Artificial Hearts: A Controversial Medical Technology and its Sensational Patient Cases

Today, artificial hearts are a clinical reality after decades of contentious development. Former U.S. Vice Pres. Dick Cheney stated that the technology ‘saved his life' in 2010, but not all patients enjoyed such successful outcomes. Medical historian Shelley McKellar examines the clinical use of artificial hearts since the 1960's, situating the triumphant narrative of this technology and its ‘resurrectionist capacity’ alongside technical device challenges and difficult patient experiences. The appeal was the promissory nature of artificial hearts as a life-sustaining treatment. But it was (and is) an imperfect technology, and its controversial history speaks to questions of expectations, meanings of success, limitations and uncertainty in a high technology medical world.