Figuring the Dead Descartes: Claude Clerselier’s
*Homme de René Descartes* (1664)

In 1644, Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655) responded to Descartes’s (1596–1650) dualist metaphysics by sarcastically apostrophizing him as “O Mens” (O Mind) in the *Disquisitio Metaphysica*. A host of Jesuit confrères, preferring the skepticism and materialism of Epicurus’s reviver to the spiritualist certitudes claimed by his adversary, seized on Gassendi’s joke. Facetious narratives featuring Descartes’s soul taking recreational leave of his body regaled the anti-Cartesian readers of Gabriel Daniel’s *Voyage du Monde de Descartes* (Descartes’s voyage around the world) (1691) and Pierre-Daniel Huet’s *Nouveaux Mémoirs pour servir à l’histoire du cartésianisme* (New memoirs for the history of Cartesianism) (1692). Little could these humorists have guessed that their purposefully ridiculous caricatures of Descartes as a disembodied mind would soon be accepted idiom for discoursing about the philosopher. One contestant for the Académie française’s 1765 eloquence prize on the subject of Descartes affirmed, “He is no longer, but his spirit [esprit] lives on; it spreads from nation to nation, from century to century.” This was only the beginning of Descartes’s rather astonishing posthumous career, as his protean esprit and its successor, the so-called esprit du cartésianisme, went on to sustain the agendas of a series of -isms in France, from revolutionary republicanism to restoration nationalism, from third republic parliamentarianism to interwar communism.

Happily, a constructivist turn in the history of science has constrained such cavalier appropriations of Descartes’s esprit. Broaching scientific knowledge as a product of human discourse rather than as natural truth unveiled, historians are grounding the canonical figures of the discipline within their material and human...
contexts. They are curious about the body of France’s most (in)famous dualist and strive to uncover the social milieux that shaped his ostensibly solitary intellectual trajectory. As Descartes begins to look less like a bodiless “I” distilling its thoughts in the warmth of a well-stoked stove, the days when l’esprit cartésien could be lodged in just about any house are drawing to a close. Yet given that Descartes scholarship generally adheres to the generic conventions of biography or reception history, it glosses over the crucial transition between life and afterlife, between the philosopher’s embodied existence and his textual legacy. My purpose in this essay is to show how Descartes’s followers exploited his dualist metaphysics in their posthumous publications of his works in order to fashion a radiant afterlife for him. By bringing previously unpublished works to light after his death, they emphasized the continuity of his esprit. However, because these unfinished and imperfect texts were made public only as a result of Descartes’s disappearance, they stood to remind the reader of the fact of his death and the fate of his body. To prevent the memory of Descartes’s dead body from interfering with his posthumous prestige, therefore, his followers strove to make the reader forget the materiality of the texts in which his thought manifested itself. How they managed this feat is the subject of this essay.

The story begins with Descartes’s death. As philosophers and literary theorists have long recognized, death is what irrevocably consecrates an author as an immortal entity; it is what erases the vicissitudes of the body and the mess of human intercourse, leaving only the essential: the name of the author and his work, or in the present case, “Descartes” and the cogito. For the philosopher especially, death is the culmination of a career devoted to transcending the contingencies of life, or so claimed that very busy parliamentarian of Bordeaux, Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), when he defended Cicero’s charge “to philosophize is to learn to die” in his immensely popular Essais. Yet the apotheosis bestowed by death is not automatic, even for a philosopher. In 1650, it was not at all clear that Descartes’s death would cement his second career as a disembodied esprit. As celebrated by some as he was reviled by others, the polemics engendered by his philosophy had gradually pushed him to the margins of Europe. A promising début in Holland had turned sour by the late 1640s and no doubt contributed to his acceptance of Queen Christina’s invitation to Stockholm. More than fifteen years after his death there, one Cartesian expressed his dismay that “the place of his birth is almost the last to render him justice, and . . . his own country opposes the institution of his maxims with the greatest obstinacy.” After the Sacred Congregation of the Index added Descartes’s philosophical works to their list of forbidden books in 1663, the avenues for the dissemination of Descartes’s philosophy were increasingly circumscribed in France. In 1666, Cartesians were excluded from the newly founded Académie des sciences; in 1667, the Archbishop of Paris, François de Harlay de Champvallon (1625–1695), prohibited the pronouncement of a funeral oration on the occasion of Descartes’s (re)interment at the abbey of Saint-Geneviève; and in 1671, Louis XIV banned the teaching of Cartesian philosophy at the University of Paris.
More, however, than the censorship that hampered the spread of his ideas, Descartes’s mistaken prognostications regarding his own death threatened to undercut his posthumous legacy. Rather than expecting death everywhere as Montaigne had advised, Descartes expected his philosophy to prolong human life. In the *Discours de la méthode*, he promises that through the development of his speculations, “we might exempt ourselves from an infinity of illnesses . . . and perhaps even from the debility of old age.” While Montaigne counted himself among the lucky for having lived beyond the age at which Jesus Christ and Alexander had met their makers, Descartes confidently proclaimed his longevity. At the age of forty-three, he wrote to Marin Mersenne (1588–1654) that he felt himself further from the clutches of death than he had been in his youth and predicted to Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687) that he had at least thirty years left to live based on the quality of his teeth. Descartes’s soothsaying became a facet of his celebrity, and in 1648, the Dutch student Frans Burman (1628–1679) interviewed him about his secrets for staying young.

Not surprisingly, the philosopher’s demise from pneumonia at the relatively young age of fifty-four came as a shock to his friends and as cause for gloating to his enemies. Queen Christina of Sweden (1626–1689), whose early-morning study regimen no doubt contributed to her tutor’s fatal illness, remarked dryly, “His oracles certainly misled him”; an Antwerp newspaper reported that a fool who had claimed to be able to live as long as he wished had recently died in Sweden; and a 1701 edition of Descartes’s works sported a frontispiece engraving of the philosopher in the likeness of Faustus, the legendary hero who sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for the power to work miracles. The irreverent insertion of Descartes into the magical tradition to which he was so allergic was no doubt a satirical response to his unfulfilled project of delaying death.

How did Descartes’s reputation recover from such an inauspicious last impression, and so spectacularly that, in a matter of a century, Gassendi’s sarcastic interpellation—“O Mens”—was adopted in all seriousness? If Gassendi’s joke lost its bite by the mid-eighteenth century, I contend, it was because the Cartesians who survived Descartes in the 1650s and ’60s understood that last rites determine how the deceased will be remembered by posterity, and they exploited Descartes’s dualist account of death to ensure a glorious afterlife for his philosophy here below. Descartes argued that death occurs when the machine that is the human body breaks, and when, as a result, the conditions for union between mind and body are no longer fulfilled. At this point, the soul, whose thought has been distinct from the body all along, simply separates itself from the cadaver. Because mind and body are already distinct substances in life, Descartes dedramatized death; the machine breaks, but the mind continues on. Accordingly, Descartes’s followers played down the death of his body as a means to fostering the enduring influence of his philosophy. They carefully disposed of his physical remains to pave the way for his resurrection as a disembodied esprit. The remains I consider are the works that were yet
unpublished at his death, and the last rites I examine are the posthumous publications of those works. I focus specifically on two different editions of Descartes’s treatise on man, Florent Schuyl’s Latin Renatus Des Cartes de homine and Claude Clerelier’s French L’Homme de René Descartes, published respectively in 1662 and 1664, and I view them through the lens of two seventeenth-century metaphors: the book as body and the text as tomb. Through a detailed analysis of the differences between the figures in these editions of Descartes’s treatise on man, I hope to persuade my reader that the philosopher’s esprit first took flight in books, the undeniably material source of all subsequent Cartesianisms.

