The Birth of Modern Anatomy: Anti-Ritual Rhetoric[1]

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This essay takes as its departure a curious pairing of terms: *ritual* (a practice?) and *anatomy* (a discipline?). Today, atop the pavement of our twenty-first-century Euro-American cultural byways, it is difficult to speak about the human body as an object of study without recourse to an overtly technical medical-scientific bellow—a bellow partially rooted in the post-Cartesian representation of the body as a machine. To talk of ritual, then, certainly within the confines of a sterile hospital or research facility, appears at best, an ill-fated task, and at worst, a methodological hazard. Indeed, discussions of ritual within medical discourse usually fall along controversial divides: (1) the place and purpose of male circumcision, (2) so-called "Western" practices versus "Eastern" practices, or (3) the efficacy of "folk" medicine. Accordingly, ritual is relegated to the arbitrary or alternative, and in all three cases, the "religious," distinctly that which medical research and practice seeks to avoid. More intriguingly, each of the aforementioned contests involves surgical or medicinal *practice* that endeavors to treat or heal living human beings.[2] And yet, I mentioned one of

1. I would like to thank James W. Watts for his guidance and support.

2. A few other examples should be noted. In recent years, bio-medical science has been forced to perhaps better face the problems of suffering and mourning, both of which have instigated the propagation of what might be called (in very general terms), healing *rituals*. See Arthur Kleinman's *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), for a discussion of the problem, that is, the current medical paradigm's inability to answer the questions related to both the sufferer and social group: "Why me? And what can be done?" Also, Kandace Geldmeier, PhD student at Syracuse University, is currently conducting research related to rituals enacted for and by parents who have suffered through perinatal deaths. Perhaps one of the most basic fears against introducing such rituals is the implications they may have on the status of life in general. Again, these examples belong to the category of treatment, clearly within the walls of one half of the problematic divide: action/thought or practice/knowledge. This essay, however, is more concerned with the *use* of the term ritual and its perceived role in the "practice" of generating epistemologies; it looks specifically at the contested forms and functions of dissection and anatomy as described in texts.

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the topics of this essay was *anatomy*, defined (1) as "the science of the shape and structure of organisms and their parts," and (2) "dissection of a plant or animal to study the structure, position, and interrelation of its various parts."[3] Anatomy, today, is not directly concerned with healing practices, although these may or may not be its ultimate goal; rather, its primary directive is to uncover and generate epistemologies—a far cry from ritual's treads, or so it would seem. For this reason, the majority of theoretical inquiries into the meaning, function, or status of ritual ignore from the start scientific research as a fruitful field of possibilities. Catherine Bell hones in on this fundamental dichotomy when she claims that ritual theory is almost always predicated on an oft-unquestioned yet fundamental dichotomy: the difference between action and thought. She continues:

> In some cases added qualifications may soften the distinction, but rarely do such descriptions question this immediate differentiation or the usefulness of distinguishing what is thought from what is done...Ritual is then described as thoughtless action—routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic—and therefore the purely formal, secondary, and mere physical expression of logically prior ideas.[4]

It is precisely this distinction I would like to problematize. If anatomy has all but scudded ritual from its methodological skin—hairs and all—it may prove useful to turn to a moment when the divide was less distinct, when public dissections were often performed with theatrical fanfare, though not without contest, within carefully constructed anatomy theaters.[5] Here, one can almost hear the adjectival droppings of ritual as broadcasted in common parlance: prescribed, routinized, performative, and perhaps dramatic. As such, it comes as no surprise that much of the scholarly work today concerning the historiography of medicine has similarly focused its attention on the early modern period as defined by the "culture of

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3. anatomy. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/anatomy (accessed: November 11, 2008).

4. Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19.

