



WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

Images as Evidence (of what)? The Body at the Intersection of Science and Art

Organizer: Sophie WAGNER, Barbara GRAF

E-Mail Address: sophie.wagner@univie.ac.at

Abstract: Scientific images of the human body hold a distinct status as being reliable mediums, even though we often don't know, or partially ignore, what kind of image it is and how it has been made (Canals 2020). This is true for visualizations that serve as referential witness – micro photography, x-rays, MRI, CT-scans or endoscopic images – and “visual strategies” that put together data on the basis of synthesis, ordering knowledge in “abstract tableaux”, transforming it into calculable figures, graphs or diagrams (Mersch 2006). They serve as evidence in clinical decision making, as tool for governmental practices, and legitimize policies. Bodies are dissected, screened and measured, promising transparency (Strathern 2000), creating a sense of “hyper certainty” (Fox 2000), and fostering the idea of medicine as “exact science”. With this panel we aim to discuss current modes of engaging with the human body visually, examining this framing of bodies, beings – and lives in general – as calculable and predictable. We want to examine the terrain of both – the visualizations of diseases, and articulations of individual illness experiences, which have proven to be particularly useful in supporting the patient-doctor communication. We ask: how can we critically engage with image-making embedded in discourses of certainty and trust? Following the Images of Care collective's manifesto (Pieta and Favero 2023), we understand visual culture - “how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein” (Foster 1988:ix) – as being shaped by ongoing dialogues between biology, culture and politics. We invite scholars and practitioners to present works, which explore bodily processes, corporeal sensations and illness experiences. We highlight an interdisciplinary perspective, hoping to inspire dialogue across professional boundaries, inviting anthropologists who follow collaborative and experimental approaches (Fortun et al. 2021), visual artists, health-care professionals, and patient advocates.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Monday, September 23, 2024 | Slot 3 | Room 2

Benjamin Ji: Reimagining Bodies through Qi: The Entanglement of Painting and Alternative Healing in the Late Twentieth Century China

Barbara Graf: Images of Lived Experience as a Medium of Mediation and Coping with Illness

Monday, September 23, 2024 | Slot 4 | Room 2

Moyuree Mukherjee: Exploring New Frontiers: How Virtual Reality is Transforming Genetic Research

Sophie Wagner: Making visible and being seen: images of chronic living

Helen Vaaks: SORGERÄUME - a work on the invisible

SESSION PAPERS

Remaining Bodies through Qi: The Entanglement of Painting and Alternative Healing in the Late Twentieth Century China

Benjamin Ji

With the disintegration of the Maoist centralized economy and China's incorporation into the transnational capital market, the public medical system went through a process of privatization; and emergent private factories had caused a large scale of occupational exposure to toxin and environment contamination. Qigong (气功), "a health-enhancing technique that combines controlled breathing, meditation, and physical movement", mediates and negotiates the tension between China's neo-liberalization and the mass need for a healthy life in a toxic environment. This research focuses on a Chinese rural woman artist, Guo Fengyi (郭凤仪), and her painting practices. After getting early retirement because of arthritis at the age of thirty-nine, Guo turned to Qigong to seek self-healing and alleviation of pain. During her meditation, she experienced the emergence of images in her mind, a large amount of which are human bodies in the cosmology of Traditional Chinese Medicine, acupuncture energy maps, and ghosts, and began to replicate these visuals by painting. This research draws from my interpretation of Guo's painting, close reading of her personal history, and critical engagements with a broader context of post-socialist China's privatization trauma, healing politics, and technoscience. Through this case study, I aim to unpack the alternative ontology of bodies and healing embedded in Guo's paintings and Qigong, different from modern Western biomedicine. It is also an attempt to move towards a decolonial and feminist/queer approach to life, vitality, and medical technology.

Images of Lived Experience as a Medium of Mediation and Coping with Illness

Barbara Graf

The terms illness and disease distinguish different perspectives on the same incident or bodily condition. Although medical visualizations play a crucial role in the diagnosis and the observation of the progression of a disease, the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), for example, refers to possible symptoms but reveals nothing about the qualitative experience of illness. The contribution focuses on self-experienced phenomena related to multiple sclerosis (MS) and their graphic representation. At issue are sensory disorders, which are a common phenomenon in MS, but also occur in other illnesses as well. The sensations are paresthesia, which sometimes feel as if the body is being

extended by textile fibers or clothing, and other sensations that are also difficult to put into words, such as stabbing pain, tingling and burning. These symptoms can be irritating or even distressing, leading to a feeling of alienation from one's own body perception. Communicating experiences is particularly important in the case of chronic illness, as these are not temporary phenomena and coping with the altered body is essential for well-being and to reappropriate a body that is perceived as foreign. There are a relatively large number of verbal descriptions of physical sensations, summarized in clinical studies and based on patient reports. But it is rare to find graphic representations of physical sensations, and artistic formulations mostly relate to psychological expressions. The presentation focuses on the possibilities of depicting lived experiences and includes questions about which languages and memories are available for visual formulations of the invisible and whether subjective perceptions can be conveyed at all. Throughout the process of transformation from sensation to perception, and from perception to visual representation, drawings, photographs and textiles from the artistic research project 'Phenomenological Archive of Body Sensations' will be presented, and their resonance with recipients will be put up for discussion.