The Textual Tomb

My reader will be relieved (or perhaps disappointed) to learn that the funerary rites I propose to examine are not those that accompanied the philosopher’s burial at the cemetery for unbaptized children in Stockholm in February, 1650, the translation of his body to the abbey Sainte-Geneviève in Paris in 1667 or to Saint-Germain-des-Prés in 1819, nor even the alleged recuperation of his skull in 1821. Rather, I am interested in how Descartes’s followers dealt with the textual corpus that survived him. The metaphor of book as body was commonplace in early modern France. Montaigne deployed it winningly, qualifying his essays as “members” of himself, comparable to excretions (kidney stones), appendages (erections), or even progeny. In contrast to Montaigne, of course, Descartes by and large ignored the materiality of the printed word in works published during his lifetime, and he eschewed the traditional trope of the text as an extension of the author’s flesh and blood. Written in ink and on paper, his manuscripts were nonetheless subject to the decrepitude and decay of all bodies. The trunkful of “writings concerning the sciences” that Pierre Chanut (1601–1662), the French ambassador to Christina’s court, sent back to France spent “three days under water” due to a shipwreck on the Seine, and its soggy contents were thoroughly mixed up when servants spread them out pell-mell to dry. “The notes that were found in Mr. Descartes’s trunk in Sweden were so defective in some places, and so badly written and so messy in others,” notes Adrien Baillet (1649–1706), Descartes’s first biographer, that his editor, Claude Clerelier (1614–1684) “found it sometimes necessary to supply words and fill in holes, as much as fidelity to the Author permitted.”

No latter-day Cartesian did more, in effect, to divine the voids and smooth out the imperfections of Descartes’s unfinished, disordered, and in some cases, barely legible manuscripts than the faithful Clerelier. Clerelier was a lawyer in the Parisian parliament who had distinguished himself during Descartes’s lifetime with his translation of the objections and replies for the French edition of Descartes’s Méditations métaphysiques (1647). His brother-in-law was none other than Chanut, and
it was to Clerselier that the ambassador entrusted Descartes’s manuscripts “like an invaluable inheritance.” Clerselier’s publications of Descartes’s textual estate earned him recognition as the premier Cartesian of the day from fellow Cartesians and anti-Cartesians alike, who unanimously emphasized his role as a guardian, producer, and solicitor of books. Florent Schuyl, the editor of *Renatus Des Cartes de homine*, lauded him in 1662 as “that guardian and faithful curator of the posthumous works of Mr. Descartes”; Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) described him as “the ornament and pillar of Cartesianism”; Baillet called him “the second author of Cartesianism”; and the Jesuit Louis le Valois, alias de la Ville (1639–1700), vilified him as the very “soul” of the Cartesian “sect,” singling out his quarrelsome habit of engaging “those with the most wit [esprit] and talent to continually further its reach with new books.”

Clerselier produced three volumes of Descartes’s correspondence as well as the first French edition of *Le Monde*, but *L’Homme de René Descartes* (1664), the first French edition of what is generally considered to be the first French treatise on physiology, was his masterpiece (fig. 1). Though rarely read today, *L’Homme* was the most influential of all of Descartes’s works in the decades following his death and well into the eighteenth century. The full title of the edition reads, *René Descartes’s Man, with a treatise on the formation of the foetus by the same author. With remarks by Louis de la Forge, Doctor of medicine, living at la Flèche, on René Descartes’s Treatise on Man, and on the figures invented by him. Descartes’s writing, L’Homme and the Traité de la formation du foetus, comprises less than half of the volume. Prefaces by Clerselier and Schuyl, that together occupy more than a hundred pages, encase Descartes’s two works. Clerselier’s preface opens the edition after a dedicatory epistle to Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683). Schuyl’s preface to *Renatus Des Cartes de homine*, which Clerselier’s son translated into French, closes the volume. By far the thickest section of the book, the *Remarques* by Louis de la Forge (1632–1665)—a regular, like Clerselier, at the scientific conferences hosted by Henri-Louis Hébert de Montmor and a self-described “disciple of Mister Descartes”—take up more pages than those they remark upon.

Numbering some five hundred pages in all, Clerselier’s edition is a far more impressive monument to the philosopher than the wooden edifice that Chanut had had constructed to mark Descartes’s grave. And more than that makeshift marker, *L’Homme de René Descartes* evinces the ambivalent function of the seventeenth-century tomb. As well as serving to perpetuate the memory of the deceased, Antoine Furetière (1619–1688) notes in his 1690 dictionary of the French language that tomb “also denotes things that make one forget another object, and that, so to speak, entomb [ensevelir] it.” The ironical topos of the tomb as mineral Lethe, especially popular in literary treatises and in political pamphleteering of the time, exposes the underbelly of more earnest memorials such as Clerselier’s *L’Homme de René Descartes*. An anonymous burial-in-effigy of Marie de Medicis’s despised favorite, the Italian parvenu Concino Concini (1569–1617), makes clear, for in-
stance, that the price of immortality is a decomposing corpse. Clerselier understood the symbiosis between remembrance and amnesia, and whether intentionally or intuitively, he both memorialized Descartes’s esprit and dispensed with his body in his edition of L’Homme. His editorial choices set a precedent for how the philosopher would be forgotten, and how, once forgotten, he would be remembered.

The Figure of Figures

L’Homme is the most obvious candidate of all of Descartes’s posthumous publications to serve as the site of an investigation into how his death was managed, since its content, ostensibly, is the human body. Likewise, the illustrations—or figures, as Descartes called them—are the element of the edition that offer the most instructive vantage point for appreciating the editor’s entombment strategies, since, for Descartes, figures were the textual equivalent of a body. Either an illustration featuring “the position of lines and of the surfaces of objects” or a perception that
occupies physical space in the brain, a figure clearly participates in extension, the primary attribute of the body, according to Descartes. While Descartes ignored the materiality of the written word, his recognition of the material ontology of figures invites the reader to compare them to other material entities—most obviously, in the case of L’Homme, to the body they portrayed. Clerselier’s treatment of the figures is therefore symptomatic of how he handled the memory of Descartes’s dead body.

A second reason for privileging the figures in an interpretation of the editorial decisions brought to bear in L’Homme is simply that the figures were crucial to the legibility—and according to some contemporaries, to the intelligibility—of the treatise. Clerselier emphasizes their importance through a caricature of Descartes’s epistemology. Following the philosopher’s line of reasoning in the Meditationes, he explains that “the body alone, and all that depends upon it, that is to say extension, figures, and movements, can in truth . . . be known by the intellect alone, but they are much better known when the intellect is assisted by the imagination.” As products of the imagination, the form of thought that manipulates sensual data, figures assist the reader in understanding the printed words that (it is implied) communicate the ethereal ruminations of Descartes’s intellect. An anonymous reviewer in the first issue of Le Journal des Scavans (January 1665) goes so far as to claim that “Mr. Des Cartes had left this treatise in such confusion, that it would be unintelligible had Mr. Clercelier not put it in order, and had Mr. De la Forge and Guscoven not elucidated it with their figures.”