5. The first known extant anatomy theater was built in 1594 at the University of Padua where Andrea Vesalius taught surgery and anatomy between 1537 and 1544. Both the Leiden, Holland (1597) and the Copenhagen, Denmark (1643) theaters were based on the Padua model.

dissection,"[6] to borrow Jonathan Sawday's designation, when anatomy formerly emerged and joined the annals of human inquiry. In so doing, scholars have employed the term, *ritual*, time and time again, often in order to distinguish various anatomical practices of the past from those conducted today. This, I will admit, has been my greatest motivation to write this essay. It seems to me that much of the intellectual framework generating these excursions into early modern anatomy/dissection are guided by a handbag of accreted assumptions—perhaps older than the early modern period itself—that posits ritual as "*thoughtless* action," either (1) in order to distinguish the breaking-free of modern science from its darker, routinized past, a tactic early-modern authors themselves employed, or (2) when it becomes apparent that the rhetoric of such early-modern authors does not indeed represent a prevalent historical reality—that is to say, when their ideas are more polemical than descriptive—then ritual takes on a preserving or legitimizing role which paves the way or makes room for a "modern" ascent. Following this curious janus-faced treatment of ritual, it is part of my main argument that the moment ritual is called ritual, there is a sheer sign of conflict, and it is best to start not with what ritual may or may not be, nor what it may or may not do, but rather, with what is said *about* it, whether directly, hot under the collar, or more implicitly, in its outright absence. Further, I believe the current bio-medical paradigm has defined itself—as epistemologically-oriented—in *difference*, and in this difference, ritual, as it was then called, figured brightly, and in the case of arguments concerning "proper" practice, still does.[7] As such, I would like to begin with the early-

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6. By "culture of dissection," Jonathan Sawday does not simply mean medical anatomical inquiry; he means, rather, something akin to a world-view, a way in which humans relate to the world, their bodies, and their minds across disciplines and mediums. See Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). Sawday states, "The 'culture of dissection,' then, the culture of enquiry: an incisive recomposition of the human body, which entailed an equivalent refashioning of the means by which people made sense of the world around them in terms of their philosophy of understanding, their theology, their poetry, their plays, their rituals of justice, their art, and their buildings," ix.

7. By "proper" practice I mean to call attention to arguments staunchly resting on a certain perspective of what is or is not "therapeutic." Take male circumcision as an example. David Richard discusses in "Male Circumcision: Medical or Ritual?" in *Journal of Law and Medicine*, Volume 3, Number 4, May 1996: 371,"the history and reasoning behind male circumcision; identifies overwhelming medical evidence against the performance of non-medical (ritual)

modern "culture of dissection's" utilization of the term ritual on behalf of a very specific project—that of *Andrea Vesalius' De Humani Corporis Fabrica*—and then I would like to turn to one contemporary researcher's treatment of ritual derived both from and against Vesalius' own mission, that of Andrea Carlino.

In exploring ritual and anatomy in the early modern period, I try to heed Philippe Buc's methodological caveat: that it is absolutely imperative to analyze historical works with "*constant* sensitivity to their status as texts."[8] In his book, *The Dangers of Ritual*, Buc is largely concerned with correcting his discipline of historiography. He takes as his subject matter the applicability of twentieth-century social-scientific/anthropological models to medieval source documents detailing Western European political/religious culture. Specifically, from the outset, Buc cautions against using the term ritual to explicate the deep reservoir of documented medieval practices such as imperial funerals, coronation *ordines*, royal accessions, relic elevations, etc. Further, he contends that the category ritual and its content are irreconcilably indebted to a theological genealogy; to apply it, then, is not only to settle for pseudo-understanding, but to stick fast in a mire a subject's own agency. I share these concerns with Buc, and indeed, I will come back to them. While the time period on which I would like to focus is slightly later than Buc's Ottonian Dynasty, his words nonetheless resonate.

1543 is the date to which historians generally attribute the birth of modern anatomy. It is the year in which Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564), a humanist physician/anatomist, published the first complete textbook of anatomy, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*. Vesalius' *Fabrica* constituted a radical break from the directives of previous anatomical treatises—just as the Columbian explorers stressed the importance of "ocular evidence,"[9] thus refurbishing the Ptolemaic tradition with an emphasis on empirical

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circumcision; and argues that the medical profession may be ignoring modern medical law through a combination of medical opinion, negligence, and vitiated consent." What is "proper," here, or properly therapeutic, is *not-ritual*. "Medical or Ritual?" has been explicitly posed as an either/or question.

8. Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4.

