

Dommann, Monika: **Dursicht, Einsicht, Vorsicht.** Eine Geschichte der Röntgenstrahlen 1896–1963. Zürich, Chronos Verlag, cop. 2003. 447 S. Ill. (Interferenzen, 5). Fr. 44.–; € 29.80. ISBN 3-0340-0587-3.

Quasi everybody knows X-rays: some bodies have been x-rayed, medical bodies routinely perform X-rays and yet other bodily encounters with x-ray take place, for example via advertisements. Whatever the context, “X-ray” nowadays stands for transparency throughout, in short for “seeing is knowing”. It is precisely this contemporary taken-for-granted-ness of “X-ray” that Monika Dommann with her book *Durchsicht, Einsicht, Vorsicht* – based on her PhD thesis handed in at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zurich – attempts to disrupt. Unravelling the history of X-ray, she turns our attention backwards to times and places in which production, use and meanings of x-rays were rather opaque.

Claiming her story to begin where the classical historical narratives stop – with the “discovery” of X-ray by Roentgen – Dommann concentrates on one local context, German-speaking Switzerland, to elaborate on the new technology’s diffusion into the world “after the lab”. She thereby combines science and technology studies and history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) – a combination that becomes programmatic throughout the book as the author analyses material culture (architecture,

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machines) to emphasise the social interactions shaped by and shaping them. Based on meticulously researched heterogeneous material (diaries, building maps, photographs of machines, hospitals, regulations, etc.), the author thus pulls the reader for a time period of 67 years through the different corners of Switzerland (towns, shoe shops, laboratories, the army, hospitals), thereby introducing him/her to a large variety of actors that all appropriate X-ray technology in one way or the other. She thereby convincingly re-presents the “seamless web” of social, technical, epistemic and body factors that make X-ray work.

One might feel a bit lost within the author’s thick description of places and people were it not for two factors that help keeping up an overview. On the one hand there is a detailed index at the end of the book that provides systematic access to the complex matter at hand. On the other hand this over-view is created by a clear division of the book in three distinct parts. Focusing on the move of X-ray technology from the realms of the physicist’s laboratory to the hospital, the first part demonstrates that this spatial shift involves making new experts as well. Attention to room(s) thus turns into an analysis of increasing differentiation among professional groups that come to be responsible for the new technology (physicists – doctors, male doctors – female assistants). Staying within the medical field, the emphasis of the second part is on the spatial arrangements between gazes, pictures and bodies working to make an X-ray image represent something. Dommann’s attention here is both on the patient body as an epistemic object, but with focus on the notion of tacit knowledge also on the operator’s body-work to make an acceptable X-ray image. As a nice surprise this part shows X-ray pictures re-printed on transparent paper. The third part is dedicated to the truly invisible, the rays themselves. Interweaving “big history” (the atomic bomb) with the small stories of increasing individual law suits for X-ray damages in Switzerland, her book ends 1963 where state regulation, the so-called *Strahlenschutzverordnung*, presents a significant factor in stabilising the technology in a way known to everybody today.

Conceptually, Dommann’s book does not offer anything significant new as the science and technology studies concept of the seamless web has been described by others before, also with regard to the history of X-ray. However, it is the embeddedness of science and technology studies concepts within the detailed description of one local context that enables the author to convincingly write against the typical technologically deterministic account of many historians. Not only does Dommann thereby extend the boundary of merely another field study, she also offers extraordinary insights into how history of medicine and science can be done otherwise.

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