This brings us to the third and most important reason for privileging the figures: Clerselier’s hand is most conspicuous there, because he had to supply them himself. Although Descartes frequently refers to figures in L’Homme, they were nowhere to be found in the trunk hailing from Sweden. Commissioning new figures was thus the first major step Clerselier took toward producing L’Homme de René Descartes. As he states in his lengthy preface, he began recruiting illustrators in 1657, seven years before the treatise was actually published. Illustrators were not forthcoming initially. When at last he did find a willing candidate in the person of Gérard van Gutschoven, a professor at the famed Flemish university of Leuven, he despaired of ever receiving his contribution. By the time Clerselier received figures from Gutschoven—and from La Forge, who had volunteered his services in the meantime—his project had been preempted by Florent Schuyl (1619–1669), a professor of philosophy at the prestigious academy of Bois-le-Duc in Lyon. Schuyl produced a Latin edition of the treatise with his own figures in 1662: Renatus Des Cartes de homine figuris et latinitate donatus a Florentio Schuyl (fig. 2). To justify his new edition of the treatise, Clerselier underscores his dissatisfaction with Schuyl’s figures. If Schuyl had succeeded “in the figures of the muscles and brain that he invented,” affirms Clerselier, “I would have done nothing more than to put the treatise in its natural language, and I would have used his figures.” But in Clerselier’s
FIGURE 2. Florent Schuyl based his 1662 Latin edition of Descartes’s treatise on human physiology, *Renatus Des Cartes de homine* (Lyon, 1662), on two copies of Descartes’s manuscript, which he translated and illustrated himself. The caption under the phoenix reads, “From death, immortality.” The phoenix evokes Descartes, at least nominally, for his first name, René, means “reborn.”

opinion, Schuyl failed in his endeavor, and a new edition with new figures was needed.

Clerselier’s critique of Schuyl’s figures stems, on the face of it at least, from a concern for their appropriateness to Descartes’s intentions in *L’Homme*. Clerselier rightly points out that Schuyl misunderstood the epistemological function that Descartes assigned to figures, and he accuses him of neglecting Descartes’s comparison of the human body to a machine. Underlying Clerselier’s criticism of the un-Cartesian character of Schuyl’s figures, however, is the question of the philosopher’s posthumous fate. Schuyl’s figures underscore the body’s mortality and, consequently, evoke the circumstances that engendered them: the author’s death. In contrast, Clerselier’s illustrators incorporate Descartes’s machine analogy into their figures. Gutschoven’s and La Forge’s figures perpetuate the philosopher’s project of postponing death by diverting the reader’s attention from the corruptible nature of the body.

Schuyl was evidently proud of his figures, as he advertises them prominently in
FIGURE 3. Schuyl illustrates Descartes’s explanation of how the eye adjusts to see at different distances in this landscape; *Renatus Des Cartes de homine*, 98.

the title of his edition. Clerselier concedes that his predecessor’s elegant copperplate engravings “are superior to the figures that I had put in this book, if one considers only the engraving and the printing.” Through the burin’s incision on copper, Schuyl captured the minute elements described by Descartes in a way that the rustic woodcuts of Gutschoven and La Forge could not. Clerselier admits that certain things, such as crisscrossing blood vessels, simply could not be represented in the cruder medium of his illustrators: “The wood that was used to engrave these figures could not withstand such delicacy.” Besides his technological advantage, Schuyl clearly had better artistic training than either of Clerselier’s illustrators. Schuyl demonstrates his mastery of perspective, for instance, in the figure with which he illustrates Descartes’s account of how the eye adjusts to see objects at different distances (fig. 3). He uses size to signify distance in a virtual landscape; the fire is larger than the tower because it is closer to the eye. Instead of situating the vanishing point at the center of the image, however, as Renaissance theoreticians of perspective advised, Schuyl places it at the far left-hand side of the figure. He renders perspective laterally from right to left because he is portraying distance from the vantage point of the eye on the page. The godlike eye in the sky reflects the omniscience of the reader, who not only witnesses the eye seeing objects at different distances (as in Descartes’s text) but also sees how the illusion of distance is rendered in two dimensions. In addition to perspective, Schuyl deploys the trompe l’oeil conven-
FIGURE 4. Schuyl’s engraving features flaps that can be lifted, allowing the reader to conduct a virtual dissection of the heart; *Renatus Des Cartes de homine*, 11.

...tions of anatomy books. One of the most beautiful figures in Schuyl’s edition is a full-page engraving of the heart (fig. 4), complete with little flaps representing layers of flesh that can be folded back to uncover its innermost chambers. Similarly, a series of seven engravings depict the brain from various angles and at various stages of dissection. One of these features a paper pineal gland that can be lifted to reveal the openings to blood vessels or nerve passages that lie beneath (fig. 5). Engaging
the reader’s sense of touch as well as his or her sense of sight, Schuyl’s figures invite him or her to participate in a virtual anatomy of the brain. Schuyl’s choice of the pineal gland as the flappable element of his figure is especially significant, for in lifting it, the reader initiates the movement that, according to Descartes, is one of its principal features.40

Despite Schuyl’s technological advantage and superior artistry, Clerselier
deems his figures “less intelligible . . . and less appropriate to the understanding of the text” than those of Gutschoven and La Forge.\footnote{41} The problem is that, whether through the deployment of perspective or anatomical simulacra, Schuyl encourages the reader to interpret his figures as two-dimensional imitations of things that can be seen in nature, when the processes that Descartes actually describes in the treatise are neither visible nor, for that matter, natural. For Descartes as for all of the proponents of the new science, intelligibility was the guarantor of truth, and visualization—or a process that could be understood in analogy to visualization—was the guarantor of intelligibility.\footnote{42} Descartes borrowed his criteria for valid ideas, clarity and distinction, from optics and qualified error as blindness.\footnote{43} Yet he used this visual terminology only metaphorically. To rely on the senses, be it the sense of sight or any other, was its own form of blindness. The figures that Descartes commissioned from Frans van Schooten the Younger (1615–1661)—in La Dioptrique (1637), Les Météores (1637), and the Principia philosophiae (1644)—are therefore not “literal” representations of natural things, or imitations in the Aristotelian sense. Instead, they are expository schema that give shape (and credence) to truths deduced through reason.\footnote{44}

In L’Homme, as Clerselier puts it, the figures serve to explain “what Mister Descartes advances in his book, where he speaks, for the most part, of things that are inaccessible to the senses, and that had to be rendered in a sensible medium, so that they would be more intelligible.”\footnote{45} In effect, Descartes warns that most of the corporeal elements he describes cannot actually be seen, but only inferred by the movements they cause: “for [those parts of the body] that are invisible due to their smallness, I will most easily and clearly make them known to you by speaking of the movements that depend on them.” As for those elements “that are big enough to be seen,” they are not his concern: “you can have them shown to you by some learned anatomist.”\footnote{46} The learned anatomist then closest to Descartes’s home in Utrecht was Nicolaas Tulp (1593–1674), whose practice was famously portrayed in 1632 by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606–1669), then an apprentice to Joris van Schooten, the father of the man who later illustrated Descartes’s works on natural philosophy.\footnote{47} Rembrandt’s Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp typifies the triumph of description in Dutch painting of the period, the kind of representation that Descartes explicitly sought to avoid in his figures, but that Schuyl, who left his post as professor of philosophy at Bois-le-Duc to join the faculty of medicine at the University of Leiden, adopts in Renatus Des Cartes de homine. He ignores Descartes’s dismissal of anatomy and quite ironically inserts his figures of the brain precisely at a point in the treatise where Descartes expresses his reluctance to rehearse what anatomists “have already all noted” and eschews the redundant portrayal of what can be “clearly perceived with the eyes.”\footnote{48} Although the editor of De homine purports to “supply the missing figures”—in other words, to replace Descartes’s figures—it seems instead that his ambition is to supply two-dimensional substitutes for nature.

