



2023

Holiday Newsletter

MPRG “Practices of Validation
in the Biomedical Sciences”

Max Planck Institute for the History of Science
Berlin, Germany



Celebrating the group

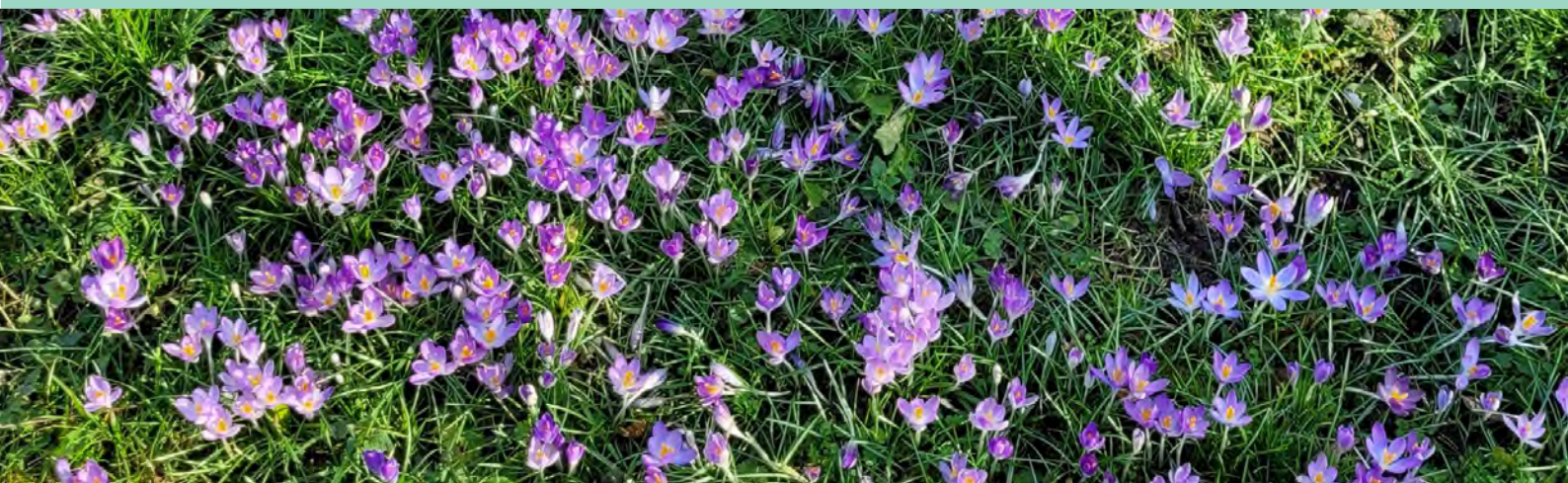
Dear All,

Welcome to the holiday letter of the Max Planck Research Group “Practices of Validation in the Biomedical Sciences.” We want to use this occasion to thank all of you—for your interest in our work, your contributions to our seminars, working groups, and workshops, for your support and your inputs. This network of friends and colleagues is the soil and fertilizer that sustains us.

A research group needs a group to exist and flourish. This implies a lot of work to create and sustain research environments that allow all group members to co-own the group, to develop their individual research strands, while ensuring that these strands interweave to address the group’s research program—in our case, historicizing validity as a relational property. How does good group research work in the humanities? We have experimented with many formats and would like to share some of our learnings in this holiday letter.

Max Planck Research Groups are temporary. This group will formally close on Aug. 31, 2024—at the end of an exceptional two-year transition phase that the Max Planck Society granted us after my appointment as Professor for History and Philosophy of Medicine at Bielefeld University. Some of the group members will take up positions in Bielefeld, some will transition to Dept. II at the MPIWG, some will go to other places. A good ending is always a bit sad. I am sad that the Research Group is coming to a close, but I am also confident that the seeds of our work will give rise to many beautiful plants in the years to come.

Best wishes and happy holidays,
Lara



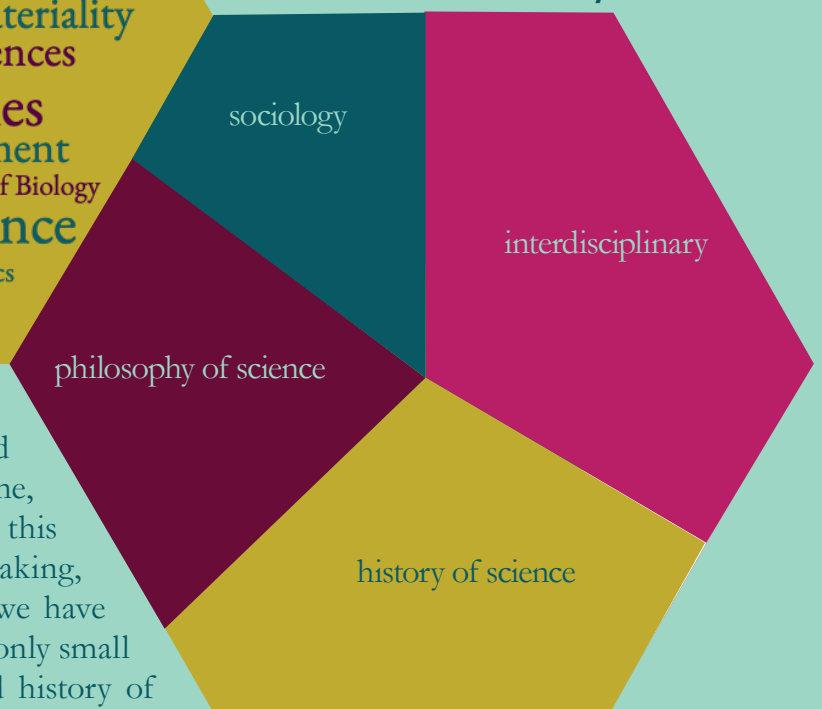
This Year's Output



Conference Themes



Proportion of Conferences Visited in Various Disciplines



The Medical Statistics Reading Group can dissect the significance of these numbers, and the Identity in Histories of Science, Medicine, and Heritage Reading Group can contextualize this finding in the history of academic identity making, but here is a vague idea of how and where we have been spending our time. Although there were only small differences in the number of philosophy and history of science conferences attended, the most conferences visited were inter- or crossdisciplinary.

