Imagining Illness: Public Health and Visual Culture (review)

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permitting a new form of eugenics by virtue of a shift in medical norms, such that neo-eugenic practices are no longer viewed as misconduct. Such well-intentioned gymnastics distract them from larger, more immediate problems, such as peer-pressure eugenics, which they hint at but do not probe. Finally, they demonize the Progressive Era and fret over "flawed genetic determinism" (p. 213) (Is there an unflawed genetic determinism?) leading to a neo-Progressivism. Twenty-first-century individualized medicine is touted, by the McCabes and others, as anodyne against a return to coercive, collectivist Progressive eugenics. But the Progressive Era was also a time of liberal politics, community spirit, and a rough-hewn Enlightenment philosophy. In contrast, contemporary individualized medicine has emerged within a political context of selfish rational-choice individualism, a lurch to the political Right, and the abandonment of collectivist ideas such as public education, social welfare programs, and collective bargaining. Individualism solves some problems and creates others.

The final essay, by Maxwell Mehlman, seeks to clarify the definition of eugenics, describe modern eugenics, and foreshadow future eugenic developments. It usefully shows that the line between government and private action is not as sharp as we tend to think. Furthermore, he points out that some institutions favored by liberals, such as universal health care, could encourage eugenic practices such as genetic discrimination. He does not mention another very distinct possibility: genetic registries.

Valuable and welcome as these studies are, the collection's focus on the anniversary of the Indiana law almost inevitably overemphasizes Progressive Era science and policy. The Progressive Era was an anomaly in the history of eugenics; most eugenics has been softer, more voluntary, and less rigidly hereditarian than the so-called mainline eugenics of that period. Gentler, subtler efforts at human improvement are more in line with the original conception of Francis Galton. Acknowledging this makes contemporary eugenic trends that much thornier for scholars to understand, yet that much easier for the public to swallow.

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David Serlin, ed. *Imagining Illness: Public Health and Visual Culture.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. xxxvii + 285 pp. Ill. $27.50 (978-0-8166-4823-8).

Like many such collections, this gathering offers little more than the sum of its parts. Even though some of the scholars are eminent and a few of the studies are excellent, I could not find any synergy among the chapters as they rarely if ever refer to each other. To help *Bulletin* readers find what might interest them, the chapters are examined seriatim.

Focusing on Rockefeller Foundation–sponsored hookworm campaigns in Australia and Asia, Lenore Manderson's study mines a particularly rich collection at the National Library of Medicine. Among the papers of Wilbur Augustus Sawyer, "an earnest amateur photographer" (p. 30) and a leader for public health campaigns in the 1910s and '20s, historians will find fascinating photographs, many of which have never been published.

Liping Bu examines an American doctor working in Asian public health campaigns, William Wesley Peter, a medical missionary in China in the 1910s and the '20s, who employed posters, films, banners, and slide shows in popular exhibitions. The ubiquity of a visual approach to public health promotion in this era is suggested by the fact that some of Peter's first exhibit materials were not generated by him but rather purchased from an illustrated catalogue of items developed by the American Medical Association for its own use and afterward sold by them to others.

Gregg Mitman provides a sensitive analysis of racially distinct imagery in promotional films and poster photographs created by the National Tuberculosis Association and the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis between the 1930s and the 1950s. In addition to the images themselves, he has other evidence to show the ways foundation leaders weighed when and how to shift successfully from segregated to integrated photography.

Kirsten Ostherr contrasts two quite different publicity films about health care in Africa. *Medicine in the Tropics* (1948) was made for a subsidiary of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company to showcase its benevolent activities for plantation workers in Liberia. *Medicine of Liberation: Aspects of Primary Health Care in Mozambique* (1978) was made for the World Health Organization to celebrate the social innovations of the Mozambique Liberation Front.

Katherine Ott's chapter, "Contagion, Public Health, and the Visual Culture of Nineteenth-Century Skin," works best as an introduction to the intellectual problems early dermatology experts faced in classifying skin ailments, the arrangements developed, and the essential scientific service played by published illustrations.

In "Maps as Geographic Propaganda for Public Health," Mark Monmonier brings a wealth of expertise to the subject of disease maps in the United Kingdom and the United States from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth. He makes propaganda the keyword here. In contrast to the familiar ways disease maps function in surveillance and epidemiology, "maps are inherently more effective, if not more common, as persuasive graphics than as research tools" (p. 109).

William H. Helfand's essay on public health posters in the twentieth century taps examples from his own rich collection of medical art as well as items he has donated to public institutions like the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the National Library of Medicine. Besides explaining periodization, sponsorship, intention, and artistic techniques and styles, Helfand argues for a historical shift that is counterintuitive to readers living in an age when it seems common to show anything and everything. Noting that "dramatic posters were more the rule than the exception in the early years of the twentieth century," he observes that "con-

temporary designs have [often] gotten away from the more forceful images that greeted passers-by when public health campaigns first began" (p.141).

The pictures in Shawn Michelle Smith's essay on the "image and icon" of the public health nurse support her analysis that "photographs were employed to manage new anxieties (for nurses themselves and a wider public audience), scripting responses to the public health nurse's new roles, and claiming new prerogatives for her," operating "not simply as documentation, but as argumentation" (p. 144). This chapter's value exceeds the limits of a focus on one organization (the National Organization of Public Health Nursing), a single cache of documents (in the National Library of Medicine), and a single decade (the 1930s).

Even with erudite analysis and powerful images, a single chapter cannot do justice to the book-length project suggested by this chapter's title, "Visual Imagery and Epidemics in the Twentieth Century." Among other points, Roger Cooter and Claudia Stein observe that, despite present-day scholars' greater familiarity with posters from the early decades, "the 'golden age' of the epidemical public health poster was not during the interwar period . . . but during the Cold War" (p. 184).

"The Image of the Child in Postwar British and U.S. Psychoanalysis" by Lisa Cartwright says little about public health imagery in the traditional sense. Here "the image of the child" is a changing mental concept in the minds of professionals. The three figures included are not images of children but photographs showing Dr. René A. Spitz in an article and a film directed to psychiatric professionals, not the general public. Cartwright connects Spitz to a successful movement for reform in the institutional care of orphaned infants in mid-twentieth-century Europe.

"Performing Live Surgery on Television and the Internet since 1945" by David Serlin has a narrower focus than its title might suggest and has few connections with what readers of the *Bulletin* would picture as public health. Serlin's examples are interesting, and his sketch of general changes in broadcast television is helpful, but the research core of this chapter reports on only six broadcasts of "live" surgery 1947 and 1958. Serlin makes a claim for their significance even as he immediately acknowledges that "beginning in the early 1960s, the popular spectacle of live surgery on television began to decline" (p. 235).

"Imagining Moral Disorders as a Public Health Crisis" by Emily Martin explores self-help and other popular presentations of "moral hygiene" since the 1970s. Martin reveals far-older notions of temperament embedded in much of this material, and she shows how today's schemata revive visual expressions of the tempers articulated in the "moral thermometer" of Benjamin Rush from the early nineteenth century and in the moral charts of Emil Krepelin from the 1920s.

Martin's use of historical knowledge to understand the present and the future—an approach running through this collection—is a lesson that historians already take to heart. We might hope that *Imagining Illness* will help bring this salutary perspective to the attention of nonhistorians in the world of visual culture scholarship.

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