In defense of the figures in his edition, Clerselier insists on his illustrators’ Car-
tesian credentials. Gutschoven is “at once a great anatomist and a learned mathematician”; the editor notes that he “understands perfectly all of the works of Mr. Descartes, with whom he has even conversed several times.” He moreover resembles Descartes: “[he] has the sort of mechanical mind [esprit mécanique] that his philosophy demands.” As for La Forge, he is a perfect surrogate. In the title of the edition, it is unclear which man—Descartes or La Forge—is designated by the pronoun “him” in the clause “figures . . . invented by him.”

Clereslier even esteems that Gutschoven and La Forge “succeeded better than Mister Descartes” in one instance. Somehow, independently from the Swedish trunk, Clereslier had gotten hold of one of Descartes’s original figures, which, he deduced, was meant to accompany Descartes’s account of eye muscle movement in *L’Homme*. Clereslier emphasizes its sorry state, calling it “a sketch that Mr. Descartes scribbled long ago . . . , that anyone besides me would have thrown in the fire, it is so little, torn, and disfigured.” In addition to its disfigured state, the figure is inaccurate. In the passage that ostensibly alludes to it, Descartes explains how animal spirits move the eye muscles when they pass through the nerves. Basing his conception of the nervous system on that of the circulation of the blood, uncovered by William Harvey (1578–1657) just a few years earlier in *De motu cordis* (1628), Descartes equips the nerves with valves. The problem is that while the text speaks of two folds (*replis*) in each valve, his autograph figure appears to portray three (fig. 6). Clereslier resolves the apparent contradiction by hypothesizing that the third fold in the sketch is in fact a hook that serves to pull back the valve. He nevertheless supplements his copy of Descartes’s figure with figures by Gutschoven and La Forge, in the hope that “what is incomprehensible in one might become clear in another.” Gutschoven merely eradicates the confusing third fold to bring it unambiguously in line with the text (fig. 7). As for La Forge, “he was bolder; and to show everybody that he is no slave to Mister Descartes’s opinions, and that if he sometimes adopts them, it is only by deference to reason and not to authority, he did not hesitate to stray here from the Author’s thought, and to substitute his own in its place” (fig. 8). Clereslier’s (very Cartesian) approval of La Forge’s disregard for authority and authenticity, together with his presentations of the three figures as equally valid illustrations of the text, has the effect of mechanizing the process of figuration. What matters is not the identity of the artist, but the adequacy of the figure to the text, which anyone with a sufficiently Cartesian *esprit mécanique* can muster.

More Cartesian than the master, it is no surprise then that Clereslier’s illustrators eschew true-to-life representations of bodily parts. If Gutschoven’s and La Forge’s rudimentary woodcuts “don’t resemble nature [le Naturel],” Clereslier warns, “you shouldn’t be surprised, since our intention was not to make an anatomy book.” Gutschoven’s representation of the physiology of visual perception at different distances (fig. 9), the equivalent of Schuyl’s picture of the eye, the fire, and the tower, is a particularly successful example of a figure that enables the reader
to visualize a physiological process that defies the senses. By contrast to Schuyl’s omniscient eye in the sky, the eyeballs portrayed by Gutschoven discourage identification. They are attached to a brain, evoking the mechanics of vision rather than a symbolic subject position. Yet the reader does not confuse Gutschoven’s representation of the brain with a real brain, as in Schuyl’s anatomical drawings. While Schuyl’s eye enjoys an unmediated gaze at the fire and the tower, the line of sight in Gutschoven’s figure stops short of the object of perception. The points A, B, and C that are mirrored in the retina correspond to the line in front of the apple instead of to the apple’s surfaces. In fact, the line almost appears to block the eyeball’s
FIGURE 7. As in figures 6 and 8, this figure by Gérard van Gutschoven (designated by the G) illustrates Descartes’s account of eye muscle movement; Clerselier, L’Homme de René Descartes, 16.
view of the apple. Analogously, the schematism of Gutschoven’s figure prevents the reader from entertaining the illusion that he or she is “seeing” the physiology of vision. Just as the line both represents and obstructs the view of the apple, Gutschoven’s figure simultaneously represents the physiology of visual perception and signals its inadequacy to it.

Functioning as a visual prop, Gutschoven’s figure enhances the reader’s understanding of that which can ultimately only be understood through recourse to reason. “Just as it is up to experience to reveal [faire voir] those things that fall in the realm of the senses,” Clerselier contends, “it is also certain that it is up to reason alone to make known [faire connoistre] those that are too subtle to submit to the senses: and it is of the latter that Mister Descartes speaks almost exclusively.”

Schuyl’s figures purport to “faire voir”—to reveal to the eyes—the human body and its constituent parts. They are mimetic, copies of natural entities. The figures in Clerselier’s edition, on the other hand, aim to “faire connoistre” or make known the elusive movements postulated by Descartes. They are heuristic devices that reify invisible things. And those things are invisible not so much because they are too miniscule to be seen even with a microscope, as because they simply don’t exist.

What Gutschoven and La Forge portray are in fact the tiny elements of an imaginary machine. Their mechanistic figures reproduce Descartes’s theory of life, for Descartes likened the human body to a machine. I turn now to that theory, in order to show how their loyalty to Descartes’s mechanism allowed them to shape the public’s memory of him. We shall see that the inert contrivances pictured in Clerselier’s edition of L’Homme obscured the messy fate of Descartes’s mortal remains.
Clerselier concludes his defense of Gutschoven’s and La Forge’s figures with a recommendation to the reader: “there is nothing easier than . . . to put these things in their natural context [dans le Naturel] and to conceive of how they are, after having considered them as other than they are.”56 The editor’s awkward assertion that things are best understood when considered as other than they really are demonstrates his fidelity to Descartes’s methodology in the text of L’Homme. For what Descartes describes in L’Homme is not a natural body, but an artificial creature. Extending the commonplace trope of the clockwork universe to human and animal physiology, he supposes “that the body is nothing other than a statue or earthen machine that God forms purposefully to resemble us as much as possible.”57 As both Schuyl and Clerselier recognize in their respective prefaces, Descartes hypothesizes a machine whose functions are identical to those of a human body in order to refute the animistic explanation of life prevalent among scholastic natural philosophers.58 This would allow him to affirm the radical difference between mind and body, already a cornerstone of his metaphysics even before the coherent formulation of his system in the Discours and Meditationes. The scholastics equated movement with life, which, in their view, could only be caused by animation.59 Descartes, as Schuyl notes, held that “movement . . . is a false index of life” as well as of ensoulment.60 To prove that the soul plays no part in movement nor, for that matter, in
digestion, circulation, respiration, or perception, Descartes strives to persuade his reader that a machine could be built to carry out all of the functions of the human body:

