

Symposium

Violence, Care, Cure (Self)perceptions Within the Medical Encounter

Organized by Clio Nicastro and Marta-Laura Cenedese

ICI Berlin

3 – 4 February 2022

In English

CFP

Since the 1980s, scholars in the interdisciplinary field of the medical humanities have foregrounded how the distinction between ‘disease’, i.e. the medical classification of symptoms, and the individual experience of illness can be generative to unlock the tensions within the medical encounter. The doctor and the patient may tell two very different stories of illness, even contradictory ones. The mismatch that often arises between the medical gaze¹ and the individual’s gaze in the face of the same event can be productively addressed by paying attention to their visual and narrative representations. In addition, the ways diseases have been portrayed with words and images have also affected the (self)perception of the body through history. If medicine is about stories (the patients’, doctors’, science’s, society’s), when and where do conflicts and misunderstandings arise that turn the cure into something perceived as violence? Literary and visual narratives contribute to sharing these stories and can offer a vantage point to address larger cultural scripts. How do these narratives represent perceptions of violence within medical settings and practices?

The two-day symposium seeks to address the ambiguities of and tensions among perceptions at the cusp of internal (subjective) and external (social, cultural, political) ‘gazes’. What the individual experiences, at either end of the consultation room, is a complex interlacing of personal vicissitudes, global structures, and community practices: a prismatic network in which ‘care’ and ‘violence’ are reflected and refracted in a variety of oftentimes overlapping and divergent interpretative modes. Communities (whether concrete, virtual, or imagined) can be perceived as both providers of care and support, as well as instigators of violence. A case in point mirroring this ambiguity are for instance online *pro-anorexia* and *pro-bulimia* communities, where users create a space to share their experiences of eating disorders while at the same time promoting self-disruptive food behaviours. Another telling example is constituted by the outcomes of the ongoing pandemic; the alliance of extreme right-wing movements with anti-vaxers, and the protests against governments’ covid-related sanitary measures or the green pass (dubbed a ‘sanitary dictatorship’) have exposed the infiltration of radical ideologies and conspiracies into medical discourse, whereby care and

¹ Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique. Une archéologie du regard médical* (Paris: PUF, 1963).

violence lose their neat distinction. While a black and white opposition between internal/external, care/neglect, cure/violence may seem reductionist, engagement with these seemingly contrasting attitudes reveals the complex entanglements among possible scientific dogmatic drifts, social inequalities within healthcare systems, and idiosyncratic projections of individual and collective fears, which often lead to stigmatizing certain collectivities for the origin or transmission of contagious diseases.²

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Encounters in the medical space
- Phenomenological approaches to illness and medicine
- Visual and literary narratives of illness and healthcare experiences
- Power and biopolitics
- Communities of care (virtual, concrete, imagined)
- Entanglements of ‘care’ and ‘violence’
- Patients’ agency in illness
- Cure with/against care
- Persecution and scapegoating
- Eating disorders

This conference encourages proposals from researchers working across medical humanities, cultural and critical theory, critical race theory, visual and film studies, medical anthropology, disability studies, queer and feminist theories, philosophy, and literary studies.

Presentations will be in English, limited to 20 minutes. Please email an abstract of no more than 300 words and a short bio (150 words max) to violeccarecure@ici-berlin.org by 10 December 2021. A full programme will be published in due course. A publication based on this conference is planned, and we will be able to provide further details at the conference.

As with all events at the ICI Berlin, there is no registration fee. ICI Berlin is now applying the 2G rule, but cannot foresee what the Covid situation will be like in February 2022 – for further information please check the ICI’s visitor guidelines www.ici-berlin.org/covid-19-visitor-guidelines/. ICI Berlin can provide assistance in finding accommodation at your own expense for the conference period. The Institute’s facilities are wheelchair-friendly; please let us know in advance if you require further assistance. The ICI Berlin wishes to implement sustainable and low-waste practices.

The symposium is co-funded by the ICI Berlin, the VolkswagenStiftung, the Centre Marc Bloch, and the Nordic Summer University.

² Zhao Xun and Sander L. Gilman, *‘I know who Caused Covid-19’: Pandemics and Xenophobia* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2021).