Highlights from 2023

Past MPRG
Events

WORKSHOP
Coordination and Validity in Measurement across Science and Medicine: Historical and Epistemological Perspectives
MAR 22, 2023 | 14:30-19:30 H. ZOOM/ONLINE

Workshop Schedule

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 14:30-14:45 | Welcome and Introduction (Michele Luchetti) |
| 14:45-15:30 | FLORIAN FRODAS "From 'Common Sense' to Epistemic Trust: Validity and the Role of Measurement in Experimental Practice" |
| 15:30-16:15 | LEAH MCCULLOUGH "Measurement, Coordination and Normativity" |
| 16:15-16:30 | Break |
| 16:30-17:15 | CHRISTIAN LANGFELDT-PHILIPP and WIGOLD GIMNEZORGE "From Measurement to Epistemic Trust: A Historical Perspective" |
| 17:15-18:00 | OLIVIA FEIST "Coordination, Common Sense and the Validity of Evidence in 'Practical Reason' and 'Practical Reason'" |
| 18:00-19:30 | General Discussion (Chair: Michele Luchetti) and Informal Reception |

Workshop

Coordination and Validity in Measurement across Science and Medicine: Historical and Epistemological Perspectives

Organized by Michele Luchetti

Health Beyond Medicine Talk

Organized by Lara Keuck, Dora Vargha, and Birgit Nemec

“A Cosmopolitan Parasite: Tracking Toxoplasma between Laboratory Diagnostics and Regionalized Public Health Measures”

Hanna Lucia Worliczek



Workshop

A Little Bit Different from Oral History? The Historiographic Realm of Research Interviews in History of Science and Medicine

Organized by Alfred Freeborn and Hanna Lucia Worliczek

Authors' Workshop
Biomedical Visions
Aesthetics, Epistemology, and Medical Practice
September 28-29, 2023
Boltzmannstraße 22
14195 Berlin
By invitation only

Organizers
Elizabeth Hughes
Alfred Freeborn

Authors' Workshop

Biomedical Visions: Aesthetics, Epistemology, and Medical Practice

Organized by Alfred Freeborn and Elizabeth Hughes

Commoning Biomedicine
PUBLIC LAUNCH EVENT
DECEMBER 6, 2023
16:00-17:30 CET
ONLINE

Speakers:
Alfred Freeborn, Lara Keuck, Franz Beckwith, Hanna Lucia Worliczek, Janice Okuyoko-Oryu, Enrico Benson

Public Launch

Commoning Biomedicine Online Platform

Organized by Alfred Freeborn

Explore our OA Oral History Search Platform!

To look forward to in 2024

Future MPRG Events

Colloquium Day

Health Beyond Medicine

Organized by Lara Keuck, Dora Vargha, and Birgit Nemeč

February 20

Workshop

Globalizing Schizophrenia: The History and Legacy of the WHO Studies of Schizophrenia

Organized by Alfred Freeborn

June 13–14

by invitation only

Workshop

Public Health Beyond Pandemic—Zoonoses, Environments, Food Production, and Infectious Diseases Between One Health and Medical Humanities

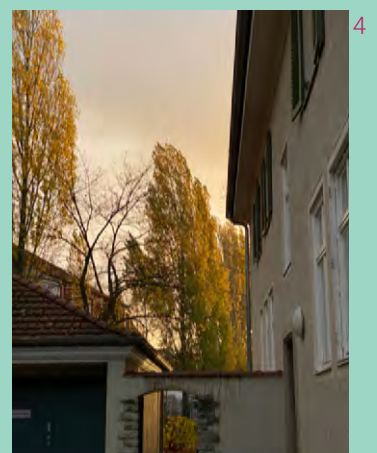
Organized by Hanna Lucia Worliczek

July 15–17

Farewell to the Villa

As members of the team prepare to carry on the group's research in Dept. II of the MPIWG until 2026, at Bielefeld University, and elsewhere, we celebrate the achievements made so far and say goodbye to the Villa as the nerve center of MPRG Keuck.

July 19



Taming the Medusa

Hanna Lucia Worliczek



5

How to present the work of the research group in a way that does justice to the many perspectives that we have on validity in biomedicine?

This question instantly came to mind in December 2022 as I mused about submitting a proposal to the biennial meeting of the International Society for the History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology (ISHPSS), to be held in Toronto in July 2023. The aim of ISHPSSB is an integration of historical, philosophical, and social science perspectives on research in the biological and life sciences, including biomedicine. Consequently, our group composition of historians, philosophers, and sociologists appeared to be a perfect fit. Yet, we do not apply our various perspectives on the same cases. Although our individual projects have conceptual overlaps and we use inter- and crossdisciplinary approaches for analysis, we investigate different phenomena and periods to untangle the thing that is validity as a relational construct, with a multifaceted history and many realms of practice. Seven group members were, in the end, motivated to contribute to a

session at the ISHPSSB meeting: Simon Brausch, Sam Ducourant, Alfred Freeborn, Ariane Hanemaayer, Lara Keuck, Michele Luchetti, and Hanna Lucia Worliczek.

A “classic” conference panel would have been an option in principle, each of us giving a talk about their project, each followed by a discussion. But with seven contributors, this was not feasible for the ISHPSS format, which typically allows for up to two sessions with three talks each. So, we aimed at a “diverse format double session” that would allow us to use two one-and-a-half hour sessions any way we would see fit. With this very open format, excluding a solely project-centered perspective, we needed to agree what we wanted to achieve, what we wanted to present that would give justice to our individual contributions as well as to the group work in a way that would showcase our frameworks of validity, and engage the audience. To get started with this process and knowing that none of us had full insight into each other’s projects, Ariane, Simon, and I developed a questionnaire for each contributor to respond to:

1. About which science/field/subfield would you talk (your epistemic object)?
2. What is your period of investigation?
3. From which perspective do you investigate, analyze, talk (roughly: history, philosophy, social sciences, or a combination)?
4. When did concerns or questions about validity arise in your field of investigation?
5. Why did concerns or questions about validity arise in your field of investigation?
6. How was it attempted to validate—which practices of validation were applied (and when)?
7. What targets of these practices could you identify? (What was validated?)
8. What relational aspects could you identify (“valid in relation to...” = layers of validity)?
9. What topic(s) would you like to cover not represented here in relation to validity?

The answers to these many questions were insightful yet hard to manage. Therefore, I decided to visualize them with a mind mapping-tool that I already used in my current research project for sorting a multitude of perspectives and epistemic objects relating to a central topic of interest.¹ And it came as no surprise that the result of this visualization, resembled the same

mythological creature as it did for my project-related purposes—the medusa (Fig. 1).