The functions in this Machine all result naturally from the sole disposition of its organs, no more nor less than do the movements of a clock, or any other automaton, from counterweights and gears, such that there is no need to explain these functions by means of a vegetative or sensitive soul, nor by any principle of movement and life other than the blood and animal spirits, agitated by the heat of the fire that burns continually in the heart.\(^61\)

By contrast to the spiritual or astral faculty that Aristotle, Galen, and, following their lead, Jean Fernel (1497–1558) and Jean Riolan (1577–1657) called \textit{innatus calor}, the fire that Descartes identifies as the principle of life is the product of fermentation caused by digestion; it is no different in nature “than the fires in inanimate bodies.”\(^62\)

In a typical reversal of scholastic natural philosophy, then, Descartes situates the source of life in the body rather than in the soul. This move has two important consequences for the nature of human and animal bodies. First, although the premise of \textit{L’Homme} is that one could construct a machine that would be indistinguishable from a human body, the upshot of Descartes’s body-based life principle is that the human body \textit{is} a machine. Like the bathing Dianas, jealous Neptunes, and menacing marine monsters “that you might have seen in the grottoes and fountains in the gardens of our kings,” natural bodies (human and animal), are automata, “that is to say, . . . machines that move themselves.”\(^63\) Second, Descartes radically minimizes the difference between living and dead bodies. Since the life principle in his account is bodily in nature, death for him amounts to a mechanical malfunction. The living body is therefore a functioning machine, while a corpse is simply a machine that has stopped working: “the body of a living man differs as much from that of a dead man, as does a watch or other automaton . . . when it is wound, and when it contains the corporeal principle of the movements that it is designed for, . . . from the same watch, . . . when it is broken and the principle of its movement ceases to act.”\(^64\)

Descartes’s denial of any substantive difference between living and dead bodies dedramatizes death (might one restore life to a cadaver with some repairs, just as one fixes a broken watch?), but it also circumscribes the vitality that infuses the animist view of life. Schuyl, in his preface to \textit{De Homine} that Clerselier reproduces at the end of \textit{L’Homme}, inadvertently underscores the lifelessness of Descartes’s life principle when he defends the Descartes’s contention that animals are machines. “The soul of beasts is in truth something dead,” he says, quoting Basil (330–379), the erstwhile bishop of Caesarea; the animal soul “consists in blood, and . . . thickened blood is ordinarily converted to flesh, and . . . corrupted flesh dissolves into dust.”\(^65\) Schuyl obviously means to defend the orthodoxy of Descartes’s claim that animals have no soul, not to deny that they are alive. Yet what Basil calls the animal
soul—the blood—is none other than the vehicle for what Descartes identifies as the source of life. Following Basil’s logic, Descartes’s life principle is oxymoronically “something dead.” To be sure, Basil’s ashes-to-ashes, dust-to-dust view of death is premised on the very animism that Descartes combats; for matter to metamorphose in such a way, it must be animated by an active principle, which the seventeenth-century reader would no doubt have associated with a soul. Nevertheless, heat produced by fermenting food in the digestive tract and, more generally, mechanical, hydraulic, and thermodynamic explanations of physiology fail to convey the verve imparted by the vegetative and sensitive souls and their capacious “faculties.”

The body detailed in *L’Homme* therefore resembles Marie de Medici’s baroque automata not only in that it is self-moving but also because, like them, its striking lifelessness makes it immune to death. Of course, this does not mean that Descartes identified human beings as machines, as he did animals, for their bodily machinery was joined to a soul, at least until death. The point is that although it is the body, in Descartes’s dualist metaphysics, that determines whether a human being is dead or alive, that body was in a sense always already dead.

Through the figures he commissioned, Clerselier reinforces Descartes’s body/machine analogy, and, with it, his evacuation of human mortality from the pages of *L’Homme*. Following Descartes’s choice to describe a creature of his own invention rather than a real body, Clerselier insists upon the artificiality of the figures in the title of his edition, where he describes the figures as having been “invented.” Overlaid with lines, numbers, and letters, the diagrammatic organs represented by Gutschoven and La Forge evoke a manual for the construction of a machine. Although Clerselier assures the reader that it is easy to “put these things back in their natural context [dans le Naturel],” he leaves such contextualization entirely up to the reader. In contrast to Schuyl’s framed and lush landscapes, the stark figures in *L’Homme* float on the page, grounded neither in time nor in space. Nothing in them suggests that the entities that they represent were or will be other than they are now. Even the apple in the figure illustrating the perception of distance fails to evoke the misery and decrepitude caused by original sin. It is an object of perception, of measurement perhaps, but certainly not of curiosity, much less of desire. No moral allegory emerges from between the lines that lead from the fruit to the pineal gland, whose forward-leaning posture denotes a purely mechanical reaction to a stimulus rather than simulating the dangerous passion of curiosity.

Like the text they illustrate, the schematism of La Forge’s and Gutschoven’s figures obscures the difference between human body and animals: its connection to the soul that grants free will to humans and makes them accountable before God. But Clerselier’s insistent rejection of “le Naturel” also effaces that which ostensibly distinguishes both human and animal bodies from automata: the possession of life and the resulting vulnerability to death. As ever, Clerselier’s proscription of the organic nature of the body demonstrates his keen attention to the master’s words.
Descartes characterizes the heat that is the source of life as a “fire . . . without light,” in other words, as a thing that can neither be seen, nor represented. Life is invisible, and as a result, unfigurable. Any representation of nature and more specifically, of the life that distinguishes bodies from machines, might result instead in the figuration of death, as Schuyl’s figures amply demonstrate.

In contrast to Clerselier’s illustrators, Schuyl does not shy away from representing Descartes’s invisible life principle, and he takes it upon himself to situate the machine he describes “dans le Naturel.” Consequently, his figures—both the artful landscapes and the anatomical plates—evoke the specter of death, for, in nature, things that live also die. The inescapable fate of all living things is evident in the elaborate landscape through which Schuyl illustrates Descartes’s account of distance perception. The eye perceives two different things: a fire’s flames and billowing smoke in the foreground, a fortress in the background. Descartes mentions neither fire nor fortress in the text that alludes to this figure, so Schuyl’s choice of these objects is significant. The fire, of course, recalls Descartes’s alleged life principle. Situated as it is in the eyeball’s line of sight, Schuyl seems to advertise the feat that he achieves in his figures: he makes life—invisible, according to Descartes—accessible to the senses. Although Schuyl foregrounds life, the scene in the background reminds the reader of the extinction that eventually greets every living being. Two objects are incongruously perched atop the fortress: a catapult and a small tree or shrub. Catapults were usually used to besiege fortresses, not to defend them, and they were rarely seen inside fortresses. The catapult was moreover a long-outmoded weapon by the second half of the seventeenth century. Gunpowder had made giant slingshots such as the trebuchet or the couillard obsolete by the sixteenth century. The equally misplaced vegetation accentuates the catapult’s obsolescence, for it suggests that the fortress is in ruins; nature has prevailed over human artifice. While Descartes argues that men’s bodies resemble machines, therefore, Schuyl’s figure suggests that machines—in this case a machine de guerre—are like bodies. Considered “dans le Naturel,” they too are subject to time and suffer in their old age. Schuyl’s juxtaposition of the fire, principle of life, and the retired catapult, instrument of death, underscores the inseparability of life from death.

