

Book Reviews

Samuel J. M. M. Alberti and Elizabeth Hallam (eds.), *Medical Museums: Past, Present, Future*, London: Royal College of Surgeons of England, 2013, paperback J25, pp. vi+250

This beautifully produced and highly readable volume was published to mark the bicentenary of the opening of the Hunterian Museum. Rather than focus exclusively on the Royal College of Surgeon's renowned collection, the text introduces readers to 15 medical museums from across Europe and North America, addressing the origins of key anatomical and pathological collections. Authors invariably highlight some of their most fascinating specimens and demonstrate the challenges that museum curators have always encountered in the display, financing and preservation of their collections. Having visited more than half of the museums featured in this volume, much of this was familiar ground. Reading about the museums' histories, their current missions and future plans in a single volume was fascinating and invited wider comparisons as these collections' pasts are usually discussed independently. Without a doubt, these histories and the authors' collective agendas will interest many other historians, but also museum scholars, healthcare practitioners, as well as interested lay readers, because chapters address key issues in museology and medical education, but are also lavishly illustrated and well written.

The volume begins with a succinct introduction that usefully reminds readers of the origins and functions of anatomical collections, stressing the centrality of these spaces to medical pedagogy, but also their wider cultural contexts, given the way in which their histories 'are thoroughly entangled in the conflicts, politics and material negotiations of life and death, from war to empire' (7). Individual stories serve to animate the thousands of specimens crammed into the shelves, showcases, halls and basements of these learning spaces and recount a lively past. Each chapter brings select curiosities to life, but also emphasizes the dynamic nature of what many surely presume were dusty galleries filled with preserved bodies and their diseased parts. So regular was change at museums, there was in fact little chance of any dust actually settling on these relics.

The pace of change at museums is evident in Alberti's expertly guided tour of John Hunter's eponymous collection from its acquisition by the College of Surgeons in 1799, and opening in 1813, to its current status as an important learning centre and tourist attraction. In 1831, it opened for three days instead of two, became the country's preeminent museum of natural history under its curator Richard Owen, and eventually admitted women in 1882. Surgical instruments were donated in greater numbers from the 1870s, an odontological collection (of teeth) was actively acquired in the early twentieth century under conservator Arthur Keith, who also gradually transferred much of the zoological material to the British Museum. In the Second World War, around two-thirds of the museum's 65,000 objects were destroyed during air raids, some of the unoccupied space thereafter being filled with x-rays, clinical illustrations textbooks and tools, rather than just anatomical specimens. Reopened in 1963, the museum displayed the 'dynamic revelation of pathological processes' (26), at a time when the place of museums in education was in decline. As the status of museums in medical education waned and museums themselves began to suffer their own pathologies, missions again changed and the better placed collections, like the Hunterian, managed to attract a new generation of funders, were refurbished to better undertake educational missions, and began to admit many more thousands of public visitors each year.

Most of the chapters in this volume begin with proud declarations of annual visitor

numbers, 30,000 in Edinburgh, 700,000 at the London Science Museum, and far fewer at the precarious Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. Chapters foreground prized and unusual contents, from Irish giants to comprehensive collections of contraceptives and medical drawings, or even artwork created by patients and artists in residence. However, they resist descending into purely promotional tracts. Individually, chapters by Henry, Söderqvist and Chelnick touch on neglected specimens, especially those related to dentistry and odontology. Waxes are also given considerable attention by Maerker, Rhode, Ebenstein and Condrau. Condrau equally addresses the increasing presence of the patients and their experiences in these collections, as do Bud, Chelnick and Schnalke. As importantly, Schnalke reminds readers of the ethical context of collecting, both under National Socialism and as part of the everyday work of current staff, as do Hicks and the editors in their introduction.

In terms of the 'future', as highlighted in the volume's subtitle, some chapters are more illuminating than others. Many medical museums, like the Science Museum in London, are currently undergoing further rounds of refurbishment, while others have clearly led the way in terms of reaching out to new audiences and using old material to ask original and challenging questions, often on shoe-string budgets. The Medical Museion in Copenhagen in this respect comes across as visionary, even daring, in its decision to display items with minimal text, and challenging curators to work with collections in ways that 'use exhibitions to find things out...and not just regurgitate what is already known' (152). No longer purely historically oriented, the Museion staff draw on science studies, material culture and design studies, among other fields, in order to inspire their visitors as implied by the Museion's 2003 name change. Like other museums, not least Ebenstein's *Morbid Anatomy* project, they have a strong online presence, and its vision, on-going discussions and the challenges staff set themselves are communicated via its blog and various social media platforms.

There are of course many more medical museums around the world than simply those included in this volume. I had hoped to learn something about collections in South America, Russia, India, China and the Middle East, but these will certainly attract greater attention in the future. Meanwhile, the 80 medical collections, which existed in teaching hospitals in 1950 in the United Kingdom alone, will continue to dwindle, or soon face futures as precarious as some unfortunate cases discussed in this book. Like the *memento mori* contemplated by earlier museum visitors that were intended to remind viewers of their own impending deaths, these less optimistic tales will serve as similar reminders to museum curators facing extremely challenging times and, in some instances, potential closure. That said, and as reiterated in Arnold and Chaplin's afterword, the 'medical museum is dead' (229). Its latest incarnations, however, are as lively and provocative as they were during the days when throngs of students carefully studied the contents of Hunter's jars and polished cabinets.

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Carol Scott (ed.), *Museums and Public Value: Creating Sustainable Futures*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013, hardback J45.00, pp. xvii + 189

Intuitively, I have always assumed that museums exist to produce 'public value', without using this phrase. Over my thirty-plus years as a museologist, I've realized that most museum operations, as well as their related funding/policy systems, are not designed with public value in mind. Carol Scott has assembled a valuable collection of essays, written by a diverse group of museum practitioners and academics, exploring the notion of 'public value' and its potential to foster meaningful change within the museum world. This is a book written using academic conventions and has a certain density to it – but for those who are passionate about museums realizing their potential for public relevancy, there is much to think about here.