9. Sawday, 26: "Christopher Columbus, describing the wealth of the Indies on returning from his first voyage of 1492–3, observed that 'although there was much talk and writing of these

knowledge, Vesalius similarly distinguished himself as a first-hand voyager. Above all, he sought to overthrow the thousand-year reign of classical anatomy, spearheaded by Galen in the Second Century, which, according to Vesalius, was fundamentally flawed in its understanding of the human body. He rebuked his wayward predecessors for stressing rational inquiry over and above practical experimentation; indeed, he even mocked them for repeating from memory the errors they had learned (and trusted) in other people's books without pursuing a *direct* affiliation—through autopsy or dissection—with the human body.[10] Further, as a feat in both didactic function and artistic sensibility, Vesalius' *Fabrica* signaled an innovation in the ways that anatomical knowledge was compiled, categorized, retrieved, and disseminated. This cannot be denied. And yet, it is important to remember that such innovations do not spring forth from vacuums, nor do they emerge mysteriously, without reason, from those individual minds with which we posit a peculiar genius; rather, they transpire at the vertices of human existence wherein cultural processes are ingredient, not merely accomplice, to human thought. It is here—in the midst of the implementation of Vesalius' *Fabrica* and the culmination of the body atlas[11]—that anatomy joined (and ran tributary to) an already-brewing cultural and social matrix: namely, the Protestant Reformation and the Age of Exploration.

With this in mind, the thrust of Vesalius' argument finds strength amidst the social, political, and religious undertakings of an era which could hardly be called bloodless. Framed at each end by the colonization of the Americas (roughly 1492 onward), and the Wars of Religion (1562 to 1598), Vesalius' vehement pleas should therefore not go unquestioned.

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lands, all was conjectural, without ocular evidence. In fact, those who accepted the stories judged by hearsay rather than on any tangible information.'"

10. Andrea Carlino, *Paper Bodies: A Catalogue of Anatomical Fugitive Sheets 1538–1687*, trans. Noga Arikha (London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1999), 5–7.

11. The word "atlas" here is slightly anachronistic yet intentionally premonitory. The term "atlas" for a bound book of maps came into use with the publication of Gerardus Mercator's *Atlas, Sive Cosmographicae Meditationes De Fabrica Mundi* in 1595, a year after Mercator's death and 31 years after Vesalius' death. Recalling Hesiod's *Theogany* ("the origin of the gods", circa 700 BCE), perhaps Mercator, too, saw himself as a Titan of text and image. Would it be an egregious *retrieval* to read Vesalius as a similar self-proclaiming anatomist "who *dares*," the etymological meaning of the title Atlas? As Mercator sought to illustrate and explain the "*fabrike and figure*" of the world, so Vesalius sought to explicate—one and for all—the *Fabrica* of the human body, both "Titans" against the background of great conflict.

Although often touted as the *Father* of modern anatomy whose *Fabrica* signaled the discipline's strange immaculate *birth*, Vesalius' contribution is in some ways better described not so much as a birth, but as a death (of "medieval" anatomy)[12] in the midst of life, or a living death. This statement is not intended to strip his methods of innovation; instead, it is meant to force a pause, to keep the *Fabrica's* critical edge in sight. As Andrea Carlino points out in his text, *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning*, Vesalius' model was slow to catch on. His *Fabrica*, then, should not be read or seen as the rumbles of an all-out revolution; rather, it indicates the rhetorical means by which Vesalius attempted, at times with self-serving interests, to simultaneously expunge a fractured model and recall from the dead, not Galen himself, but his true uncorrupted spirit. Nancy Siraisi remarks, as a humanist at heart, Vesalius' "attitude to Galen, his principal ancient predecessor, was a complicated mixture of dependence, reworking, and critique."[13]

To begin, Vesalius' attacked the structure of the traditional anatomy lesson as it was heretofore carried out by his predecessors and contemporaries alike. Typically, a lesson involved a *lector*, who would recite passages from Galen's cannon, or Mondino de Luzzi's *Anatomia* (1315), which held steadfast to Galen's form, while an *ostensor* would translate the Latin into the vernacular, all the while directing a *sector*, often an untrained barber, to dissect and display the appropriate parts of the body.[14] Dissection, then, was conducted in service of the text, that is, in service of Galen's pre-established findings. In the preface to his *Fabrica*, dedicated to Charles V., Vesalius rails against this method:

> Physicians did not undertake surgery, while those to whom the manual craft was entrusted were too uneducated to understand what professors of dissection had written. So far this class of men is from preserving for us the difficult and abstruse art handed down to them, and so far has this pernicious dispersal of the

12. My use of "medieval" in quotation marks is intentional. As is well-understood, the term "medieval" was implemented by so-called "Renaissance" writers in order to distinguish their thoughts and actions from those directly following the Ancient classics, approximately 600 to 1400. "Renaissance," too, may be seen as a rhetorical device.

