

New Publication “Rethinking Sociality and Health through Transfiguration”

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This special section brings together a series of papers that all have their origin in contributions to the trinational conference *Transfigurationen: medizin macht gesellschaft macht medizin* [Transfigurations: medicine makes society makes medicine], which was convened by Swiss, German, and Austrian medical anthropology organizations^[1] in February 2017 at the University of Basel in Switzerland.

Specific articulations of health and illness under contemporary conditions of ‘excessive’ economies featured as one cross-cutting theme in a set of conference contributions that were recently published as a [special issue in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*](#) (Kehr, Dilger, and van Eeuwijk 2019). In contrast, by presenting our series of ethnographic enquiries into contemporary health phenomena in East Africa, South America, and Western Europe, we intend to literally bring sociality to (bodily) life and ask what might be gained by using the lens of sociality to gain a

better understanding of the phenomena concerned. Conversely, we probe how the specificities of the field of health and illness – including themes concerning embodiment, vulnerability, suffering, death, and globally circulating medical ideas and technologies – might help to further spell out the notion of sociality both conceptually and methodologically as well as push forward the debate on sociality more generally.

In our introductory article we bring sociality into conversation with *transfiguration*. By this we refer to: (1) the constantly unfolding processes of particular extended figurations encountering, affecting, and becoming enmeshed in each other; as well as (2) the (temporarily) stabilized figurational arrangements emerging from these enmeshments. It is our hope that this notion of transfiguration will help render visible the modalities through which human engagements with each other and the world form diverse arrangements. Moreover, we aim to better understand the processes by which these arrangements – which we term ‘extended figurations’ – interact with each other, change over time, and possibly vanish and make way for others. A detailed appreciation of the workings of these extended figurations, we believe, can significantly enhance our comprehension of the particular processes of change that stand at the center of our ethnographic interest. In this sense, the concept of transfiguration constitutes one possible way of structuring the messiness and complexity of sociality for analytical purposes.

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[1] Work Group Medical Anthropology within the German Anthropological Association (DGSKA e.V.); Medical Anthropology Switzerland (MAS) of the Swiss Society of Anthropology (SSA); and Vienna Dialogues in Medical Anthropology. Please see previously published conference reports by Mira Menzfeld ([H-Soz-Kult](#)), **Laura Perler** and **Francesca Rickli** ([Somatosphere](#) / [Blog Medizinethnologie](#)), and **Max Schnepf** ([Medicine, Anthropology, Theory](#)).