Manifesting Medicine: Bodies and Machines (review)

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Bulletin of the History of Medicine, Volume 74, Number 2, Summer 2000, pp. 380-382 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/bhm.2000.0069*

Robert Bud, Bernard Finn, and Helmuth Trischler, eds. *Manifesting Medicine: Bodies and Machines*. Artefacts: Studies in the History of Science and Technology, vol. 1. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999. xviii + 180 pp. Ill. $24.00 (softcover).

By fostering a high level of curatorial scholarship, the Smithsonian Institution has long been known as a "university without students." It is, therefore, fitting that the Smithsonian, in association with London's Science Museum and the Deutsches Museum in Munich, should take the lead in presenting the fruit of recent scholarship in the history of medical technology and medical museology. *Manifesting Medicine* is the inaugural volume in their jointly sponsored series entitled "Artefacts: Studies in the History of Science and Technology." This collection of essays provides a welcome sampler of efforts to wrest cultural meaning from mute medical artifacts, and to assess the changing role of museums in that process.

The opening essay by Kim Pelis on the cultural history of blood transfusion is the most intriguing, stylistically, of the volume. By means of a fictional correspondence (à la Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) penned by a hypothesized young friend of the accoucheur James Blundell, Pelis establishes the intellectual climate of romanticism that led to a renewed interest in the transfusion of blood. That Blundell's vitalistic conception of blood shaped the precise form of his transfusion instruments is less convincing, however. What Pelis sees as a "maze of

passages to preserve the motion of the blood" (p. 21) is to this viewer simply two one-way valves (fig. 4); they have less to do with "preserving the blood's fitness" (p. 21) than with simply preventing back-flow. This minor complaint aside, Pelis's approach is refreshing and engaging.

The next essay, by Klaus Vogel, is also artifact-centered; its subject is the Transparent Man (and Woman) seen in health museums since 1930. Vogel recounts how the didactic and symbolic function of these artifacts changed to accommodate the ideologies of successive German political regimes, as well as evolving museologic practices. Now, on the eve of his seventieth birthday, the Transparent Man will again be at center stage in the millennial exhibit, simply entitled *Man,* being prepared by the German Hygiene Museum (Dresden).

Inspired by the "new history of technology," essays by Ghislaine Lawrence, Johannes Abel, and Patricia Gossel explore the social construction of medical artifacts. In her study of profound hypothermia apparatus for cardiac surgery, Lawrence demonstrates that medical devices are shaped by the solutions and idioms (or paradigms, in Kuhnian terms) peculiar to the specific technological milieu their designers inhabit. Abel, in turn, reveals how the Geiger counter was utilized to deal with a variety of radiation threats, ranging from industrial exposure to fallout from atmospheric nuclear testing; in each context, the instrument provided a means to maintain social order in the face of concerns over radiation safety. The advent of the "compliance package" for oral contraceptives is the subject of Gossel's fascinating contribution, which demonstrates that some innovations in medical technology stem from patients' concerns and originate outside the medical-industrial complex.

The book concludes with Timothy M. Boon's assessment of the shifting landscape of contemporary medical museum exhibition and Ken Arnold's review of the historical evolution of medical museums. Boon, co-curator of *Health Matters,* the Science Museum's gallery devoted to twentieth-century medicine, explores the changing dynamic of collecting-interpreting-exhibiting in medical museums. In particular, he faults curators for adhering to a previous generation's positivistic historiography. That is changing, however, as the interplay of science, medicine, and society is subject to more nuanced approaches, and as curators borrow from them to make sense of the objects in their care. Collecting strategies and the style(s) of exhibition are also compelled to change, Boon contends, as curators assimilate the new historiography.

In the companion essay, Arnold explores the changing role of museums in medical history: their origins as cabinets of curiosity, and their subsequent evolution as adjuncts to medical instruction. He traces their metamorphosis into historical institutions, some uncritically venerating the medical profession, while others strive to place medicine within a broader cultural context. Arnold lauds the ascendance of temporary thematic exhibits, particularly those that explore the conjunction of art and science. He also raises the as-yet-unfulfilled promise residing in artifact-driven exhibits: rather than simply employing artifacts in a

supportive role, as mere illustrations for a script, Arnold proposes that museums should mount exhibits that reveal "what objects can, in their own right, uniquely divulge about the history of medicine" (p. 163).

These two complementary essays provide a fitting conclusion to the volume, as well as a comprehensive and stimulating overview of the field. I only wish that something like this had been available when I entered the field some twenty years ago! As a bonus, the extensive notes for each essay provide a guide to the growing corpus of scholarship emanating from medical museums today. And finally, Robert Bud, Bernard Finn, and Helmuth Trischler are to be congratulated for launching the series, "Artefacts," with such a welcome and worthy addition to that literature.

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