13. Nancy G. Siraisi, "Vesalius and the Reading of Galen's Teleology." *Renaissance Quarterly*, 50, no. 1 (Spring, 1997), 3.

14. Andrea Carlino, *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 11.

> healing art failed to avoid importing the vile ***ritual*** in the universities by which some perform dissections of the human body while others recite the anatomical information.[15]

There are a few main points I would like to establish here: (1) it is apparent that Vesalius strategically uses the language of ritual in a derogatory sense in order to jettison certain *meanings* from his own project. (2) Following this quotation, all we can truly say about Vesalius' definition of ritual is necessarily related to that which he believes ritual is *not*, or cannot accomplish. Ritual as such is taken up by the "uneducated," that is, it is ill-informed. Further, the meaning of ritual, in this context, seems to signal a complete break between knowing and doing: the knower cannot know that which he does not do, and proper doing *should* always be done in service of knowing, that is, the uncovering of "true" knowledge, not the rote recitation of "information." Although Vesalius himself never commits to any "heresy," (certainly not under the auspices of King Henry V's Court) it is interesting to note that Luther, himself, believed that knowledge could not be reached through the words of the Catholic Church alone, as if a direct affiliation with the spirit behind the letter was more than necessary—the student, too, should, himself, unswervingly dissect the book, or in the case of Vesalius, the body.[16] While any direct affiliation between the Protestant platform and Vesalius' model is at best circumstantial, it is not difficult to imagine that its *language* could cross such boundaries. It is along these lines that Buc draws our attention to *ritual's* historical (nay, theological) categorical import:

15. Andrea Vesalius, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, trans. Daniel Garrison, Malcolm Hast and Northwestern University, http://vesalius.northwestern.edu/ (accessed: November 11, 2008), emphasis added. "Ritual," does indeed translate the Latin, "ritus."

16. Many have speculated Vesalius' relationship to Lutheran Protestantism. See Andrew Cunningham, *The Anatomical Renaissance: The Resurrection of the Anatomical Projects of the Ancients* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997). Although all evidence appears inconclusive, Cunningham believes it is impossible that Vesalius may have remained untouched by Luther's arguments and methods. Vesalius grew up in the Netherlands during Luther's confrontation with Rome, and he studied in Paris at a time when Luther's teachings were impacting French thought. The question, then, is not whether Vesalius was a self-avowed or closeted Protestant; rather, the question is, can Vesalius' intellectual preoccupations be linked to those of Lutheran Protestantism? The answer resounds: yes.

> The Reformation's success in sixteenth-century Europe can be explained partly by the skill with which its propagandists mustered against the Roman Church notions basic to the medieval definition of Christendom. They positioned themselves on the side of the spiritual against the putative carnal, and attributed to the enemy a mindless ritualism, recycling for their polemical descriptions of Catholic rites late antique depictions of pagan cults, but perhaps more pointedly the opposition between the New Law and the Old Law.[17]

In reference to the established university authorities, Vesalius at least twice uses the phrase, *Rabinis illis* ("by these Rabbis"), as a generalized sarcasm.[18] Clearly, at this time and place, the religious-secular divide was still a bit hazy, and yet we catch the traces of its positioning(s). On the one hand, Vesalius speaks from within one side of an already brewing cultural conflict (the so-called decline of medical practice), borrowing perhaps categorical descriptions from another structurally similar conflict (the Protestant Reformation), and on the other hand, he projects a discourse-to-be at least partially demarcated in style and scope by the content he necessarily excludes: the ritual of doing for the sake of doing. It is important to note here that I may have over-extended my analysis. It could be said that I have placed too much emphasis on one instance of word choice at the cost of Vesalius' full project. After all, Vesalius is not specifically talking *about* ritual as ritual, yet I would insist that his inclusion of the word, itself, suggests its handling and its inevitable prohibition.