As opposed to the fate of the mythological entity, we did not want to cut off the medusa’s head with its many snakes. Rather we wanted to tame it—to make its complexity productive. To do that we invested many hours of meetings, some with the organizing group of three people only, some with all participants. We decided to focus on our research content in the first session and on the group work in the second, assuming that research groups are still rather fringe in the humanities and therefore giving insight into group-work aspects would be of interest for our expected audience. Moreover, we knew enough about what we wanted to do to ask Sophie Veigl (University of Vienna) and Andrew Inkpen (Mount Allison University) to chair the two sessions. Based on these decisions we were able to write and submit an abstract for the conference, titled “In Search of Biomedical Validity: Towards a Crossdisciplinary History of Validation Practices.” But how to enact it was not settled yet. We further tamed the medusa with the help of the whole research group, including group members not participating in the conference and the student assistants, at the group’s retreat in Haus Fläming in February 2023.

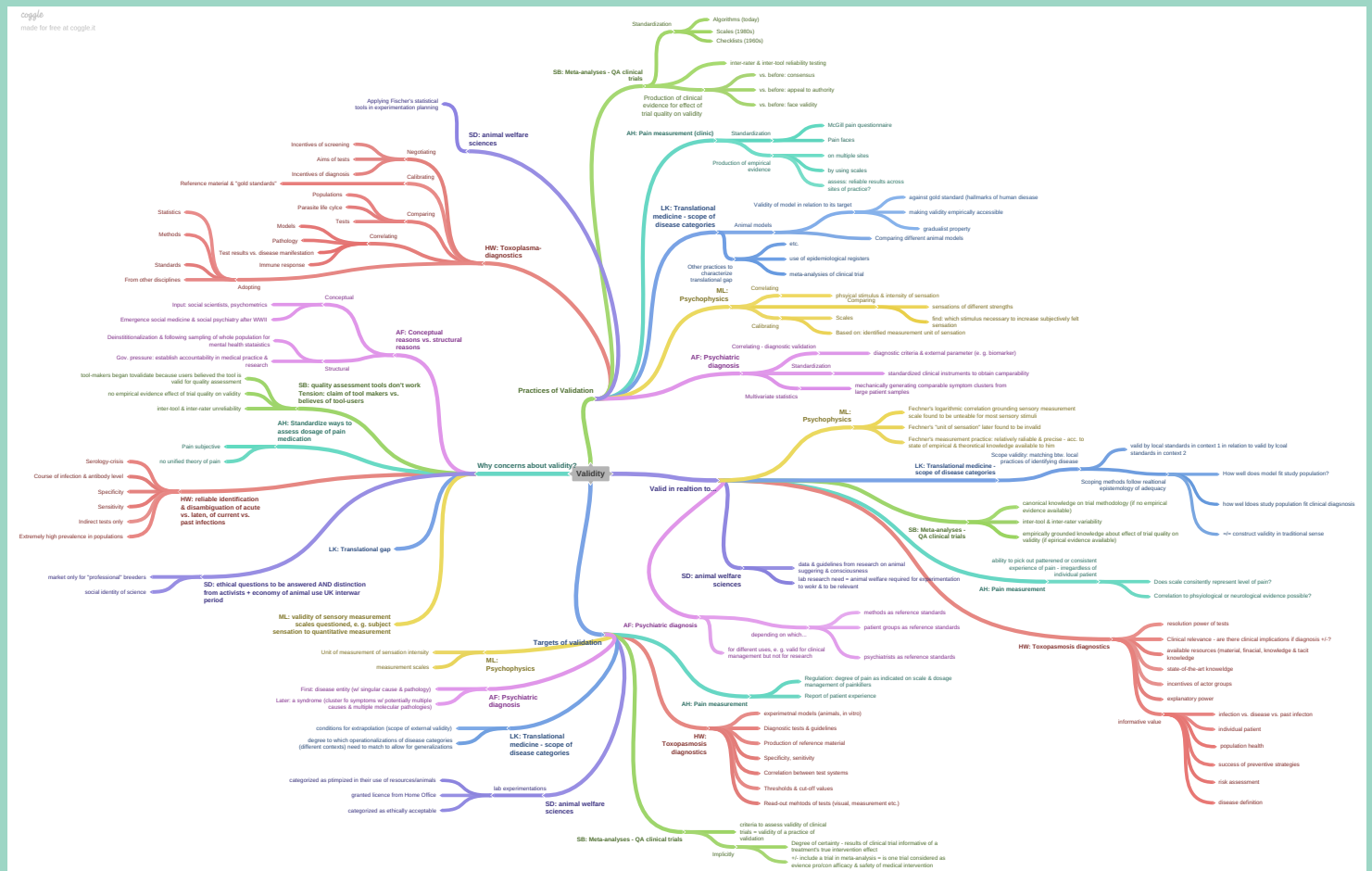


Fig. 1 The Research Group’s validity medusa visualizing the results from the questionnaire in preparation for the ISHPSSB meeting. Each color represents the perspective of one group member to be covered.

The output of the retreat for Session 1 was that we would work in pairs (or dyads, as we called it) to come up with three 14-minute-long double presentations on one selected topic, and Lara as the group leader would present the larger perspective on validity that motivated the formation of the research group to frame the three dyads in an overall context. This group work led to an unexpected outcome. By choosing a common topic to be addressed by a pair of us, we engaged in intellectual work that would not have happened otherwise, even leading to new findings. The first session was structured along our central findings: (1) introduction: validity and validation regulate the sciences of health (Lara); (2) global standards in biomedicine aren't the full story yet (Alfred and Hanna); quantitative scales of qualitative states require validation (Michele and Ariane); evaluative categories can be and have been misused (Sam and Simon); (5) conclusion: historicizing validity as a relational property (Lara).

Preparing Session 2, with the subtitle of “Getting Meta,” required very different group work. Eventually we came to the consensus that we (i) wanted to give a short recap our all our individual projects beyond what was presented in Session 1, including a brief showcase of our research questions, methods and data, and the open ends each project produces. We reached this first aim by using a slide template to be filled by ourselves for each project and speaking for no longer than 2 minutes each. But as the main focus we aspired (ii) a meaningful and informative meta-conversation between us and the audience that gives insight into how the research group works, how its collaborative aspects are enacted by us, and how we make our interdisciplinary group formats productive for each one's research. We reached this aim by collectively creating a set of interview questions that our chairperson would ask us,

covering our disciplinary and scholarly identity, the research group setting, the dynamics and objects of analysis. In order to prepare for that, we intensively discussed our potential answers to these question in advance. At the conference it took much longer to get the audience involved beyond a traditional Q&A format but when it finally happened, participants from the audience engaged in sharing their own experiences with interdisciplinary group work, leading to the workshop-style format we aimed at.