While Schuyl’s landscape comments on the fleeting nature of life in all of its manifestations, his anatomical illustrations vividly recall the fact of human mortality. From the flayed flesh portrayed so dramatically by Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) to Rembrandt’s tribute to Dr. Tulp, anatomy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was very conspicuously the art of dead bodies, so much so that in the explicitly moralistic and frequently gruesome idiom of Reformation and Counter-Reformation poetry, “an anatomy was synonymous with a cadaver: “I present here like an anatomy,” versifies Jean-Baptiste Chassaignet (1571–1635), “the heart without a beat, the mouth without a smile, the head without hair, the bones languishing.” That Rembrandt went on to paint a cycle featuring Christ’s agoniz-
ing, dead, and then resurrected body after frequenting Tulp certainly suggests that beyond an understanding of the construction of the human body, his anatomy lesson left him with a vivid impression of human mortality.

As his allusion to melancholy in the *Meditationes* indicates, Descartes was familiar with the tropes of baroque poetry, and he was well acquainted with the works of Vesalius, to which he alludes in letters and notes, as well, we can assume, as with Rembrandt’s rendition of a Utrecht anatomy lesson. In setting his work apart from theirs, Descartes thus distinguished *L’Homme* from what the moralists of the day termed vanitas. Macabre objects that symbolized the fleeting passage of time and the evanescence of life, vanitas were incorporated into jewelry, furniture, but most often paintings. The paintings typically depicted genre scenes of surgeries or anatomies and still life (nature morte) arrangements featuring skeletons, rusted armor, and worn books. Anatomy books were themselves a sort of vanitas. In the frontispiece of one of the most highly esteemed medical textbooks of Descartes’s time, Jean Riolan’s *Anthropologia et osteologia* (1626), a skull and crossbones surveys a lesson on the human entrails given below it by the author. At a time when the black plague continued to cast an incurable pall over Europe, the tête de mort poses as a reminder of the limits of medicine and bespeaks the physician’s powerlessness to counteract God’s ineluctable will. Would not Schuyl’s figures—replete with defunct weaponry, a building in ruins, a gaping heart, and a dismembered brain—have likewise been interpreted by contemporary readers as vanitas? The retired machine de guerre symbolizes the inevitable decrepitude of the human machine, and the organs laid open by his burin aestheticize the common fate of all mankind in the best of the Renaissance theater-of-anatomy tradition. Like the worn books depicted in some vanitas and similar to the subtle reminders of morbidity in medical textbooks, Schuyl’s engravings ultimately signal the vanity of the science by means of which Descartes had hoped to elude, or at least postpone, death.

Ostensibly in contrast to Schuyl, Clerselier insists in the preface to *L’Homme de René Descartes* that his design has not been to “promote the book based on the number of figures.” Nevertheless, Schuyl’s figures occasion a grievance great enough to warrant an entirely new edition of Descartes’s treatise. Clerselier’s objection to Schuyl’s figures does not result only from Schuyl’s misinterpretation of the epistemological role Descartes assigns to figures, nor exclusively from his failure to apply Descartes’s machine analogy in his figures. He is also concerned that instead of patching up Descartes’s *Homme*, Schuyl’s figures magnify its wounds; that rather than glorifying the philosopher’s immortality, as the phoenix on the title page of his edition promises to do (fig. 2), Schuyl dwells on his dead body. Clerselier therefore distinguishes his edition from a practice based, as he puts it, on “experience and autopsy.” Portraying a machine rather than mortal flesh, he strips *L’Homme* clean of the morbid and moralizing messages typically conveyed in anatomical illustrations. The bits and pieces sketched by Gutschoven and La Forge hardly conjure up a man, much less Descartes. Everywhere commemorated in *De Homine*, Descartes’s
dead body is easily forgotten in *L’Homme*. Clerselier’s edition thus fulfills the second function ascribed to the seventeenth-century tomb: to bury, to cover over. The concealment of the evidence of death allows, in turn, for the memorialization more conventionally attributed to tombs. Once the author’s dead body is safely interred and out of sight, his thought can be extracted from the textual tomb to yield an unencumbered and marvelously versatile *esprit cartésien*.

So it was that in spite of Clerselier’s impeccable fidelity to Descartes’s words and principles, his edition of *L’Homme*—“the foundational text of post-Cartesian debate”—inspired some of the least faithful interpretations of Descartes’s philosophy. The first indices of the edition’s effect on the posthumous fate of Descartes’s *esprit* are evident in La Forge’s stand-in for the intended (but never completed) second part of *L’Homme* on the mind. Just as in the figures and the “Remarques” he produced for *L’Homme*, La Forge claims with his *Traité de l’esprit de l’homme, de ses facultés ou fonctions et de son union avec le corps suivant les principes de René Descartes* (1666) only “to make up for what [Descartes] could have done,” had not death prevented him from it. He likens Descartes to Apelles (c. 300 B.C.), whose paintings were so accomplished that his disciples were content to simply sign his name on them. But he contrasts the disciples’ restraint with his own touch-ups of Descartes’s slightly less perfect *oeuvre*—first, with the figures for *L’Homme*, and now, with his supplement to *L’Homme*. The temptation to clarify Descartes’s position on the mind’s union with the body was all the greater because, according to La Forge, there was so little work left to do. “I thought I could pull sufficient material from the works that he himself had published to construct this entire work,” for Descartes had said just enough in his writings for La Forge to discern “how he would have spoken about it, if he had wanted to write about it.” Clearly, as the comparison of Descartes to a painter indicates, it was the success of La Forge’s figure-forging experiment that emboldened him to pose as Descartes’s understudy in the *Traité de l’esprit de l’homme*.

Where La Forge claimed to draw out and piece together Descartes’s disparate reflections on the mind in much the same way as he had contrived the figures for *L’Homme*, the readerly experience of that most famous of all Cartesians, the Oratorian Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), shows how *L’Homme* inspired Cartesians to take liberties with Descartes’s printed words—sometimes to the point of explicitly contradicting him. In *De la Recherche de la vérité* (1674), Malebranche claims to follow “the sure path” that Descartes had sketched “to discover all truths.” But he pursues this path so zealously that his destination would have been unrecognizable to Descartes. Extrapolating from Descartes’s efforts to prove God’s existence, Malebranche reconciles Cartesian metaphysics and mechanism with Augustinian theology. The union of the mind and body results from the first man’s fall from grace; intergenerational resemblances can be traced to Eve’s ovaries; and the question of how inert matter comes to be in motion in the first place can be resolved by positing God as the direct cause of every movement.

