Mary E. Fissell  
mfissell@jhu.edu

The Work of Healing: Towards a Materialist History of Medicine  
150.738 Fall 2020

This research seminar explores how the so-called “material turn” might be fruit-ful in our field. So far, this analytic has not been used much in the history of medicine; we might think of it as the juncture of material culture, medical technology, and clinical encounter. The focus is on bedside medicine; we look at what a wide range of healers actually did to help sufferers, and use materiality as a means of accessing and understanding that healing encounter. The course’s center of gravity is pre-modern, because that’s where my expertise lies, but we venture well into the 19th century and look at practices as varied as the use of relics; uroscopy; temperature-taking; bloodletting; and anesthesia. We’ll be reading a range of secondary sources and some primary ones as well.

The course is discussion-based; students are expected to come prepared to discuss the readings each week. Readings are available via Welch e-Res and Blackboard. Students will present twice on sources of their choosing from a larger “methodology” bibliography; will write a brief research paper on a topic of their choosing; and design a pedagogical exercise. Assessment is based on all of these aspects of the course, which is pass/fail with a detailed narrative evaluation. Given current circumstances, the course will be taught via Zoom, meeting Wednesdays 2-4 pm. Some days we may run to 4:30.

Learning Objectives:

— Build breadth of knowledge in the history of medicine and in studies of materiality.  
— Develop basic research skills in the history of medicine.  
— Analyze primary sources and develop arguments utilizing them.  
— Develop skills in note-taking and summarizing books and articles.  
— Deploy secondary sources to build an historiographic argument.

The health and wellness of students are of utmost importance to us here at Johns Hopkins. If you are struggling with anxiety, stress, depression, or other wellbeing related concerns, please consider contacting the Johns Hopkins Student Assistance Program (JHSAP). If you are concerned about a friend, please encourage that person to seek out counseling. JHSAP can be reached at 443-287-7000 or jhsap.org. Additional resources are available at https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/getting-help. If you have a disability or any health issue and may require accommodations in this course, please contact the Disabilities Services Coordinator for graduate students in the School of Medicine: GradDisabilityOffice@jhmi.edu, 410-614-3385) to discuss your specific needs.
Sept. 2: Introduction
- We'll discuss the various assignments for the course in class.
- Pedagogy exercise: design a lesson plan for 1 hour class session which brings a materiality perspective to a topic in a larger undergraduate history of medicine course. What readings would you assign? How would you run discussion? Be sure to think about what kind of course (topic, level) this lesson is for, and write learning objectives for the session.
- Research paper: research and write a brief research paper (25 pp) on an optic of your choosing, incorporating some aspect of materiality. A semester is short; focus on interrogating selected primary sources and building a (limited) argument.

Sept. 9: Bandaging
*On the Surgery*, (Hippocratic text) trans. Francis Adams, parts 7-13, 18; see http://classics.mit.edu/Hippocrates/surgery.html
- Before class, choose a bandage from the Sargent text, and spend about 20 minutes trying to replicate it on yourself or a roommate, using paper towels, fabric, whatever you have to hand. Be prepared to discuss your experience in class.
- introduction in class to finding secondary sources.

Sept. 16: Uroscopy

Sept. 23: Relics


—> introduction in class to finding primary sources

Sept. 30: Research Week 1; individual meetings

Oct. 7: Early Modern Surgery


Alexander Morgan, Casebook, selection to be posted to Blackboard. In class we’ll do a brief session on transcription using this manuscript primary source; special thanks to Dr. Michael Whitfield for his work on this source.

Oct 14: Pulse & Mo


You may wish to refresh your memories of Shigehisa Kuriyama’s work on pulse and mo, which you’ve read for other courses. Shigehisa Kuriyama, The Expressiveness of the Body (New York: Zone Books, 1991), esp. 7-60.

—> You will be presenting your initial research topic in class
Oct 21: Touching
—> You will be presenting one primary source for your research paper in class

Oct 28: Research Week 2; individual meetings

Nov. 4: Inoculation
—> You will be presenting one secondary source for your research paper in class.
  What kind of intervention do you want to make in relation to this source?

Nov. 11: Bloodletting

**Nov 18: Anesthesia**
—> Be ready to present your pedagogy exercise in class. Prepare a 1-2 page summary to submit to me that specifies topic; type/level of course; readings; lesson plan; and learning objectives.

**Nov. 25: Thanksgiving Break**

**Dec. 2: Measuring at the Bedside**
—> Be ready to present an update on your research paper in class.