Taming the medusa also involved herding cats at some points—a practice that the three of us organizing it happily engaged in. Preparing for this interdisciplinary double session at the ISHPSSB meeting demanded a lot of time and preparatory work. Because we did not go for a traditional conference format, we needed to have all of our talks prepared well in advance to time the contributions accordingly and to know exactly what will be covered by someone else. Doing all of that turned out to be very productive for each of our projects as well as for the whole group's perspective on validity and phenomena of validating. And moreover, more than 40 participants attended our presentation although there were nine other sessions to select from. A pleasure indeed.

¹ <https://coggle.it/>

From Bad Belzig...



...to Toronto



Curiosities

Inevitably there comes a time when a delightfully strange footnote or a tangential side story must be cut from the final draft. These tantalizing edits wait in scholastic limbo in the hopes of later serving as the basis of an entirely new paper. In this section, Becca gives one of her recent side stories its day in the sun, and Hanna and Michele share a few unusual inspirations for future projects.

How Many Centimeters in Diameter is a Small Lemon?

Becca Jackson

In my research on the history of centimeters as the unit for measuring cervical dilation, as well as attempts at making “cervimeter” instruments that could measure dilation in centimeters, I came across this discussion about the tension between scientific-seeming units (like centimeters) and units that could be meaningfully and reliably assessed by the human hand.

This is an excerpt about cervical os sizes communicated by German mark coin sizes:

One designates the different sizes of the mother's external cervical os with increasing dilatation according to the size of our coins (one, two, three, five-mark piece size), the higher degrees of dilatation with: small palm-sized, palm-sized, opened with a small rim, completely opened.

Sellheim and others are quite right when they call this size determination unscientific and not precise enough and demand the determination of the cervical os diameter by centimeters. But most people can more easily imagine the size of a circle corresponding to a five-mark piece than a circle with a diameter of 5 cm. Now that silver coins have disappeared in our country, there is an additional external impetus for utilizing exact numbers.

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Mark coin size = 2 cm</i> | <i>Small palm size = 6 cm</i> |
| <i>Three-mark coin size = 3 cm</i> | <i>Palm size = 8 cm</i> |
| <i>Five-mark coin size = 4 cm</i> | <i>Full opening = 10 cm¹</i> |

The problem with centimeters, as Stoeckel noted, is that most people cannot easily connect the image of a five-centimeter circle with their sensory experience of feeling the cervix. Thus, translating meaningful units (coins) into ordinal units, with centimeter-labeled translations, was the proposed compromise. Note that the above translations of coin-sizes into centimeters

are approximated—these are not true measurements of these coins!

This conversion alone was not seen as a satisfying replacement, as later Wilhelm Liepmann proposed a new set of familiar hand-held objects, arguing, “I believe that the objects mentioned here are so well known that every student and every midwife has a certain idea about them.”²

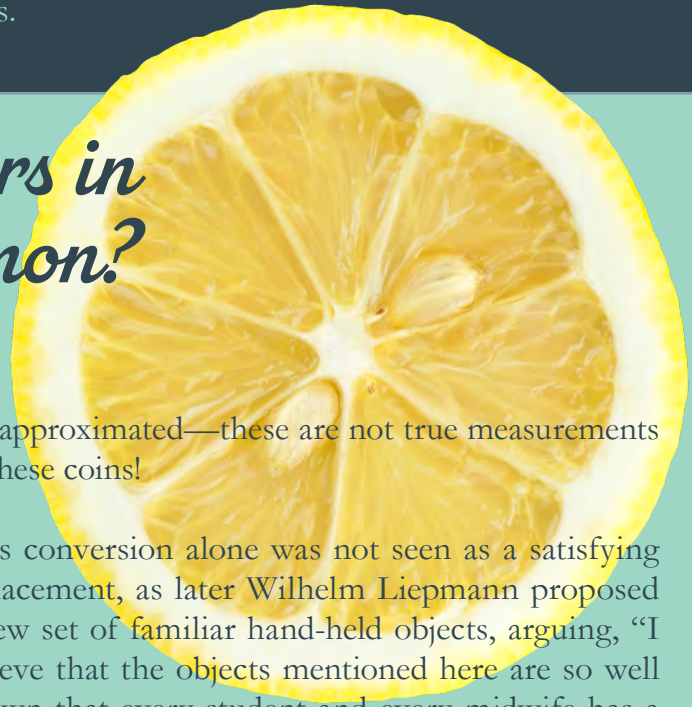
A fingertip = 1 cm
Wedding ring (average 1.8-2 cm) round = 2 cm
Ladies' watch (average 2.5-3 cm round = 3 cm
Men's watch (average 4.5-5 cm) round = 5 cm
Small palm size = 6 cm
Palm size = 8 cm

Liepmann believed the above objects, or metal disks created to be the same size, could be used as tactile training tools for the sense of touch to be able to correctly identify these distances. He acknowledged, however, the need for an open discussion to decide on some set of units that would be used and recognized universally in universities and midwifery schools. The issue was not as simple as converting to the metric system; there needed to be a consensus on a set of units that were meaningful for the human mind to be able to distinguish between the apertures and assign them a value in a consistent manner.³

¹ Walter Stoeckel, *Lehrbuch der Geburtshilfe* (Jena: Gustav Fisher, 1920), 212. (translations by Becca Jackson)

² Wilhelm Liepmann, “Die Größenbestimmung des äußeren Muttermundes in der Geburt, ein Vorschlag für Unterricht und Praxis,” *Zentralblatt für Gynäkologie* 45 (1921): 1289.

³ *Ibid.*



Cervical Dilation

What does 1cm to 10cm look like?

Healthcare providers measure cervical dilation by placing two fingers on either side of the cervical opening and estimating how far apart their fingers feel.



CHEERIO
1 cm



TOP OF
HIGHLIGHTER
2 cm



SILVER
DOLLAR
3 cm



TABLESPOON
4 cm



SMALL
LEMON
5 cm



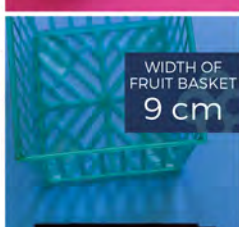
MEDIUM
GARLIC
6 cm



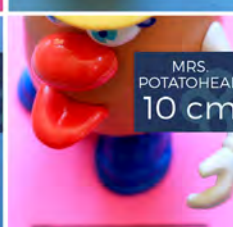
TOP OF
PICKLE JAR
7 cm



TOP OF
PINT GLASS
8 cm



WIDTH OF
FRUIT BASKET
9 cm



MRS.
POTATOHEAD
10 cm

Fig. 1 Eva Martin, "Cervical Dilation: 50% of the Time, It's 100% Right," *preg U: Medium*, June 7, 2017.

