



ART AND CARDIOLOGY

Increasing Awareness of Heart Transplantation Through Socially Engaged Art Practices From Selected Artists of MEDinART



Vasia I. Hatzi, BSc, MSc, PhD

Heat transplantation is a life-changing process with great impact in the personal and social life of the patient; it raises urgent questions about bodily integrity, personal identity, and the relationship between recipients and donors. The collaboration between contemporary artists, medical scientists, and patients may increase awareness of heart transplantation through socially engaged cultural practices. This paper presents the personal, social, and medical perspectives of heart transplantation through selected collaborative works of artists, who are also members of the global sci/art network MEDinART (www.MEDinART.eu). Inspired and created by Dr. Vasia Hatzi, MEDinART explores the interface between biomedical sciences with arts through the work of 173 artists from 30 countries that are influenced by biomedical sciences.

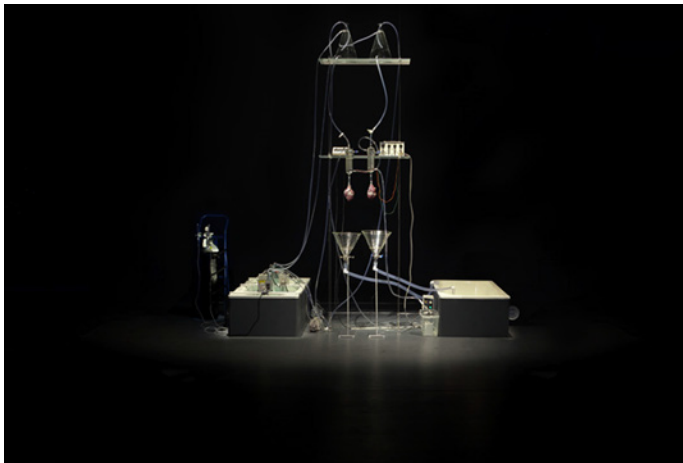
CONNECTING THE VIEWER WITH HIS OR HER INNER BODY INCREASES AWARENESS IN ORGAN DONATION

The collaborative research-based project “The Body is a Big Place” (2011 to 2013) is a large-scale installation developed by artists Helen Pynor and Peta Clancy in collaboration with scientists from King’s College London, Griffith University, Queensland, and the University of Ljubljana; clinicians from The Heart and Lung Transplant Unit, St Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney, and The Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute, Sydney; and sound artist Gail

Priest. The installation comprises a 5-channel video projection, a fully functioning heart perfusion device used in live performances at Performance Space, Sydney (2011), Science Gallery Dublin (2013), and Galerija Kapelica (2013) to reanimate fresh pig hearts, a soundscape by Gail Priest, and a single-channel screen-based video work (Figure 1). The development and realization of the project depended on engagement with members of an organ transplant community in Melbourne who were performers in the work’s underwater video sequences. These were individuals who have received, donated, or stood closely by loved ones as they received or posthumously donated human organs.

The work explores organ transplantation and the ambiguous thresholds between life and death, revealing death as an extended durational process. The artists procured fresh pig hearts from abattoirs, re-staging the clinical processes used to care for human hearts destined for transplantation and thereby enabling reanimation of the pig hearts to a beating state in live performances. An intention of this uncanny specter, recontextualized into a gallery setting, was to facilitate a deeper connection with viewers’ own interiors. Moreover, the project explored the widely reported experiences of organ transplant recipients experience an altered sense of self, following transplantation. The connection of viewers with their interior body may have played a role in affecting perception and awareness of members of the public of illness and organ donation. According to Helen Pynor, “The Body is a Big Place’ did not attempt to take a position on the ethics of organ transplantation but rather to raise questions about its complexity that could leave audiences the space to explore their own personal beliefs and opinions. We know from feedback

From the Benaki Phytopathological Institute, Athens, Greece. Creator and curator of the global sci/art network MEDinART (www.MEDinART.eu). Dr. Hatzi has reported that she has no relationships relevant to the contents of this paper to disclose.

FIGURE 1 Detail of the Large-Scale Installation, “The Body is A Big Place”

Peta Clancy and Helen Pynor. Performance Space: Sydney, November 2011 (2). Photo by Georgie Cargill. ©Peta Clancy and Helen Pynor.

via venues that have hosted the work that some viewers resolved to add their names to organ donor registers as a result of seeing the installation” (1,2).

EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF HEART TRANSPLANTATION

“Hybrid Bodies” (3) is an international and multi-disciplinary research and artistic creation project, based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, that brings together the domains of arts, ethics, medicine, and social sciences. This project explores the complexity of organ transplantation mainly through the organ recipients’ experiences (project “Hybrid Bodies I”) and the complex issues surrounding the anonymity of organ transplantation donors from the perspective of the donor family (project “Hybrid Bodies II”). Toward this direction, in 2007 the artists Ingrid Bachmann (Canada), Andrew Carnie (United Kingdom), Catherine Richards (Canada), and Alexa Wright (United Kingdom) were invited to collaborate with a newly established interdisciplinary study (The Process of Incorporating a Transplanted Heart) on the emotional and psychological effects of heart transplantation. This interdisciplinary study was produced by a research team based at Toronto General Hospital and the University of Toronto Health Network. The team includes a cardiologist (Heather Ross), a philosopher (Margaret Shildrick), a specialist nurse (Enza De Luca), a psychiatrist (Susan Abbey), a health sociologist (Patricia McKeever), and a social scientist (Jennifer Poole) (4).

The artworks created in the frame of this project were first presented to the public in the exhibition “Hybrid Bodies” (2014) that took place at the PHI Centre, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The show “Hybrid Bodies” went also to KunstKraftWerk, Leipzig, Germany (2016) and to Gallery West, London in 2017. “Hybrid Bodies” exhibition explores the complexity of organ transplantation in a novel way that raises awareness and makes it accessible to the public, providing a context to discuss and explore these ideas. In the 8-channel installation “Heart of the Matter” (2014) (Figure 2) by artist Alexa Wright, monologues compiled from individual accounts of the experience of heart transplantation are juxtaposed with narratives of intimate relationships. The 8 different stories, which emerge from simple felt jackets, are activated as visitors approach. As more people enter the installation, individual stories are overlaid to form a cacophony of interconnected testimonies about the effects of a physical or emotional change of heart (5,6). The artwork explores the impact of heart transplantation on personal identity and highlights the intimacy of the relationship between donor and recipient.

“A Tender Heart,” the work of the UK-based artist and academic Andrew Carnie, (2013) (7), is a series of large, 2-times life-sized hearts (up to 12 in all) made in clear soap and strung from ropes that hang from the ceiling (Figure 3). The larger heart has embedded in it a smaller heart in slightly different color. Over time, the hearts get washed away, revealing the inner heart. Soap is a soft material that symbolizes sterility, fragility, transformation, and purity. However, soap produces a lather, a frothy white mass of bubbles that reflect the dangers of hanging your happiness on something so ephemeral that it needs to be avoided, making an indirect criticism on the fragile psychology of the transplant patient and the “dark side” of the heart transplantation industry. Despite all these approaches, Carnie explained that, “among other elements, this work represents the need for patients to remain constantly clean following a heart transplant, to prevent infection.”

ENHANCING THE VOICE OF THE TRANSPLANT PATIENT

Artists, through their work, can amplify the voice of the patient to increase awareness of the social, emotional, and medical issues around transplantation. The exhibition “Transplant and Life,” which was held in the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons (RCS) in London from November 2016 to May 2017, is an exemplar of such approaches.

Long-term collaborators John Wynne (artist and Professor of Sound Art at University of the Arts London) and the late Tim Wainwright, photographer and film maker, worked closely with patients and medical staff at 2 world-class centers for organ transplantation, Harefield and the Royal Free (8).

Through long-term residencies in these hospitals in 2007 and 2016, respectively, the artists photographed and recorded cardiothoracic and abdominal transplant recipients, live donors, people on the waiting lists, and specialists in the field. The goal was to make artwork that would bring voices and faces to the sometimes impersonal sterility of the medical field. Working with patients from a wide and diverse range of ages and backgrounds, the artists developed working techniques that would encourage and enable these individuals to speak candidly about whatever was most important to them in their experience of transplantation. The outcomes of this research include *Transplant*, a 24-channel sound/photography installation and a published book of essays and interviews containing a DVD (9), the exhibition “Transplant and Life,” an installation and series of events at the Hunterian Museum (Figure 4), and “Birds I wouldn’t have heard,” a 6-channel sound and video installation at Science Gallery London.