In *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture*, James W. Watts discusses the need to heed rhetoric when attempting to theorize about ritual either in general or according to a specific context. He calls our attention to a fact which is so obvious it is too often occluded in its very obviousness: "texts are not rituals and rituals are not texts."[19] Further he writes,

> When a text describes rituals, the first question interpreters should ask is "why?" The answer is often given explicitly in the text: rituals are usually described to persuade people to perform them, or to perform them in this particular way, or to

17. Buc, 164.

18. Daniel Garrison, Malcolm Hast and Northwestern University, trans., *Andrea Vesalius' De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, http://vesalius.northwestern.edu/ (accessed: November 11, 2008), *Preface*, footnote 15.

19. James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29.

> accept the text and/or its author's authority to mandate the ritual and, perhaps, to officiate over it. Attention to the purposes served by ritual texts should therefore lead to analyzing their means of persuasion, that is, their rhetoric.[20]

I would like to flip this around and still preserve its meaning. In the case of Vesalius, ritual is (rather implicitly) described to persuade people *not* to perform "it." Indeed, Vesalius defines the "it" before he defines "ritual" as such. We are to accept his authority based on his rejection of "ritual." "Ritual", here, is thus *implied*. In other words, this is *not* a "ritual text." He makes a similar, perhaps more telling, move in the closing of his preface. In a stroke of humility (or is this a latent critique?), he indirectly praises Charles V.:

> and I have thought it still less proper for me to enumerate any of your praises here, lest I pour darkness instead of light on them by my meager and unpracticed style—especially since the hackneyed ***ritual*** of prefaces is altogether to be condemned in which indiscriminately and with little regard to merit, as if in accordance with some standard formula and for the sake of some cheap gratuity, everyone is routinely credited with admirable learning, singular prudence, remarkable clemency, keen judgment . . .[21]

Again, we see Vesalius' project defined against "ritual." Indeed, his word choice can no longer appear arbitrary. Second, ritual takes on a few more meanings: it is indiscriminate with little regard to merit. It adheres (harmfully) to some standard formula. It is routine, and in this case, it is written, a text.[22] Strikingly, in an annotated footnote, Daniel H. Garrison, translator and organizer of the online Vesalius project at Northwestern University, comments that Vesalius, himself, adheres to the formula of a standard preface. To call him out, however, to say that Vesalius is not practicing that which he preaches, or rather, to say he is practicing that

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20. Ibid., 35.

21. Vesalius, Preface.

22. Talal Asad uses entries in the Encyclopedia Britannica to note the change in common conceptions of "ritual." Before 1852, ritual was defined as a book containing a script for religious ceremonies, yet by 1910, there was a shift in emphasis, from text to action. See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003), 56–57. How might Vesalius' rhetoric implicate the textual import of "ritual" at the time? As a critique of the traditional anatomy lesson divided into three roles (lector, ostensor, sector), the text does seem to direct the action. And yet, Vesalius offers his own text, the *Fabrica*.

which he preaches against, would simply be to re-inscribe the divide and to take up camp with the other side.

What, then, might be the problem? My argument is not intended to paint a tragic story to which I may offer a radical solution: I would not recommend we stand on behalf of ritual by recalling its deeper meaning or structure; that is, I am not suggesting we should defend the Galenic model, or the three-part lesson, and chastise Vesalius, nor am I suggesting that contemporary bio-medical science must make room, once and for all, for ritual's long-forgotten sway. I simply mean to illustrate that this is the very problem with which theorists must contend, either within or without the field which typically takes up ritual as an object of study. Indeed, the problem appears more urgent in its latency *outside* of a field or framework that directly deals with ritual as such. Therefore, I would like to turn to one such author whose treatment of Vesalius and the early modern "culture of dissection" does not simply take up the term, *ritual*, but goes so far as to make *ritual* integral to his argument.

