disprove traditional localizationist theories of the brain being "hardwired," and outline the importance of "critical periods" in brain function development.

- Obsessive-compulsive disorder conceptualized as "brain lock," and new strategies for psychotherapy.
- "Phantom limb" pain, its prevention and treatment.

On the negative side, some of the chapter headings seem somewhat sensationalistic and the book relies heavily on anecdotal accounts. The latter are persuasive about the results achievable by determined individuals, but may disappoint scholars of evidence-based medicine (who may, in their skepticism, miss the comments about fMRI confirmation of lasting changes in brain function that accompany a number of these cases). In addition, the use of patients' case histories, even with consent and without identifying information, raises some ethical issues that cannot be set aside simply because the book is well-intentioned.

However, this book may well make us ponder on how politics, pride and shame can delay the recognition of important scientific advances and the research that would provide evidence for their effective use in clinical care.

In a second edition, perhaps the author will provide an improved annotated bibliography containing hyperlinks to abstracts of articles catalogued by PubMed, and suggestions for curriculum changes for medical and nursing schools, rehabilitation medicine and elementary teacher education (see online appendix at www.cmaj.ca/cgi/content/full/177/12/1552/DC1).

As work proceeds on the possible introduction of a developmental trauma disorder diagnosis in the next *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (expected in 2012), I would have preferred to see a focus on this disorder, rather than an extended section on psychoanalysis as "neuroplastic microsurgery." When we consider the number of children affected worldwide by poverty, war, childhood abuse and terrorism, and the posttraumatic consequences of these, we need to emphasize science-based, effective and accessible treatment approaches.

Overall, highly recommended; if you choose not to read it yourself, please

consider donating a copy to your local medical library or medical school curriculum coordinator.

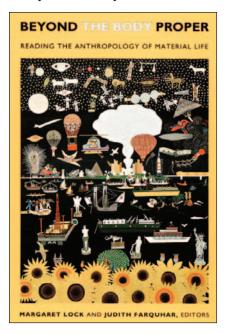
## Ian A. Gillespie MD

Psychiatrist Victoria, BC

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## Body: know thyself



## Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life

Margaret Lock and Judith Farquhar, editors Duke University Press; 2007 688 pp. \$34.95 ISBN: 978-0-8223-3845-1

riting a coherent review of Beyond the Body Proper is a difficult task, given that it is a collection of articles discussing multiple aspects of our perception of the biological, as well as the interrelation between mind and body, known as embodiment. With titles as diverse as "We Always Make Love with Worlds," "Woman Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteen Century," "National Bodies, Unspeakable Acts: The Sexual Politics of Colonial Policy Making," "The Egg and Sperm: How Sci-

ence Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male–Female Roles" and "Quit Snivelling Cryo-Baby, We'll Work Out Which One's Your Mama," it needed a good editor to make sense of it all.

Fortunately, medical anthropologists Margaret Lock and Judith Farguhar were up to the task, and skillfully led readers through the discursive thread and in the understanding of their proposition, which can be summarized as "... comparative scholarship in anthropology, history and the humanities shows that the problem of the body can be read from many kinds of discourses, mundane practices, technologies and relational networks." The book draws from history, philosophy, anthropology and literature to paint a picture of the evolution of knowledge, perceptions and theories of the body and its role in culture.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is its discussion of "local biologies." The term, used by the editors in the introduction, is the unifying theme of the collection: It refers to how every culture has a different view of the body, a context that is internalized and feels "natural" for the members of that culture. In a real postmodern way, the idea of a body "proper," unified, constant through geography and history, is deconstructed to analyze its cultural context and multiple meanings.

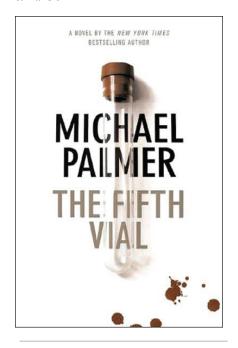
Clinicians will be particularly interested in the last 2 sections, discussing "Bodies at the Margin, Or Attending to Distress and Difference" and "Knowing Systems, Or Tracking the Bodies of the Biosciences." These texts examine how we are rethinking the body in contemporary context, including new reproductive technologies, molecular biology, "unusual anatomies" and even *Body Worlds*, the exhibition of plastinated cadavers that is touring internationally.