Exploring New Frontiers: How Virtual Reality is Transforming Genetic Research *Moyuree Mukherjee*

The development of virtual reality (VR) technologies transformed genetic research by providing scientists with a powerful tool to visualize and manipulate genes in a three-dimensional space. VR integration facilitated interactive gene modeling, and real-time exploration of genetic modifications. This resulted in refined hypotheses testing and experimentation methods which reshaped scientific knowledge production in genetics and genomics. When leveraged alongside advancements in personalized and precision medicine, VR holds immense potential to inform treatment decisions and therapeutic interventions. Hence, it is crucial to understand how scientists assimilate VR into their research methodologies and how they interpret resulting innovations. Concerns about privacy, consent, surveillance, regulatory compliance, and equitable access accompanying VR innovations also warrant exploration. Through participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews of scientists working in 'innovation labs' using VR systems, this paper will delve into the "deep mediatization" of scientific institutions, wherein emerging technologies like VR become integral to their fundamental operations (Couldry and Hepp 2017). I will also examine how VR serves as a mediator, transforming biological entities such as genes into 'valuable' virtual representations through visualization and how these representations come to serve as "operational images" with their own agency which gives them the potential to actively intervene in constructions of scientific meaning (Farocki 2000). This paper also links VR's transformative potential to epistemic shifts, wherein new modes of perception emerge, necessitating a critical examination of existing knowledge structures and power dynamics (Foucault 1966). I also aim to explore "intra-action" in VR systems, where technologies and users co-constitute each other (Barad 2007). As VR blurs the line between physical and digital worlds, this paper will examine notions of inseparability and dependence in this co-constitution. Through these inquiries, this paper aims to uncover insights into how VR shapes scientific research practices, influences knowledge production, and challenges established epistemic paradigms.

Making visible and being seen: images of chronic living

Sophie Wagner

Automated decision-making and artificial intelligence have allegedly changed type 1 diabetes – a chronic disease that requires daily insulin management – for good. This paper draws on research in a clinic in Austria, specialized on so-called hybrid-closed-loop systems, as well as creative, reflexive workshops with patients. What is often referred to as the "holy grail" of diabetes management consists of a wearable sensor – which continuously monitors the blood sugar – and a connected pump, which receives this data and administers the necessary insulin semi-automatically in tiny doses throughout the day. This technology promotes efficiency and patient-empowerment through precision, predictability and certainty. The expectations that come with it often-times create a pressure to display healthiness and to function effortlessly, which glosses over the frictions and challenges patients experience in their daily lives. The effort patients put into making it work are rendered invisible. This is also reflected in the access to disability benefits, where “good numbers” signal a functioning system, or an "almost cure" – a view which completely lacks an acknowledgement of the patient’s tiring, daily involvement in their production. And yet, it is precisely this feedback loop, this intimate entanglement of patients and technology, that characterizes today’s disease management. The medical images that emerge as a result of these interactions consist of graphs, charts, numbers and symbols, and serve as evidence in the clinical decision-making. It requires experience, skills and empathy on behalf of health care professionals, to make room for a more holistic image of the disease and the illness experience. I explored these topics with patients in the making of Body Maps, examples of which will be discussed in the presentation. This creative mode of reflection and elicitation helps visualize the challenges of chronic living and highlights the importance of acknowledging distributed agency and relational expertise.

SORGERÄUME - a work on the invisible

Helen Vaaks

What do we see and envision when we think about care? How is care enacted represented in the public sphere?

Care is a practice, care is labour, care is a relationship to oneself and to others. The ethnographic film project with the working title "Sorgeräume" (“Caring Spaces”) does not focus on the body as the main subject of care, but on the caregivers: Who 'cares'? It is primarily about communities that need to be formed in order to develop a sustainable system for care work. A closer analysis within the Austrian context focuses on three main topics: Care & Migration, Care & Family, Care & Inclusion. As filmmakers, we asked ourselves what care means, how it is represented and what political and practical implications these ideas of care have. We interviewed experts from research and practice throughout Austria, and searched for care in public spaces. We looked for images that are sometimes in contrast, sometimes in harmony with the stories of our protagonists.

“[...] in order to really thrive we need caring communities [...] in which we can support each other and generate networks of belonging. We need conditions that enable us to

act collaboratively to create communities that both support our abilities and nurture our independencies.” (The Care Collective, 2020)

The Open Innovation in Science Impact Lab "Caring Communities for Futures" of the Ludwig-Bolzmann-Gesellschaft supports and connects projects that build communities of care. As part of this project, the film explores different concepts of caring communities, drawing on The Care Manifesto, a key element to the research as a whole. For the panel, we would like to show excerpts from our raw film material: as a provocation and food for thought about 'who cares' and what this tells us about our relationship to our social environment.