This tension between the scientific appearance of units on one hand, and the actual reliability of cervical estimation on the other hand, is still an issue to be overcome today—100 years later. These are two recent creative attempts to make centimeters of dilation sensible. One attempt uses everyday objects which are approximately similar sizes in the full centimeter scale from 1–10 (reversing the relationship between objects and centimeters as Stoekel and Liepmann thought of it) (Fig. 1), and the other displays each centimeter diameters by increasingly large mouths of jack-o-lantern pumpkins (Fig. 2). The chart originates from the US (notice the pint glass and silver dollar!), and the pumpkins were displayed at Royal Oldham Hospital in Lancashire, UK. What objects would you select for this purpose? What cultural, gender, and accessibility issues are reflected by our choice of units?



Fig. 2 Jessica Lindsay, "Horrorifying Pumpkins Show Stages of Dilation during Childbirth," *Metro*, November 9, 2019.

Inspirations

“Only the human body, freed, thanks to the help of geometry, from every naturalistic burden as well as from every psychological obsession, can reactivate on the scene the lost relationships between microcosm and macrocosm.”
–Oscar Schlemmer

13



The incorporation of scientific teachings of psychophysics on human perception in artistic and performative currents in the modernist family, such as Meyerhold’s theatrical biomechanics.

–Michele

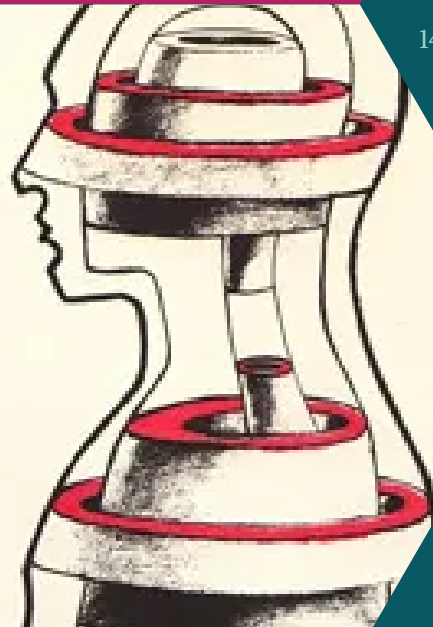


How flea circus technologies were most relevant for research on disease transmission

–Hanna

The theory of emotional anatomy by Stanley Keleman
–Michele

14



Reflections

Even as the group was winding down, we welcomed several guests and two long-anticipated new members. Volker Roelcke joined us for two months in February. Amirreza Liaghat, a Master's student in philosophy in biology and medicine at Bordeaux Montaigne University, completed a summer internship with us. We also hosted the Institute's journalist-in-residency, Elna Schütz, as she researched normality in medicine. Becca Jackson started in the Villa as a visiting postdoc and Henry Kalter joined us at the same time as a visiting predoc.

Several members of the group made great achievements this year as well. Our student assistants Klara Schwalb and Henrik Hörmann completed their respective Master's and will both pursue their doctoral studies at Bielefeld University. Our visiting predoc Sam Ducourant successfully defended her doctoral dissertation. Angela Creager received the Robert K. Merton Book Award from the American Sociological Association, Section on Science, Knowledge, and Technology for her co-authored book *Residues: Thinking Through Chemical Environments*. Most recently, Michele Luchetti received an ERC Preparative Fellowship at Bielefeld University.

Our heartfelt congratulations to all!

In this section, a few of these wonderful new team members and guests as well as veteraned members have offered us reflections on research, group work, and daily life in the Villa.

Henry Kalter

On November 23, 2023, it was my turn to present my research on rigor in the already legendary Research Therapy series, where scholars are invited to present their struggles while doing research, rather than their finished research results. It provides a rare opportunity for collective deliberation on urgent and informal matters, that would otherwise remain in the background.

What I recall in particular from all of the supportive responses, was the question: why did I exclude the “medical-anatomical concept” of rigor from my literature review of rigor concepts? This response caught me by surprise, while I could've expected it, being part of a research group led by Lara Keuck that focuses on the biomedical sciences. My answer was rather disappointing, namely that this particular concept of rigor represents a physical-material-descriptive property, whereas my interest goes out to concepts of rigor that have an abstract-metaphorical-evaluative nature (such as “scientific rigor,” “mathematical rigor,” “methodological rigor,” etc.). Irrespective, the question kept haunting me in the following days. How sure was I that the medical concept of rigor is not as abstract-metaphorical-evaluative as the concepts of rigor that are included in the review?

I decided that I will examine this distinction in more detail. I will therefore not only demonstrate, to a greater extent, how the medical concept of rigor, firmly rooted in Latin, underwent a deep epistemic transformation throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, but also how this metaphorical revolution left its traces on the medical concept of rigor. Indeed, I did really get the rigors from reading about rigor in the medical literature.



On Research Therapy

Alfred Freeborn

As a student in Cambridge, I was always amused by the small meetings of scholars with various names like Greek Therapy or German Therapy. At these meetings historians would help each other decipher obscure sources in a foreign language, with a focus on sharing skills and encouraging those with less expertise to persevere in their scholarship. I never actually attended one of these meetings, so I couldn't say if the concept works, but for me this simply added to their mystique. When our group began at the MPIWG in 2021 we decided to cultivate a particular approach to the internal research seminar which prioritizes the sharing of work in progress. Remembering my time in the swampy fens of Cambridgeshire and these mysterious meetings, I suggested we call it Research Therapy. This may sound rather pretentious, but the principle is fairly simple. Indeed, the description of Research Therapy on our seminar program is two sentences long:

The idea of Research Therapy is to give informal presentations of research questions, progress, or challenges, not the presentation of polished papers. There is no expectation of a formal presentation, just a chance to tell everyone what you are doing, how it is going, what you are enjoying, and what is challenging.

So what do we mean by therapy? Well it is not really therapy in the sense of a session on the couch spilling the beans to a carefully concealed psychoanalyst (although I do find that sometimes when talking to a mosaic of blank zoom screens the situation is not dissimilar). We rather mean therapy as an exercise in collective learning. In my mind, this is inspired to some extent by lessons from the history of psychiatry.

One origin of the so-called “therapeutic community” can be traced to practices developed in Britain during the Second World War to help soldiers with physical and mental disabilities.