Unfortunately, the editors chose not to write a conclusion to their book, and this might be the main weakness of this collection. People interested in humanities or medical anthropology will already have had read some of the articles — classics from Walter Benjamin, E.E. Evans-Pritchard and Marcel Mauss. However, it is Lock and Farquhar's commentary that brings the book alive and

gives it a specificity. When I finished the last page of the last essay, I wished to have a few more insights from the authors to conclude my reflection on embodiment. One can only hope that their intent was to lead the readers to draw their own conclusion on their personal internalization of the notion of body.

Isabelle Leblanc MD MSC Family Medicine St. Mary's Hospital Montréal, Que.

# Add a dash of mystery, and stir



The Fifth Vial
Michael Palmer
St. Martin's Press; 2007
372 pp. \$31.95 ISBN: 978-0-312-34351-4

s if we didn't have enough to worry about just watching the news, along comes Michael Palmer's 12th medical thriller to get us

really stirred up. Never mind. From time to time, we need a heroic tale to make us glad we're still alive and to point out just how much worse things could be. Palmer is a master of this game. He blends his medical background with his storytelling instincts in a cauldron of international conspiracy, ethical disaster and human drama. No wonder his medical thrillers scamper up the bestseller lists.

Here's his recipe for success: Start with a contemporary medical issue (in this case, the heartbreaking shortage of transplant organs), add a shadowy international corporation running blood-testing labs and a medical cabal with a difference, drop an unsuspecting hero and heroine into the dangerous brew, sprinkle with a touch of unlikely romance, and bring to a boil in Brazil. Palmer stirs well and the first thing you know, you've kissed your good night's sleep good-bye.

Palmer is passionate about the issue of organ shortages and uses the thriller to reflect his concerns. The story plays out with 3 protagonists who are unaware of each other and of the impoverished victims who have been selected because their blood samples have been tissue-typed as matches for wealthy and desperate recipients.

It's easy to care about the people in this book: not only the victims, with their unheard screams, but also the brilliant and dying medical researcher, Joe Anson. He is close to a breakthrough serum that could save millions of lives, yet is guarding the results from his funders: the Whitestone Foundation, a conglomerate that's a front for the Guardians of the Republic.

Aside from the saintly Anson, the key character to root for is Natalie Reyes, a flawed, obsessive resident, who will stand up to anybody, even when this is obviously a bad plan. This attitude, useful for the Olympic-level

athlete she used to be, gets her tossed out of her emergency department rotation, and may cost her the surgical residency she covets. That chip on her shoulder gets larger after Reyes is attacked on the way to a medical conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and, as a result, loses a lung.

Meanwhile back in Chicago, Illinois, Ben Callahan, a failed private detective, seems to need a boot in the backside to get out of bed in the morning. He gets that metaphorical kick when he's hired by a medical anthropologist to investigate the death of a bone-marrow donor, unknown to any of the local hospitals. The likeable Callahan could use a dollop more flawed obsession as he is pulled reluctantly into this international conspiracy.

Reyes and Callahan will be called on to survive in intense and challenging conditions, tricky at the best of times, and nearly impossible as they both converge on the secret medical facility in a remote Brazilian community and use every strength they possess to save an unwilling victim. You will figure out early enough who is pulling the strings, but Palmer can still get your heart rate up during the darkest moments. Of course, you already know that a certain suspension of disbelief is required in any contest of lonely heroes against vast and organized evil. Suspend early, and Palmer will reward you with a lively and engaging adventure. One word of advice: you do not want your patients reading this book. They might never look at you the same way.

### Mary Jane Maffini BA MLS Ottawa, Ont.

Mary Jane Maffini is a part-president of the Crime Writers of Canada and the author of 3 mystery series. Her latest book is *Too Hot to Handle*.

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