Like La Forge, Malebranche took his cue from the figures in Clerselier’s edition...
of *L’Homme de René Descartes*. Malebranche’s friend and fellow Oratorian, Yves-Marie André (1675–1764), recalls Malebranche’s legendary first encounter with the book: “strolling one day along the quai des Augustins, [Malebranche] asked a bookseller what new books he had on hand.” It was 1664; he found himself perusing a freshly minted copy of *L’Homme* in which he discovered such luminous truths, deduced in such marvellous order, and especially a mechanics [*une mécanique*] of the human body so admirable and divine, that he was ravished by it. . . . the joy of making so many discoveries caused such violent palpitations in his heart, that he was obliged to put the book down time and again in order to catch his breath.92

André attempts to explain what it was about *L’Homme* that so struck Malebranche: “this posthumous work, as shapeless [*informe*] as it is, boasts singular beauties.”83 André does not elaborate on what he means by “singular beauties,” but it seems that he can only be referring to Gutschoven’s and La Forge’s stark and stylized figures. Single units portraying discrete mechanical systems, they stand out from the mass of print by which Clerselier approximates the unfinished and deformed manuscript of *L’Homme*. In his attempt to rationalize Malebranche’s irrational response to Clerselier’s edition, André puts his finger on its appeal. The text is “*informe*,” at once unformed and ill-formed, while the figures are fully formed. Gutschoven’s and La Forge’s lifelike (but lifeless) machines pose as the fulfillment of Descartes’s intentions. They exemplify the perfectibility of his thought and the continuation of his *esprit*.

No doubt the greatest testament to Clerselier’s finesse as editor-*qua-*undertaker, however, is the disappearance of the figures from modern editions of *L’Homme*. Their suppression effaces the artifice with which he set the philosopher on his glorious posthumous course. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, editors of the now standard edition of Descartes’s complete works, opine, “the most interesting question for this *Traité de l’Homme* regards the figures.”84 They nevertheless relegate the figures to the back of the volume, with the exception of Clerselier’s copy of Descartes’s surviving figure. To be sure, the rest of the figures are not authentic, and, contrary to Clerselier, Adam and Tannery were not Cartesian enough to abandon authenticity as an editorial priority. Neither, however, were they Cartesian enough to recognize the importance that Descartes gave to figures in the creation of knowledge. “For Descartes,” argues Brian Baigrie, “it is the artifice of craft (and by association, the artifice of drawing) that enables us to grasp nature; working with mechanical models, whether constructing or drawing them, is a form of cognition that engenders favourable dispositions for grasping the insensible workings of nature.”85 In their decision to exclude the drawings from the text of *L’Homme*, Adam and Tannery assume, following Clerselier, that the figures serve a purely expository function. Clerselier surmises that Descartes made his one surviving sketch “when he was trying to imagine a figure that could correspond to and satisfy the idea he had in his mind [*esprit*].”86 In this account, the figure merely approximates a preexisting
thought; it is therefore the product of an afterthought and in no way represents the essence of the author’s thought. On the other hand, according to Clerselier, Descartes’s words are essential; they represent the very content of his esprit. To explain away the discrepancy between the author’s words and his figure regarding the number of folds, Clerselier says, “it was necessary in a sense to guess what his thought had been by confronting the sketch with the text.”\textsuperscript{87} Despite the expository role he assigns to figures, here the text is the key to the figure, not the other way around. Clerselier’s conflation of Descartes’s words—words, we recall, that were at times illegible and even missing in the manuscript—and thought effaces the fact that words, no less than figures, take part in res extensa. Seemingly on Clerselier’s advice, Adam and Tannery confine the philosopher’s dessicated relics to an appendix; all that remains in their edition of L’Homme are his words, that is to say in Clerselier’s somewhat reductive analogy, his esprit.

Only a quarter of a century after Clerselier’s publication of L’Homme, Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757) enlisted Descartes’s “new method of reasoning” in the name of the Moderns while rejecting “his philosophy itself, of which a good part is false or uncertain, according to the very rules he taught us.”\textsuperscript{88} No doubt Descartes’s example—and above all his provocative rejection of authority in the Discours de la méthode—was what inspired La Forge, Malebranche, and Fontenelle among so many others to cheerfully appropriate his esprit and mold it according to their preoccupations. But the point of the present essay has been to show, somewhat less predictably, that books themselves had their part to play in unmooring Descartes’s esprit from his words, his words from pages, pages from books, and that, paradoxically, the transience shared by books and bodies was most effectively denied by the only part of the book whose ontology as an extended body Descartes explicitly recognized: the figures.

One wonders what Descartes, who specifically warned posterity against words and thoughts attributed to him but not expressed by him, would have thought of Clerselier’s resuscitation of L’Homme, all the more so since, according to Baillet, he had intended the trunk he took with him to Sweden to be L’Homme’s final resting place.\textsuperscript{89} Without assigning yet another shape to the philosopher’s protean posthumous esprit, we can remark upon the Faustian foresight he evinced while still alive. In his correspondence, Descartes referred to the future executor of his textual estate as “Clairsellier.” Instead of seeing what Baillet, Bayle, and Le Valois saw in the editor of L’Homme—a scribe who preserves his master’s perishable remains (clercellier; “scribe”-“cellar”)—Descartes unwittingly invited his correspondent to note Clerselier’s brilliant talent for concealing them (clair-celer; “brilliant”-“hiding”).
My thanks go to Jordi Cat, who generously lent me a whole stack of pertinent books and articles, and to Jacques E. Merceron, for helping me to identify the catapult in figure 3.


6. The collection of essays edited by Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene in *Descartes and his Contemporaries: Meditations, Objections, Replies* (Chicago, 1995) signals a turning point in this regard. Each essayist in the collection addresses an aspect of Descartes’s *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (1641)—the very core of Descartes’s opus, to judge by current philosophy and literature curricula—in relation to one or all of the following objections by contemporary philosophers and theologians. Far from modeling Descartes’s ideal of a science founded by one subject, these scholars suggest that the *Meditationes* are fundamentally a collective work, insofar as the objections are integral to the work as a whole. The broader implication of the volume—namely, that accurate interpretations of Descartes’s works depend upon an understanding of the cultural environment that fostered them—has been carried out on a much larger scale by Stephen Gaukroger in *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford, 1995) and Theo Verbeek in *Descartes and the Dutch: Early Reactions to Cartesian Philosophy, 1637–1650* (Carbondale, Ill., 1992). Along the same lines, new researches on the fortunes of Cartesianism conceive the subject in more local—and arguably more ambitious—ways than traditional history-of-ideas scholarship. Where Francisque Bouillier claimed to provide an exhaustive genealogy of Cartesians in his massive *Histoire de la philosophie cartésienne* (1868), for instance, Erica Harth analyzes the reception of Descartes’s ideal of scientific objectivity among women in *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime* (Ithaca, 1992).