Museums and Public Value is a relatively small volume (under two hundred pages, including index), but packed with substantial ideas. The 12 chapters involve 17 contributors, from three continents. In her introduction, Scott sets the stage for the rest of the book by offering a detailed account of the notion of 'public value', as developed in the UK by Mark Moore in his

1995 book *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*. Scott writes that 'public value as a theory, model and practice addresses management issues central to [museums'] ongoing sustainability as a sector including: adaptability..., accountability..., audiences..., assets... and advocacy' (xiii). Moore's approach revolves around his 'Public Value Strategic Triangle', which lays out three critical elements – The Authorizing Environment (e.g. government policy which frames museum operations); Operational Capacity (e.g. the ability of a museum to set effective goals and strategies to achieve public value); and Public Value Outcomes (e.g. real impacts on the community/society). Essentially, a public value approach involves planning for beneficial and meaningful outcomes within communities. It is easier said than done. But Scott suggests that 'as public sector spending comes under intense scrutiny over the next few years, museums may find that adopting a public value approach assists them to be selective, choosing what is sustainable to achieve maximum public benefit rather than always trying to "do more with less"' (12).

Although the 'public value' concept was developed in the UK, it has captured the imaginations of academics and progressive museologists in other parts of the world. Following Scott's introduction, the first of three sections, entitled 'The Operational Environment: Public Value Building Blocks', provides the context for the first set of essays. American researchers Mark Weinberg and Kate Leeman place the notion of public value into the context of strategic management and leadership, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities for museums. Some of the key steps in managing towards public value outcomes, say Weinberg and Leeman, include: 'assessing the environment and institutional components; defining a value proposition; articulating a value chain; aligning systems to the value chain; and, evaluating results by analyzing key data' (23). Such reflections may appear abstract, but seem essential for understanding how a museum's leadership can re-design cultural/museum systems to improve the public value of that organization's offerings.

Randi Korn and Mary Ellen Munley, both highly respected museum professionals in the USA, offer chapters that provide insights from their years on the front lines of public program innovation, experimentation, and audience research. Readers will find Korn's 'Cycle of Intentional Practice' to be a helpful and grounding tool for planning with greater *intention*. Striving for 'relevance', Korn argues, is essential if museums are to have public value – and she points out that 'relevance to whom?' has to be sorted out. People in the 'authorizing environment' operate with one set of expectations, the public a different set and the museum staff often have a third (or even multiple internal perspectives). Creating effective linkages and alignment amongst these various spheres, Mary Ellen Munley brings theory and practice together in a related but different way – by focusing on evaluation and feedback loops. She introduces specific museum programs into the mix and shines a light on how well developed public value program initiatives can lead to measurable impacts in the public. In addition, Munley offers philosophical insights into how the role(s) of museums are shifting, specifically identifying the emergence of museums as facilitators of well being (personal) and as agents of societal change.

Section B is devoted to 'Case Studies: Implementing Public Value'. From the other side of the planet from where Mark Moore developed his notion of 'public value', Mike Houlihan, Director of the Te Papa Tongarewa (New Zealand's national museum), reflects on Te Papa's reinvention of itself, involving a process stretching over more than two decades. Houlihan speaks of how important it is to scan the larger society in order to identify insights into the cultural issues that are shaping the society at any given time. Houlihan makes the case that museums need to develop the skills and inclination to be 'learning organizations', with the capacity to both understand and adapt to the changing world around it.

Of all museum professionals, it is the educator who has traditionally had the closest relationship with the public. Veteran museum educator Ben Garcia understands the potential inherent in staff that has direct contact with the public, as well as the challenges resulting from traditional museum hierarchies that offer educators little authority.

In a chapter called 'The Public as Co-producers: Making the London, Sugar and Slavery Gallery, Museum of London Docklands', five co-authors put forth an example of how one museum has treated an historical human abuse that lingered, morphed and ultimately persisted for generations. Museums have untapped potential to address socially relevant issues.

In Section C, five authors focus their attentions on 'Working with the Authorizing Environment'. Lisa Conolly brings the perspective of her career in Australia as a cultural statistician. Drawing on professional experiences ranging from front-line museum work to managing the Institute for Museum and Library Services in the USA, Masha Semmel's contribution offers some wonderful insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with striving to create public value. Both David O'Brien and Sharon Heal provide surprising, but refreshingly sceptical, viewpoints about how well the 'public value' framework may work within the contexts of the UK and museums. Joanne Orr, CEO of Museums Galleries Scotland, provides the final chapter – discussing the progressive work undertaken in Scotland in recent times and the potential she feels lies ahead.

At its core, Carol Scott's book is a rallying cry for museum professionals to reposition their organizations with a clear commitment to relevant, public outcomes. Many authors reaffirm the need to extend this mandate beyond traditional visitors and take stock of the larger cultural needs of our changing societies. Moore's notion of public value offers a useful lens to expand the dialogue. However, from my perspective, there are some shortcomings. I frequently wanted more practical grounding points for the theory – especially stories of organizational change that resulted in new programs, new staff competencies, new partnerships and new measures of success. As a 'culture and sustainability specialist', I was also struck by the use of the term 'sustainability' in the book's sub-title, considering the lack of any real discussion about what sustainability means in this context of public value, beyond the continuation of museums as organizations. And challenging the tradition of placing museums (and culture in general) within the context of leisure-time would have opened the options more fully. Nonetheless, *Museums and Public Values* seems capable of stimulating many worthwhile conversations, experimentation and hopefully change.

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