature is visceral and complete. The lush vegetation of the Garden of Eden, depicted in countless representations of the Fall, is here transfigured into a single line on the horizon. Such an abstract synthesis, apparently deprived of colour, substance and life, is far from what viewers would associate with Paradise; however, the growth of the foregrounded trees is strong and fruitful, as everything is directed outwards and upwards. The figures interact with each other even if mobility is an issue; the fluid shape of the serpent's tail generates a moving force that ends in an unresolved tension with the stillness of Adam and Eve's trunks, so obstinately rooted in the ground. Only after a longer observation does one notice that the serpent's outstretched arms are fused to the bodies of Adam and Eve. Its left arm is immersed in Eve's belly; its right becomes enmeshed with Adam's body, in particular with the phallic form of the tree trunk. There is here a move, it seems, out of sexuality, traditionally associated with images of the Fall, and into generation. A fourth entity, extraneous to the biblical tale, is visible in the foreground, between Adam and the serpent. Something between human child and tree stump, its quasi-anthropomorphic body is stretching in an awkward pose, with arms reaching towards the sky and knees on the ground (or, possibly, sitting on a knoll facing away from the viewer). An undefined element, ambiguous and shapeless, seems to be coming into being, one that has no clear place in the narrative of the Fall: this figure represents, perhaps, a further potential, a disruption in a narrative that is usually all too ready to define its inevitable conclusion.

Early modern images of Adam and Eve are frequently concerned with the relation of sexuality and generation, and sexuality as sinful is usually represented in the serpent: Masolino's fresco of the Fall in the Cappella

Brancacci, for instance, depicts the serpent as a feminine temptress, its face very similar to Eve's. In Michelangelo's version in the Sistine Chapel, sexuality is fully inscribed into the bodies of Adam and Eve who are fleshy and dynamic, actively engaged with their surroundings. These figures, unlike those in Braccelli's album, occupy a position of priority in nature, and are defined as human through their sinful act. Moreover, the chronology is asserted: before the Fall, they are young and strong; after, they are aged and diminished, their bodies darkened and curved in shame and their faces distorted by pain. Adam and Eve are now individual entities, with heavy bodies treading on unfamiliar ground. In the *Bizzarie* the couple do not become separate entities, either from each other or from the environment, not at the moment of sexual awareness nor at the moment of procreation. In fact transformation is already within them and not dependent on the moment of awareness. Issues of identity and individuality are not pressing here: Adam and Eve's human and inanimate components are inseparable, blurred, folded into each other. Furthermore, while in Michelangelo's scene the serpent acts as the main agent of change, offering Eve the apple, here the serpent is fused to Adam and Eve, forever trapped between them. As in an alchemical transformation, the moment of knowledge seems less about sin and disobedience and more about transformative processes of matter found within nature at large. This shifts the traditional narrative of Genesis and perhaps even challenges emerging binaries between man/woman, nature/human, sin/generation.

Through the art of distillation (the practice of separating pure and impure substances from material and organic bodies), alchemists sought to extract and manipulate the hidden, invisible virtues that are inside any natural object. Braccelli's Adam and Eve are the result of an inventive recombination of artificial and natural objects, stripped to their bare essentials. Adam and Eve are, at a first glance, represented in this very moment of recombination, caught in the metamorphosis from human to tree, a transformation that recalls both classical mythology and biblical events. Arboreal figurations had a particularly poignant significance in early modern representations, as trees were inextricably linked, in both pagan and biblical narratives, to the human yearning for long life.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, onlookers would instantly be reminded of the tale of Apollo and Daphne, in which the nymph, pursued by Apollo but determined to preserve her virginity, was transformed into a laurel tree.

Yet, the transformation of Adam and Eve is not akin to that of Daphne, who through sexual desire is turned from form back into matter. These bodies have been under constant and incomplete transformation, they appear cyclical yet unmovable, as if they have always been part of the ground and always under change as with the seasons. Conjoined to the body of the serpent, they are unable to gather the momentum necessary for a radical transformation. Adam and Eve lack the metamorphic energy of Gianlorenzo Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne* (1622–1625), but an echo of that forceful moment resonates in the serpent's coiling tail and twisting body. Dynamic and ambiguous, the serpent, usually a symbol of sin associated with the female, is now imbued by an unstable, unsettled energy: entrapped between the two figures, tied to their bodies, its circular movement seems to come to a sudden stop. Rather than being a powerful entity, harbinger of temptation and wickedness, the serpent gives instead the impression of being trapped. Connecting the bodies of Adam and Eve, the serpent works to combine what had become opposing forces of feminine and masculine, in keeping with a key aspect of alchemical theory, in which something completely new could emerge from the conflicting state of its own components.<sup>33</sup>