The basic idea was to teach people about their illnesses and give them tools to talk about their own problems in a group setting. It was essentially a flattening of the traditional hierarchical doctor-patient relationship: rather than tell the patient what is wrong with them, the goal was to enable the patient to learn and develop their own attitude toward their problem. Research Therapy is not actually group therapy, but it takes inspiration from these traditions. We encourage a specific style of communication that focuses on supporting others to talk about their own research—and its problems. This kind of collective learning is particularly important to cultivate in the humanities because, as we all know, the practice of such scholarship is an often lonely and self-critical process. Research Therapy is about giving intellectual pep talks, not self-aggrandizing put downs. It is about motivating others to persevere with their research. It is about recognizing that the shift from one perspective to another, characteristic of the process of learning in general, is both a cognitive and often highly emotional activity. Does this approach work out in practice every time? Well, not always. Sometimes it is hard to break out of older scholarly norms. It is easier to ask questions of curiosity or critique than to shape questions that reveal helpful perspectives and motivate further inquiry. The demands on the audience in a research therapy are often considerably higher than in the standard seminar situation. But these challenges aside, over the previous two years the group has built a culture of scholarly communication which is respectful, caring, and constructive.



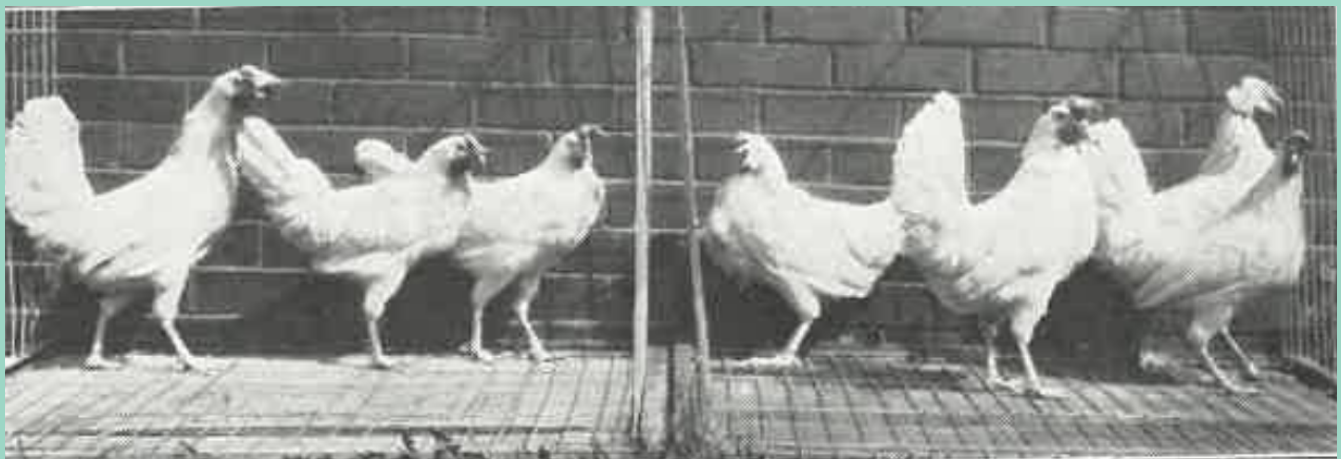
Sam Ducourant

I am heartily thankful for the year I spent as a Visiting Predoctoral Fellow in the MPRG Keuck. I have innumerable memories of informal chats and Research Therapy sessions when everyone was so focused on giving useful feedback, and I always came out of these with such enthusiasm and gratitude. During my stay, the group helped me so much in shaping my research, and especially in finding my very specific position between history and philosophy of science. They did this by being so welcoming to the third aspect of my approach, i.e. my critical and activism-oriented, sometimes even angry, sides. I'd also like to thank the Library team for providing access to archival content I had never managed to reach before, and for making my research so much easier and exciting!

This month I defended my dissertation at the École normale supérieure in Paris. It is entitled “Animal Welfare Encaged” and shows what I ended up calling “the co-constitution of legal standards, scientific disciplines and the technical system.” I studied the case of laying hens kept in battery cages in the twentieth-century Western world and showed the interactions between (i) scientific discipline identity constitution, (ii) the genealogy of the concept of welfare and its implementation in European legal standards, and (iii) the industrialization of animal productions.

I'd like to share one contribution of this dissertation that I'm quite happy about. In the third and last part of my dissertation, I studied applied research programs in the USA between 1895 and 1925, in order to understand how it became possible to raise hens in “controlled confined environments,” i.e. in restricted space with no access to the ground, exterior air, or natural light—that is, in battery cages. The first chapter studies the technical evolution that led to battery cages, and shows how hens were reduced to their egg-production function, and more precisely to production data. The second chapter follows research programs about nutrition and shows that laying hens were then reduced to “feed conversion machines.” In this alternative history, the discovery of vitamins is inseparable from the constitution of “cage hens.” The third chapter follows the very first genetic selection programs and shows that they resulted not only in the first standardized breeds, but also in the very notion of a “laying hen,” i.e. hens reduced to their heritable production traits. In the last chapter, I studied concrete interactions between individual scientists and the production chain and showed that the scientific and industrial organization constituted each other.

Just like gender or race, the very notion of a “laying hen” is therefore a social construct. It is intimately interwoven with the industrial production system. It inherently comes with violent domination, and biomedical sciences had an active role in its construction.



The very first “successfully” caged hens, after decades of nutrition research. Source: D. C. Kennard et R. M. Bethke. “Keeping Chickens in Confinement.” In: Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station: Bulletin 437 (1929), p. 8.

Elna Schütz

During my time as the Journalist-in-Residence at the MPIWG, I was based in the Keuck Research Group, where I participated in group activities or seminars, and connected with researchers directly. My research topic of the origins of normality within the medical field and mental health was purposefully broad, and I was delighted by how varied the inputs and understandings of this topic were among researchers. What particularly struck me, was that the group was open to letting me explore my own positionality and experiences in regards to the topic, which is something that is often discouraged in more conservative journalistic fields. In fact, several group members encouraged me to pursue my personal experience of chronic pain or neurodivergence as an intuitive source of understanding and curiosity that can lead me to explore these topics better than someone who holds them at arm's length. This bravery echoed through my experience at the Institute, where I found researchers holding ideas with open, curious hands, aware that their own identity can affect—and even deepen—their work.