As previously mentioned, in his work, *Books of the Body*, Andrea Carlino does well to extinguish the quasi-mythical notion that Vesalius' plea for empirically guided epistemologies resulted—with each anatomist's hand and knife at the helm of the dissection table—in a sudden all-out revolution. To the modern audience, the notion of empirical verification seems so obvious as not to be questioned, and so scholars often employ the terms "Pre-Vesalian" and "Vesalian," as a categorical distinction between two so-called historical realities. Although Carlino's argument requires a distinct division as a working beginning, he eliminates the progressive stride of time from his nominative constructions; he instead borrows W. Heckscher's term, *quodlibetarian*, to refer to the *lector-ostensor-sector* model, wherein reading space and dissection space were carefully delineated, presumably because it traditionally closed with a discussion or *disputatio*.[23] Although Carlino has dropped direct references to time, he nonetheless implicitly solidifies the

23. Carlino, *Books of the Body*, 13. In footnote 9, Carlino somewhat explains his choice: "The 'quodlibetarian model' is the definition used by W. Heckscher, in *Rembrandt's Anatomy of Dr. Nicolaas Tulp: An Iconological Study* (New York, 1958). He describes the *quodlibet* as: 'the sophisticated public disputes that, from the thirteenth century onward, had become, as it were, the show windows through which the non academic outsider could observe and enjoy the goings-on of the universities'," 45–46.

fissure when he unwittingly implements Vesalius' own rhetoric. He notes, despite Vesalius' new method, the public anatomy lesson "remained tied to the formalized ritual of the academic tradition sanctioned by the university statutes."[24] Carlino, it seems, has clenched—from the hands of Vesalius himself—what Buc astutely calls, the "mantle of legitimacy."[25] Vesalius' project is once again defined over and against the *rabbinis* of the academic tradition and their "strictly formalized ritual."[26]

Carlino does not stop here. Indeed, the reader can almost predict his next move. While university statutes limited the availability of corpses (to either criminals or foreigners) as well as the time of year during which public dissections could legally take place (between January and February), Vesalius and his compatriots often conducted dissections behind closed doors. Even within the pages of his *Fabrica*, Vesalius regales himself for once stealing a corpse from the gallows in order to dissect it in secrecy. Accordingly, Carlino draws a public/private distinction, which will be essential to his central argument. *Ritual*, it seems, will not simply describe the *quodlibetarian* model or form, it will further encompass the entire public domain of anatomy lessons constricted by both University and legal statutes. He notes that a 1602 decree mandated that public dissections take place during the Carnival vacations in Rome.[27] Carlino, then, derives from this fact a functional-sociological analysis. He remarks,

> Carnival, as is well known, is the only clearly defined time of the year during which certain behavior (generally considered transgressive) is permitted by virtue of an implicit social pact. If the dissection was considered macabre and sacrilegious in certain respects and was looked upon as barely permissible—an act that avoided prohibition only by being circumscribed by certain regulations and by a rigorous ceremonial—then to perform it during Carnival implied that it

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24. Ibid., 40.
25. Buc, 226.
26. Carlino, *Books of the Body*, 8. Here, Carlino adds another component to Vesalius' contention with the quodlibetarian model: "students acquired such technical experience, as Vesalius himself recalls, by practicing on animal corpses, and certainly not on human cadavers, that were used only according to university regulations . . . on the occasion of public anatomy lectures. These lectures were celebrated according to a strictly formalized ritual once or twice yearly."
27. Carlino, *Books of the Body*, 80.

> too, along with other transgressive practices, was temporarily channeled in to the sphere of the licit by its ritualization.[28]

Carlino's analysis is nearly identical to Durkheim's discussion of ritual. As an illustrative example, Durkheim studies the Australian "corrobbori," a religious ceremony of chaotic "collective effervescence", or a period without boundaries,[29] similar to Carlino's description of the time of Carnival. The corrobbori allows for the release of pent-up psychical energies, of "feelings of weakness and subjugation."[30] This discharge of passions "[awakens] in its members the idea of forces existing outside them, both dominating and supporting them—in sum, religious forces."[31] Further, such forces, although they are products and reflections of humanity, assume a life of their own; they are externalized and objectified and ultimately engender reactions in humanity, often re-affirming social cohesion.