To find the biblical story of the creation of humankind and their fall from grace in an album of prints is not unexpected: after all, the subject was consistently used in the seventeenth century to introduce publications with claims to new knowledge, be it anatomical, ethnographic or geographical. The theme was not only understood as an historical account of how the world was in the beginning of time, but it also served to explain differences in present physical, moral, social, and political conditions.<sup>34</sup> When it features as a conceptual frontispiece for such treatises as Vesalius' *On the Fabric of the Human Body* of 1543, or Theodor de Bry's *America* of 1592, it becomes about knowledge in relation to Genesis, and especially about the possibility of forming knowledge anew and apart from moral constrictions. By contrast, the *Bizzarie di Varie Figure* does not claim new research or exploration, and for this very reason the inclusion of Adam and Eve is intriguing.

The image of Adam and Eve is imbued with a kind of suspended, disrupted energy, and offers a view of nature that is full of potential, infinitely productive, pervaded by internal forces. This is in keeping with theories that conceived of nature as creative and active, theories that were, however, already being challenged in view of new notions of objective observation.

As Gianna Pomata has argued, at the turn of the seventeenth century the concept of empirical observation as an epistemic practice was slowly replacing Aristotelian principles. Descriptive texts and images found their way into a variety of fields and contexts, challenging traditional disciplinary apparatuses.<sup>35</sup> The early modern idea of nature as a sentient entity was soon to change, as Lorraine Daston notes in her controversial essay 'The Nature of Nature' (1998): 'no longer animated nor active, nature was reduced to brute, passive, stupid matter. The Scientific Revolution transformed creative nature into a machine, blindly obedient to cause and effect'.<sup>36</sup> This new approach, Daston maintains, made it possible to inspect nature in its entirety, and to be understood as a system that was under the control of humans. While this clear-cut, somewhat triumphalist narrative has been the subject of passionate debate, the changes in attitudes regarding knowledge about nature in the early modern period, generated by a variety of factors and intersections, are indisputable.<sup>37</sup> In this context, the enigmatic quality of Braccelli's Adam and Eve assumes an even more mysterious aspect. This print offers a haunting, ambiguous view of the relationship between human and nature, displaying not only a more intimate interconnection, but one that is crucial in the formation and generation of life. Movement, generation, growth seem to be possible only through a physical incorporation of the human and the natural world. Adam and Eve are not masters of nature: rather, they are organically merged with it and no longer divided into binary forces.

The human is here tree as much as tree is human, transmuting, recombining to generate something new. Katherine Heyck, discussing procreation in the context of Protestant Germany, argues that the development of the child in the womb constituted a physical link between God's creation and human reproduction. The infinite potential of the unborn child, formed and shaped just as God shaped Adam and Eve, assumed a cosmic significance, as it made visible and visceral the creative power of natural forces.<sup>38</sup> This embodied relationship, however, sparked conflicts in the understanding of the nature of the body, always a site of tension between its spiritual and material qualities. Early modern discourses surrounding reproduction had to negotiate between Biblical narratives, classical *auctoritates* (which were, at times, conflicting with each other) and data gathered from perceptible reality. It is well known, for instance, how Galen's notion of the complementary role of the male and the female sex in reproduction stood against Aristotle, according to whom only

the male seed provides the life-giving force necessary to reproduce, while the womb merely functions as container.<sup>39</sup> Reconciling these principles with Christian doctrine was, additionally, a thorny issue, debated by eminent philosophers such as Augustine.<sup>40</sup> Through the centuries, these theories were incessantly reworked and reshaped to fit religious, political and social agendas. Among others, Paracelsus, the controversial medical practitioner and theorist of the occult and of toxicology, wrote extensively on human reproduction, trying to reconcile the physical act of reproduction with God's will. Incorporating biology, natural history, religion and alchemy in his thinking, he attributes to the body both physical and spiritual qualities, which are combined at birth to fully express the creative potential of the human body.<sup>41</sup>

Locating Adam and Eve at the beginning of an album of prints on the imaginative extension of the body is telling. Rather than bearing a moralizing message, or acting as a metaphor for a new beginning to the production of knowledge, this image serves perhaps to introduce a reflection on generation, understood not only as the physical act of reproduction but also as the moment of unrestrained creativity, on the part of both nature and human. Presenting Adam and Eve, archetypes of human reproduction, as both nature and humanity, complicates further the reading of this print. By shifting the established idea of reproduction through the encounter of male and female seed inside the uterus, the act of creation is likened to that of reproduction within nature in an almost asexual way, germinating indefinitely but also producing endless variations from the same structure. The *Bizzarie di Varie Figure* presents such a structure, reproducing the act of generation itself by bringing together pairings of figures that are connected, but not in traditional ways. This is to say that they are productive, but not through separation of one into two, as Adam and Eve were created, or through division into binaries, which is how Adam and Eve developed and themselves created life. Page after page, pairs of figures follow one another, in a constant experimentation on reproduction, generation and doubling.

