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Ars Medica Proposal – Special issue on Frictions of Futurity, Curative Tensions, and Artistic Reimaginings of Transplantation

Bodies on the Border: Between Ableist Cures, Nationalist Hostilities & Deadly Futures

Donna McCormack, Lynne Zakhour, Richard Kahwagi and Ingrid Young

Introduction

This series of images emerges from a collaboration between academics and artists focused on organ transplantation and chronic illness. The images are part of the ongoing work of [Capturing Chronic Illness](#), a project founded by UK-based medical humanities academics Donna McCormack (University of Strathclyde, UK) and Ingrid Young (University of Edinburgh, UK) to explore how arts may engage with health, illness and non-normative embodiments that exceed dominant narratives. In this project, we seek to address, through arts, how to listen to silenced or denied experiences, particularly of queer health and illness.

The exchange which produced the images is based directly on McCormack's project – [Transplant Imaginaries](#) – which analyses fictional texts (novels and films) to explore biotechnological and anticolonial embodiments and relationalities in representations of transplantation. Building on McCormack's extensive work, we sought to create a set of texts – visual and written – that capture and reflect the key ideas and themes in transplant imaginaries. Our collaborative process was based on original text written by McCormack, and illustrations by Beirut-based artist Lynne Zakhour in response to the text. From the outset, Young and designer Richard Kahwagi joined conversations with McCormack and Zakhour to reflect on and shape the images. This coproduction resulted in the first edition of our zine, [Bloody Chronix](#).

The following three images explore transplant medicine beyond a curative imaginary. They point to key issues that are rarely discussed or even acknowledged in the clinic, but may be discussed in memoirs, by recipients and in fiction. These images, then, push us to reconsider how organ transplantation necessarily demands we pay attention to those embodied stories of living with the dead, crossing borders and how care – even that deemed 'lifesaving' – may be violent.

Images

Hauntings



Image Description: dead woman with red hair lying down with mouth open. A brownish-red tree grows out of her torso. Flowers sprouting organs grow out of her breast, mouth, nose and eye.

Haunting captures the presence of the dead other of which some organ recipients speak. This may convey a changing sense of self, as well as a sense of non-linear time where the history of the dead donor intersects with that of the recipient. Additionally, death may be constantly present as that which structures daily life when one's life expectancy is reduced and as that which has made life possible through the dead donor.

Justice & Borders

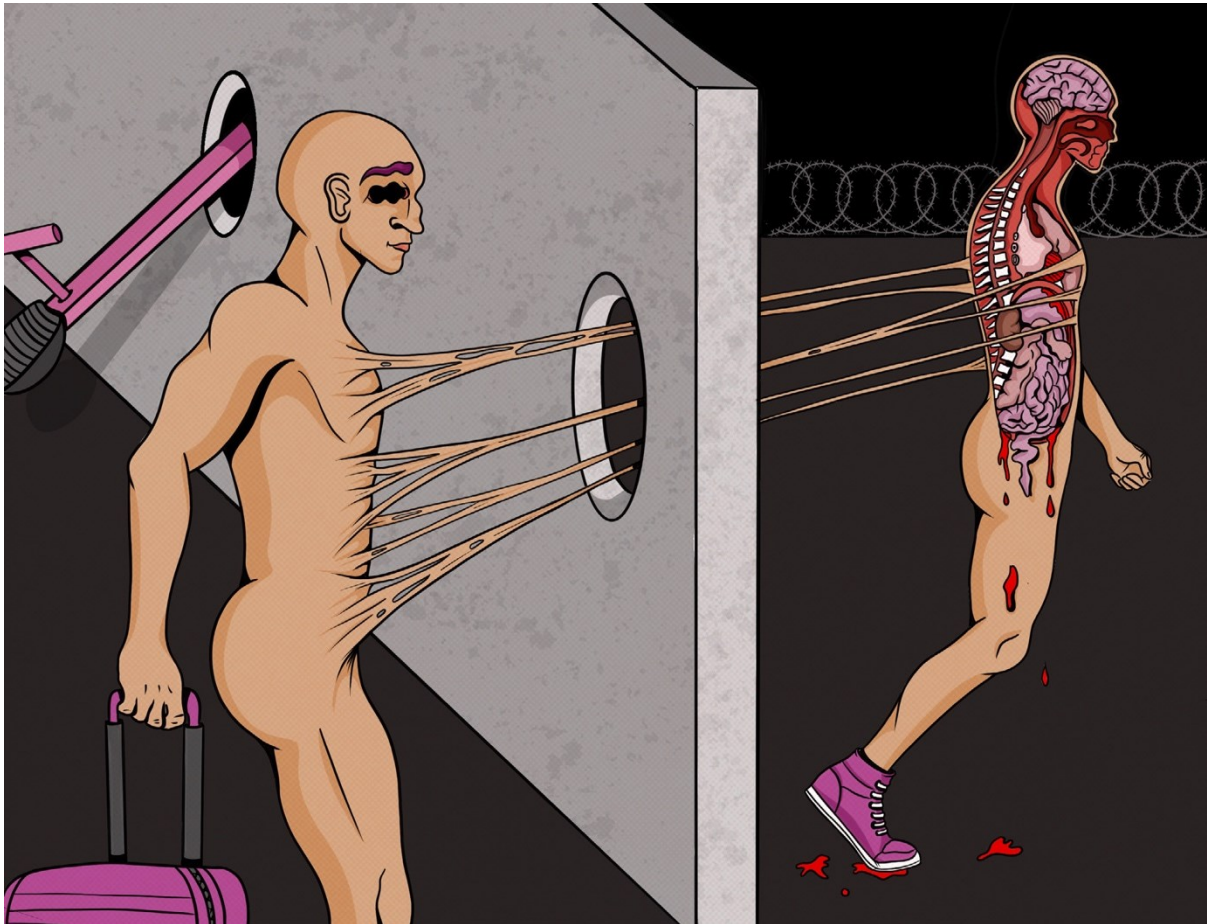


Image Description: a gender non-specific person crossing a border through a small circle cut out of a grey concrete wall. Divided by the wall, the person is cut in half but still attached by long sinews of flesh. On the right-hand side of the wall, the person's insides are on show in vibrant pink and red, and in the background is barbed wire. The half person is bleeding as their other half remains on the other side of the wall.

How do organs cross borders and which borders may be crossed to save lives? Large numbers of migrants continue to be killed or die from government policies that refuse entry into national boundaries. Crossing the body's border in transplantation is seen as a necessary intervention to delay death. How do we decide who lives and who dies, and what is justice if biotechnologies are used to save some lives as we watch others die?

Care as Violence



Image Description: On the left-hand side is the torso of a Black woman with a white face emerging from the belly. This face has bright purple hair and is smoking. On the right-hand side is the torso of a white woman with a Black face emerging from the belly. This Black person's hand is holding a drink. Both faces have no eyes, and there are random eyes in drinks, pierced through nipples and on necklaces.

Transplantation, whilst offering the hope of continued life and perhaps even a cure, may tie recipients to regimes of care that are restrictive, invasive and distressing. Furthermore, the possibility of speaking of what is happening in one's body post-transplantation may be denied as impossible and as such comes to be lived as a form of violence. Here, the donors emerge from the recipient as a way of voicing what may be silenced.