7. The bodiless “I” distilling its thoughts in the warmth of a well-stoked stove is Descartes’s famous self-portrait in the autobiographical *Discours de la méthode* (1637). See Descartes, *Œuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, 11 vols. (Paris, 1969), 6:11. All subsequent references to Descartes’s works will be taken from Adam and Tannery with the indication AT, except for the work in question here, which I will take from the two original editions, *Renatus Des Cartes de homine; figuris et latinitate donatus a Florentio Schuyl*, ed. Florent Schuyl (Lyon, 1662) and *L’Homme de René Descartes et un traité sur la formation du foetus*, ed. Claude Clerselier (Paris, 1664). All translations from French to English are mine.


son union avec le corps, suivant les principes de René Descartes (Amsterdam, 1666), [vii]. This work is unpaginated; the numbers in brackets represent what the pages would be were the first page numbered 1.


15. Descartes, AT, 2:480, 552.


18. This, in contrast to the scholastic view of death. The scholastics held that death results when the soul ceases to breathe life into the body. Since they viewed the soul as the very form of the body, death for them represented rupture. See Descartes, AT, 11:330; Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *L’Anthropologie cartésienne* (Paris, 1990), 23.


21. He does allow that “often things that had seemed true to me when I first began to think about them, seemed false to me when I went to put them on paper” in the *Discours*; Descartes, AT, 6:66.


25. Florent Schuyl, “Version de la preface que Monsieur Schuyl a mise au devant de la version latine qu’il a faite du Traité de l’Homme de René Descartes,” in *L’Homme de René Descartes*, 447; Pierre Bayle, *Oeuvres de Mr. Pierre Bayle, professeur en philosophie et en histoire, a Rotterdam, Contenant tout ce que cet Auteur a publié sur des matieres de Theologie, de Philosophie, de Critique, d’Histoire, & de Litterature; excepté son Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (La Haye, 1731), 4:110; Baillet, *La Vie*, 2:241; Le Valois cited in Henri Gouhier, *Cartésianisme et Augustinisme au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1978), 49. Perhaps in the hopes of assuring a Cartesian lineage, Clerselier married his daughter to Jacques Rohault (1618–1672), a prominent Cartesian, whose weekly conferences throughout the 1660s comprised one of the principle forums for the discussion of Descartes’s physics. In his eulogy for Rohault, the eighteenth-century philosopher and mathematician, Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794), had this to say about the match: “despite the disproportion in birth and fortune, [Clerseler] chose Rohault for his son-in-law, amidst the cries of an indignant family, who could not understand that talent and virtue might be preferable in one’s son-in-law to ancestors and gold, and who accused him of sacrificing his daughter”; cited in Albert Balz, *Cartesian Studies* (New York, 1951), 28.

26. *Lettres de M. Descartes, où sont traitées les plus belles questions de la morale, physique, médecine et des mathématiques* (1657), *Lettres de Descartes où sont expliquées plusieurs belles difficultés touchant ses autres ouvrages* (1659), *Lettres de M. Descartes, où il répond à plusieurs difficultés qui lui ont été proposées sur la Dioptrique, la Géométrie, et sur plusieurs autres sujets* (1667). In the second edition of *L’Homme* (1677), Clerselier added yet another of one of the texts
he had gotten from Chanut: _Le Monde, ou traité de la lumière_. _Le Monde de Monsieur Descartes ou le Traité de lumière_ had already been published separately in 1664 by a Parisian libraire, Jacques Le Gras.

27. Gaukroger, _Descartes_, 271.

28. Louis de La Forge, “Remarques de Louis de La Forge, Docteur en médecine, sur le Traité de l’homme, de René Descartes; et sur les figures par lui inventées,” in _L’Homme de René Descartes_, 335.


31. A certain Fancan sought to eradicate an epidemic of immorality spawned by novels by means of a _Tombeau du Roman_ (1626), and the anonymous author of a _Tombeau de la paulette_ (1618) fantasized the demise of an increasingly onerous tax on royal offices. On the text as tomb, see Leonard Hinds, _Narrative Transformations from L’Astreé to Le Berger Extravagant_ (West Lafayette, Ind., 2002), 127–28.

32. Concino Concini was prematurely interred in the anonymous _Le tombeau du marquis d’Ancre_ (Paris, 1617).

33. Descartes, _L’Homme_, 72.

34. Clerselier, “Préface,” _L’Homme_, [xl–xli]. This preface is unpaginated; the numbers in brackets represent what the pages would be were the first page of the preface numbered i.

35. “_L’Homme de René Descartes,_” _Le Journal des Savants_, 5 January 1665, 9–11.

36. Clerselier, “Préface,” [i].

37. Ibid., [ii]. 38. Ibid., [i]. 39. Ibid., [xxvi].

40. Descartes, _L’Homme_, 68.

41. Clerselier, “Préface,” [ii].


45. Clerselier, “Préface,” [xxv].

46. Descartes, _L’Homme_, 2.


48. Descartes, _Renatus Des Cartes de homine_, 118. For the French, see Descartes, _L’Homme_, 105.

49. Clerselier, “Préface,” [ix-x].

50. Ibid., [xv]. 51. Ibid., [xv]. 52. Ibid., [xix].

53. Ibid., [xxv]. 54. Ibid., [lii].

55. The vista opened by the microscope to mechanistic thought of the 1630s was more conceptual than anything else, since it only magnified things up to twelve or thirteen times their actual size; see Marian Fournier, _The Fabric of Life: Microscopy in the Seventeenth Century_ (Baltimore, 1996), 11.

56. Clerselier, “Préface,” [xxv].


63. Descartes, AT, 11:331. In *Authority, Liberty, and Automatic Machinery*, Mayr notes, “Descartes offered a direct account of the workings of the human body which was so rigorously mechanical that, in overall effect, it was equivalent to a description of a complex automaton,” 64.

64. Descartes, AT, 11:331.


66. Descartes’s lifeless account of life is exacerbated by the structure of the treatise, which he organizes around systems of organs instead of the development of the human body. As he later admitted in the *Discours*, he avoided the question of generation altogether by beginning *L’Homme* in media res with a fully formed man; AT, 6:45–46.


71. Descartes, AT, 2:525.


74. On the perceived limits of medicine, see ibid., 83.

75. Clerselier, “Préface,” [xv]. 76. Ibid., [li].


78. La Forge, *Traité*, 1. 79. Ibid., 2–3.

80. Nicolas Malebranche was a member of the Oratory, a religious order whose founding father in France, Pierre Bérulle (1575–1629), had encouraged the young Descartes to pursue his philosophical course.


tating palpitations—correspond to a passion that Descartes likens to death in the *Pâssions de l’âme*. When a person swoons, the fire in the heart is momentarily extinguished by an overwhelming influx of blood, and so “swooning is not far removed from death, for we die when the fire that is in the heart is completely extinguished; and we swoon when it is smothered in such a way that some remnants of heat remain, that can reignite afterwards”; AT, 11:418.

86. Clerelier, “Preface,” [xv]. 87. Ibid., [xviii].
89. “I implore my successors never to believe those things which are said to have originated with me, if I haven’t expressed them myself”; Descartes, AT, 6:69–70. According to Baillet, Descartes had intended the trunk he took with him to Sweden to be its final resting place. “Although these two little treatises are considered today as masterpieces of physic and anatomy [sic],” writes Baillet of *L’Homme* and the *Traité de la formation du foetus* in 1693, “there was nothing more imperfect in the eyes of Mr. Descartes, who condemned them for that reason to eternal suppression”; *La Vie*, 2:398.