



CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF  
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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PARMA



STUDIO FIRMANO  
PER LA STORIA DELL'ARTE MEDICA E DELLA SCIENZA

CSMBR  
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EVENTS

# 'A DEAD EYE IS NOT REALLY AN EYE'

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## ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS IN LATE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ANATOMY

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Analysis and synthesis—understood variously as conceptual methods, laboratory techniques, or pedagogical ordering principles—have often been cited as crucial to the development of modern mathematics, chemistry, physics, and much more. Anatomy in the early modern period was explicitly related to the terms “analysis and synthesis” or their Latin equivalents, “resolution and composition.” In addition to invigorating the discipline of anatomy, the recovery

of Galen’s works in the sixteenth century brought to light influential passages where Galen endorsed the combination of analysis and synthesis. While these passages do not appear in his anatomical works, this is perhaps unsurprising: death creates significant challenges to viewing dissection as analysis, synthesis, or both at once. As Aristotle often noted (and Galen repeated), a dead eye and a dead hand were such in name only, be-

cause the forms or natures, and the activities or capacities flowing therefrom, are lost. Nevertheless, late-sixteenth century anatomical works adopted both the terms and methods of analysis and synthesis. This talk examines several such treatises, focusing on ocular anatomy in particular. I compare methodological discussions of anatomy as analysis and synthesis with the actual dissection procedures and results of anatomical investigation of the eye found in the anatomies of Varolio, Du Laurens, Girolamo Fabrici d’Acquapendente, and Giulio Casserio which all aimed at understanding the “animal soul”.