This move, although common in the historiography of this period, is severely confused. First, Carlino follows suit with Vesalius' pursuit against *ritual* (as defined by the *quodlibetarian* model); then, in an attempt to emphasize the slow adaptation of Vesalius' ideal, he grafts a twentieth-century sociological understanding of *ritual* onto the statutory norms of public dissections, which supposedly served to legitimize dissection in general, and thus Vesalius' own project—somehow outside the confines of *ritual* activity.[32] Although the latter analysis seems more appealing to the modern ear, Carlino almost would have done himself better had he stuck

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28. Ibid., 81.
29. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 217.
30. Durkheim, 225.
31. Durkheim, 216.
32. The work of Katherine Park also fortifies my critique of Carlino. In her article, "The Criminal and Saintly Body," in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 47, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 1–33, Park endeavors to obliterate the long-held "myth" attributed to the medieval and early modern periods which holds that dissection violated the sanctity of the body or that the body's insides were perceived as "dangerous, contaminating, or polluting." She sees this "myth" as a reading backwards of twentieth-century anxieties and re-diagnoses the cause for concern: detractors were less worried about dissection as such than they were about the anatomist *as executioner*; they resisted in part out of fear that they—or their family members—might end up alive on the dissector's table. Accordingly, Carlino's ritual *purpose* seems misplaced, and indeed, borrowed from twentieth-century functionalist approaches.

with Vesalius' rhetorical divide. In Buc's words, "native cultural practices both invite us to follow their syllogisms and force us to caution: we should not supplement their ideas with ours."[33] This is the result that social scientific discourse often betrays. More than this, in the style of *Begriffsgeschichte*, Buc track's the conceptual history of the term *ritual* itself. In brief, just as the interpretive works of Christians sought to overthrow a Jewish dispensation *vis-à-vis* a carefully constructed reprobation of spiritless *rites*, so did the Protestants attempt to out-interpret Catholics (indeed, we see the traces of both of these histories at work in Vesalius' preface), and later, most unwittingly, the Sociologists/Anthropologists, the *natives*. During the Reformation, the Protestants themselves recognized the constitutive force of rituals, and so, they stripped them of their Catholic and/or religious referents, and placed them within the acceptable sphere of the political. Thus, according to Buc, Durkheim's (and so Carlino's) formulation is still *theological*, one more hand-off in a *longue durée* mantle of legitimacy, or worse yet, superiority. More than this, sociological analyses often render history meaningless, especially when forced upon texts.

To bring this discussion back full-circle, I would like to once again highlight Catherine Bell's attempt to re-define theoretical approaches to ritual. She reminds us that instead of "[imposing] categories of what is or is not ritual, it may be more useful to look at how human activities establish and manipulate their own differentiation and purposes—in the very doing of the act within the context of other ways of acting." I would like to temper this idea with an eye on rhetoric—that is, how authors distinguish, in verbal form, that which they believe they are doing, and presumably, that which everyone *should* endeavor to do (or not do), from a given context. Bell then uses the term "ritualization" to call attention to how certain activities are privileged above others. She comments, "ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane,' and ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors."[34] This seems useful, but I wonder if it ignores or risks mystifying those activities, such as dissection, which are negatively-defined as *not* ritual. Part of my hesitation is that I want to keep

33. Buc, 226.
34. Bell, 74.

the category open from both ends; at the same time, I want to investigate how it became possible to call a practice, activity, performance, or even text, "ritual," or "not ritual." I am not so much interested in resolving this tension as I am in using it as a productive (not defective) nexus of meanings. Just as a musical score refuses flattening, we ought to consider the many *voices* of ritual, sponsors and dissenters alike. That said, Vesalius was clear. His project was not ritual. Do we simply call him wrong? Or do we say he was correct and reserve *ritual* to describe the so-called legitimizing role of public dissections? Again, I think both of these attempts miss the point.

In closing, all the authors treated here nonetheless seem to be onto something. As I mentioned before, the moment something is called *ritual*, there is a conflict underway. To rest on this conflict, then, seems methodologically meritorious. I would add to this notion that theorists of ritual might glean new openings of analysis not by simply investigating activities as they are called ritual or remind us of our own understanding(s) of ritual, but by investigating those which are classified as not-ritual. It is my contention that the bio-medical paradigm, which has at least partially evolved from within (and without) this discourse of difference, would be a good place to start. Further, because the appearance of *ritual* within contemporary medical discourse has been largely relegated to issues of *practice*—as either a method for healing the ill, or treating living human beings at large—we should begin to question why and how useful it is to maintain the thought/action or research/practice split. We should further question why this rift has distracted us from investigating "ritual"—or "*not-ritual*," as the case may be—as related to practices aimed at the acquisition and transmission of knowledge. What researchers now do behind closed doors should perhaps be brought out into the fore both for and by a cross-disciplinary discussion.