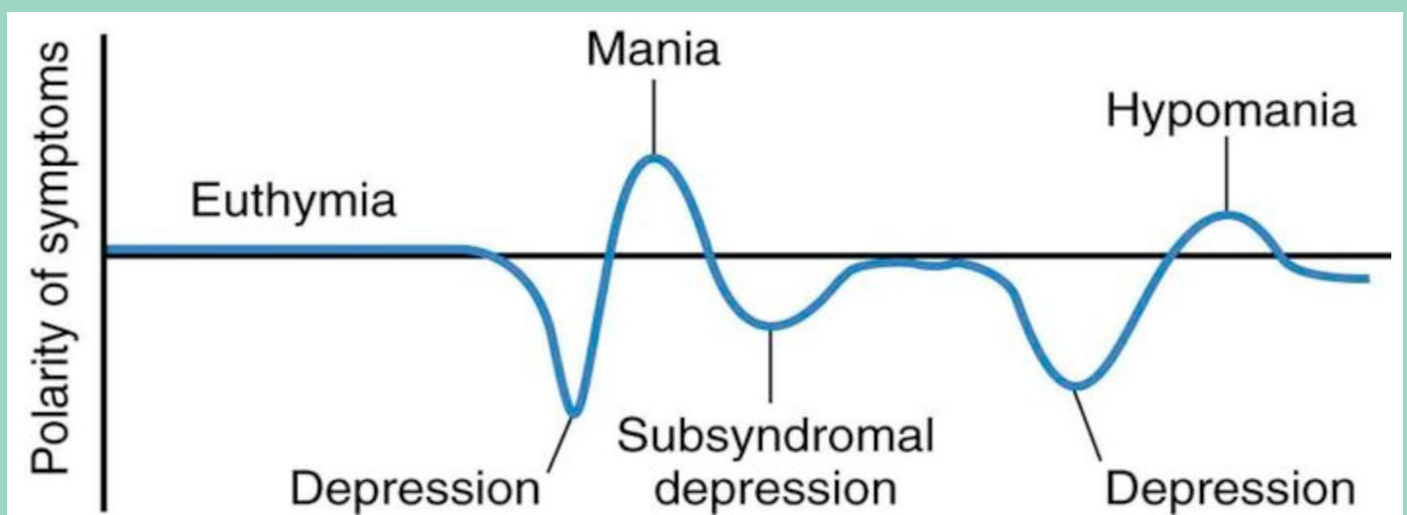
elna@elnaschutz.com, www.elnaschutz.com

Amirreza Liaghat

During my stay at Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, I had the chance to discuss my ideas with other PhD students and postdocs and also had the opportunity to present my project in Research Therapy from which I gathered many great and helpful comments. But other than this, being present at the Institute helped me to gain a unique perspective on how life is as a researcher, which I hope will help me in making decisions for the next steps in my life.

Bipolar disorder affects millions of lives. It is generally considered to have an episodic course, characterized by phases of mania and depression. Many psychiatrists have endeavored to find ways to predict new episodes in order to intervene before they occur. There are numerous controversial reports on this subject, and, to me, the central issue is that they are not fighting the same monster. In the literature, terms like “relapse” and “recurrence” have been described in various, sometimes contradictory, ways. Despite attempts to establish a consensus among psychiatrists, it seems to have fallen short. In my work, I aim to use philosophy to offer a broader perspective on these definitions and strive to identify different criteria and aspects that should be taken into consideration when employing these terms. I hope that this contribution can assist scientists to make further progress in their research and practice.

17



On Group Lunch

Simon Brausch

What makes a research group hold together? What makes it fall apart? Sure, collaborative research projects for the former, the end of the group's funding for the latter. But this doesn't yet constitute the group as a group. On a day-to-day basis, it is, I believe, only the collective act of having lunch together that is capable of breathing life into it.

In an interdisciplinary research group, each member has their own disciplinary identity and community that must be continuously nourished in view of the time after the group's existence. And in the humanities, in which we have yet to come up with a clear idea of what we mean or want to get out of research in groups, even collaborative projects usually boil down to, for most of the time, independently working individuals. So what or where would we be, both as a group and as individuals, if we all had lunch at our desks?

In our group, I'm glad that we're unable to answer this question, having introduced collective lunch from day one. It is this half to one-hour daily ritual in which ideas and experiences, stories and gossip, both academic and private, are exchanged over food that played, I think, a crucial role in constituting an identity as a group that goes beyond being a mere collection of individuals. Such an identity brings about a trusting and caring environment that lays the groundwork for fruitful work, individually and collectively.

We therefore shouldn't underestimate the epistemic importance of this seemingly trivial daily social practice for the success of any given research group and the well-being of each of its members. It may even make the identity of the group survive although funding has long run out and it has formally ceased to exist.



This contribution brought to you by Thai green curry

Factoids

Elizabeth's favorite sentence encountered while proofreading:

"The whole thing deteriorated over a cheeseburger in Palo Alto."

—Alfie's interview with Tim Crow



3

foxes spotted on the walk from the FU to the Villa

—Emma



2

apples picked from the Villa's backgarden

—Emma



51

boxes of archival material read at the National Archives of Austria

—Hanna



18

9

Krapfuses baked for the research group

—Hanna

273

files of the National Archives of Austria scanned and analyzed

—Hanna



1

green woodpecker spotted from the Villa window

—Hanna

1852

publishing date of the oldest book in Hanna's office



Bedside Reading

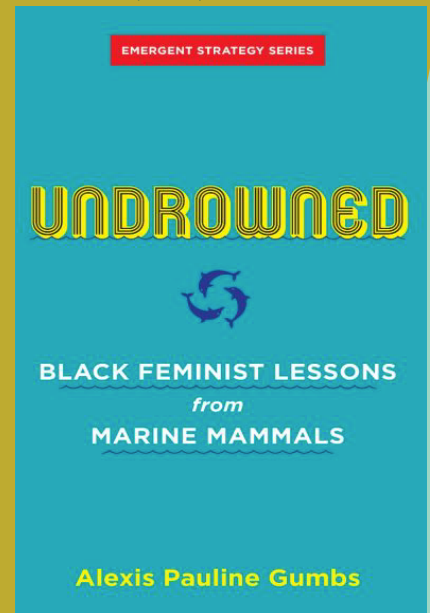
What's inspiring us outside the MPIWG Library