The *Bizzarie di Varie Figure* is a cycle of prints constructed through encounters with the body's potential, and in the process it challenges established binaries, ideas of coherence and categorization; endlessly repeating the display of paired figures and simultaneously disrupting binaries, this album is not only saturated with creative potential but also densely

intertwined with the changing conception of the body in new forms of early modern knowledge. Experimenting with continuous transformations, these images are not merely representing complex, expressive bodies; rather, they are about the encounter between the body and the medium of print, taken in unexpected directions. In a way, it is this encounter that makes the reconception of the body possible.

Multidimensional and unpredictable, the figures contained in the *Bizzarie* collection do not easily open themselves to interpretation. Eluding the constraints of their historical context, these endlessly fragmented and rearranged bodies seem to exist in a state of constant change and infinite possibilities. As this article has shown, the Adam and Eve print seems to propose an alternative development in the search for a representation of nature that could encompass its properties of changeability, creativity and internal animation. Taking to an extreme level the early modern notion of nature as a living entity, breathing and pulsating together with humans, this print blurs binaries and definitions, thus allowing ulterior meanings to emerge. Concepts of generation and reproduction are not expressed through a proliferation of symbols and allegories: they are instead viscerally embedded in the visual presentation of the figures. Rather than copying the phenomena of the natural world, in search for an image that could capture the fleeting appearance of natural objects, the Adam and Eve print is produced through an imaginative motion that integrates experience and fantasy. The result of this union is a kind of figuration that transcends forms and enters the realm of abstraction.

### Notes

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- 1 On the potential of etching, see David Pankow and Sue Welsh Reed, *Giovanni Battista Braccelli, Bizzarie di Varie Figure*, Washington D.C., 2000, pp. 14–18. For a detailed account of materials and techniques of etching, see Michael Bury, *The Print in Italy 1550–1620*, London, 2001.
- 2 There are also 8 incomplete sets listed in Alain Brieux, *Braccelli, Bizzarie*, Paris, 1963.

- The earliest scholarly essay is Kenneth Clark, 'The "Bizarie" of Giovanbatista Braccelli', in *The Print Collector's Quarterly*, October 1929, pp. 310–326. See also Anna Mariani, *Il Seicento fiorentino: Arte a Firenze da Ferdinando I a Cosimo III*, 3 vols, Florence, 1986; David Pankow and Sue Welsh Reed, *Giovanni Battista Braccelli, Bizzarie di Varie Figure*, Washington D.C., 2000.
- 3 On Braccelli's biography, see Mariani, op. cit., p. 390.
  - 4 Tristan Tzara, *Propos sur Braccelli*, Paris, 1975, pp. 10–15.
  - 5 Julie Wosk, *My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids, and other Artificial Eves*, New Brunswick, 2015, p. 6.
  - 6 On the intersection of Natural Philosophy and artistic practices in the early modern, see Kathleen Crowther-Heyck, 'Wonderful Secrets of Nature', in *Isis*, vol. 94, no. 2, 2003, pp. 253–273; Susan Dackerman, *Prints and the Pursuit of Knowledge*, New Haven and London, 2011; Martin Kemp, 'Temples of the Body and Temples of the Cosmos', in *Picturing Knowledge*, Toronto, 1996; Sachiko Kusukawa, *Picturing the Book of Nature*, Chicago and London, 2012; Pamela H. Smith, 'Art, Science, and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe', in *Isis*, vol. 97, no. 1, 2006, pp. 83–100.
  - 7 Claudia Stein, 'Images and Meaning-Making in a World of Resemblance: The Bavarian-Saxon Kidney Stone Affair of 1580', in *European History Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2013, pp. 205–234, p. 221.
  - 8 See Dedication Plate, Giovanni Battista Braccelli, *Bizzarie di Varie Figure*, 1624
  - 9 Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie de' Professori del Disegno da Cimabue in Qua*, Florence, 1681, p. 189.
  - 10 Pankow and Welsh Reed, op. cit., p. 4.
  - 11 Ibid.
  - 12 Ibid.
  - 13 Michael Gaudio, *Engraving the Savage: The New World and Techniques of Civilization*, Minneapolis and London, 2008, pp. 11–12.
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