On group work

Lara Keuck

As a historically-minded person, I believe, for one, that the actions of each and every one matters, and, for another, that what we do is embedded in and reflects a Zeitgeist. The first allows me to envision the possibility of change, and to see the necessity of conditions and environments that allow people to flourish. The second provides me with solace and empowerment, showing that we are part of a bigger movement. In this regard, I like to see our approach to group work in the humanities as a contribution to a contemporary undercurrent of appealing to the power of collaboration. This appeal is beautifully reflected in the extraordinary work of Alexis Pauline Gumbs on what we can learn from marine mammals about teaming up (and many other things in life—if you are looking for a holiday reading, consider their book, *Undrowned* (2020):

Consider the white-bellied/short-snouted dolphins (Lagenodelphis hosei), who travel in groups of hundreds, sometimes thousands (Lesson 1: roll deep) and welcome several “other species” of dolphins and whales to swim and eat in community (Lesson 2: better together). Though they swim across the entire planet, no scientists (or no one willing to tell a western scientist) saw one alive until 1971. In fact, it seems there was a coordinated movement to be recognized because there were several different “first sightings” of the species on different parts of the planet... all somehow in 1971 (Lesson 3: we can be seen on our own terms)! The only requirements to be part of this massive oceanic family are that you gotta be willing to dive deep, because they eat a thousand feet below the surface (Lesson 4: do your depth work), and flock because they collectively change direction abruptly to keep humans from following them, and also move thousands of miles to stay current with the ocean (Lesson 5: be ready to transform). (p. 55)



Klara Schwalbe

I was always a very voracious reader as a child. But when I started studying philosophy and history, I began to believe that I should only read the books with literary merit, the classics, the ones that had been awarded prizes, the ones that were recommended by the university. I started to read less and less. That only changed again during the first lockdown, when I went back to reading books because they were engaging, comforting, fun...

Currently, I am re-reading *Momo* by Michael Ende from 1973. It's a German children's classic, part fairytale,

part fantasy novel, and maybe even more meaningful to me now as an adult than when I was a child. Momo is an orphan who lives in the ruins of an antique amphitheater outside of an unnamed city. Her neighbors greatly appreciate her because she is very good at listening: When people come to tell her about their problems, they gradually learn to understand and tackle them themselves just by telling Momo about them. When children come to play with her, they come up with the best ideas on what to play by explaining their ideas to Momo.

Yet there are dark changes happening in the world and in their city. The Men in Grey have come to steal people's time. Supposedly, time can be saved and deposited in the Timesavings Bank to be returned at a later date with an interest. The best way to save time is to stop chatting with neighbors, playing with children, hanging around the pub, or sitting down with some tea to reflect the day. Very soon, the people in the town become richer, but more stressed, drained and hollow. When Momo discovers the Men in Grey's plan, she seeks out to return the stolen time to her friends and neighbors.

This book has been one of my favorites since childhood, and re-reading it is giving me a lot of comfort. It reminds me that time cannot be saved by being more stressed or productive, but that it can be valued and enjoyed by doing things that are meaningful to us and that we take pride in. I highly recommend it to all of us!



Elizabeth Hughes

As an editor, I spend many of my days reading. Following arguments, catching up on cited literature, mulling over syntax, and waging war on errant punctuation.

The Golden Age of Crime Queens are some of my frequent evening companions, my favorite being Agatha Christie. The familiar armchair detective style provides my little gray cells with a mild thrill, just enough mental stimulation, and pure escapism. Then along came this research group...

Christie's first mystery was published in 1920, her last in 1973. I have no system in what I read; I might go from a 1960s Miss Marple to a 1930s Poirot. In these radical jumps in time, I quickly began to recognize themes and topics from our Research Group. I believe the first time I noticed work sneaking into my mysteries was related to psychology. It was not just that Poirot in particular uses psychology as his method of deduction, but rather the way in which Christie writes about the field over her 50-year career changes. Her characters often engage in dialogue about psychology that reflects not only the evolving general public perception in any given decade, but also common generational or cultural disagreements regarding mental and physical illness, acceptable treatments, societal norms, patient rights, and what we might now call epistemic injustice.

Of course, this is not a radical or even original thought. There is a wealth of medical humanities research that delves into comparative literature studies, including into Christie's work. I might not be the first to realize the historical value of Christie's sustained interest in societal tension in daily life, yet it does not diminish the meaning of finding this connection to the group's work in a familiar yet unexpected place. In my job, every way in which I can put a topic into a broader context helps me to better advise, but I find this experience helpful and even vital for research to flourish in the world. It can be informative and interesting to read an article, but finding that personal and often unexpected connection to one's life is what brings that research life, makes it relatable and important to the reader. Now the group's research topics pop up regularly in my free time, in novels, art exhibits, and tv shows. But even if I am no longer so surprised, it never fails to delight me.

See you in 2024

Pictures

- 1: Spring impressions, courtesy of Hanna.
2. Klio the cat with an Austrian “Mutterpass,” photo courtesy of Hanna.
3. Odra Noel, Map of Health. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/w6w7nvcg>.
4. Our beloved Villa, photo courtesy of Emma
- 5: Godfried Maes, *Head of Medusa*, 1680. The Art Institute of Chicago.
6. Participants of the group retreat in Haus Fläming in February 2023 (left to right): Michele, Simon, Lara, Michael, Henrik, Klara, Elizabeth, Alfie, Hanna, Robert. Not pictured: Ariane, Birgitta. Photo by Birgitta.
7. Brandenburg sunset, photo courtesy of Simon.
8. Confrontational sheep in Fläming, photo courtesy of Simon.
9. Alfie and Simon taking a sandy break from the conference, photo courtesy of Hanna.
10. Simon and Sam parktaking in poutine, photo courtesy of Simon.
11. Cat on chair on pedestal, photo courtesy of Hanna.
12. Members of research group and the sessions’ chairpersons celebrating the successful conference contribution in Toronto (left to right) Ariane, Sophie Veigl, Simon, Robert, Sam, Michele, Alfie, Hanna, and Andrew Inkpen.
13. José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro. Oskar Schlemmer’s *Triadisches Ballett* costumes, 2017. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.
14. Stanley Keleman, *Emotional Anatomy*, (Center Press, 1985), Pl. 31.
15. Looking out the Villa window, photo courtesy of Emma.
16. Marco Dente and Giuseppe Salviati. Assembly of male and female scholars gathered around an open book, in the middle ground a man holds aloft an armillary sphere, another group of scholars in the background, 1515–1527. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
17. <https://step1.medbullets.com/psychiatry/114028/bipolar-disorder>
18. Krampus bread, baked and photographed by Hanna.

Many thanks to the whole team for their contributions and feedback. An exceptionally big thanks to Emma Sevink for her fabulous assistance in laying out and proofreading the newsletter! – Elizabeth