This body of work aims to enrich the understanding of this life-changing and emotionally charged medical procedure and to engage the general public while also being a valuable humanizing resource for patients and clinicians alike. Claire Marx, the first female president of the RCS, spoke feelingly at the opening of “Transplant and Life” of how proud she felt to have the testimony of patients put center-stage, outside the premises of the hospital, characterizing this exhibition as “the jewel in the crown” of what the RCS has to show. By providing a platform for the voices of the patients, Wynne and Wainwright’s work makes the complexities of the life-death-identity triad crystallized by organ transplantation accessible to a broad audience. It also has the potential to increase the empathy and understanding of clinicians and nursing staff, contributing to patient well-being and potentially improving recovery times.

ART INFLUENCED BY MEDICINE IN PUBLIC SPACES

Artwork influenced by medical sciences, especially when exposed in spaces relevant to the medical fields (i.e., medical museums, hospitals, universities), can offer novel perspectives on health care professionals, medical students, patients and their families, and the general public. This enhances the deeper

FIGURE 2 “Heart of the Matter v.1”



Alexa Wright (2014). PHI Centre, Montreal, Quebec, Canada (5,6). ©Alexa Wright.

understanding of the role of science, the voice of the cardiology patient, and the awareness of society regarding heart transplantation.

The public exposure of similar subjects through talks, articles, and exhibitions elevates not only the work of the artists but also the work of the medical scientists, which often remains unknown. Bringing into public discussion the scientific and philosophical issues of heart transplantation deepens the understanding of the medical sciences.

Medical knowledge and practice are primarily focused on diagnosing the disease and selecting the

FIGURE 3 “A Tender Heart”



Andrew Carnie (2014). PHI Centre, Montreal, Quebec, Canada (7). ©Andrew Carnie.

FIGURE 4 One of the Three Parts of the Exhibition "Transplant and Life"

John Wynne and Tim Wainwright. Installation in the Crystal Gallery of the Hunterian Museum, Royal College of Surgeons, London, UK. November 2016-May 2017. ©John Wynne.

optimal methods of treatment and therapy, often underestimating the impact of the disease on the psychological state of the patient. This approach has become less rigid during the last decades. Socially engaged art practices have the power to contribute toward this direction; for example, by presenting key medical issues from the perspective of the cardiology patients. The exposure of artwork with medical subjects in public spaces invites a wide community of people (artists, physicians, medical students, patients, and the general public) to confront illness not

as a taboo but as a sensitive subject, open to public discussion. Hearing the patient's voice through the art can increase the empathy of the medical students and physicians and their ability to be aware of the feelings and emotions of the patient. Enhancing communication between the physician and patient allows the medical students to become more thoughtful and listen carefully to a patient's narrative of his or her symptoms and potentially to improve their diagnostic and therapeutic skills. In parallel, this type of art practices allows patients to understand their illness and comply with treatment.

By giving emphasis to "who the patient is" and understanding better the negative physical and psychological causes of loneliness in the hospitalized individual, the artists contribute to the holistic approach of the treatment of heart transplantation, with significant results on the quality of the health care and the recovery of the patient.

Several interesting collaborations between artists and scientists, and sometimes also the patients, are presented in the MEDinART global art platform (www.MEDinART.eu).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS The images are reproduced with consent. Special thanks to the artists Andrew Carnie, Peta Clancy, Helen Pynor, Alexa Wright, and John Wynne for their contribution in the MEDinART platform (www.MEDinART.eu) and their collaboration in the manuscript.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Dr. Vasia I. Hatzi, Theseos 65A str, 15234 Halandri, Athens, Greece. E-mail: medinartcollide@gmail.com.

REFERENCES

1. "The Art in HeArt." *Interalia Magazine*, Issue June 2016. Interview with Helen Pynor on "The Body is a Big Place." Editor: Richard Bright. Co-editor: Vasia Hatzi. Available at: <https://www.interaliomag.org/interviews/helen-pynor-the-body-is-a-big-place/>. Accessed September 2019.
2. Clancy P, Pynor H (2011) "The Body is a Big Place". Large scale installation exploring organ transplantation. Soundscape by Gail Priest. Installation photograph: Cargill G, Clancy P, Pynor H, Sydney, Nov 2011. Available at: <http://www.thebodyisabigplace.com/>. Accessed September 2019.
3. Wright A, Richards C, Carnie A, et al. "Hybrid Bodies" (2016): A multidisciplinary research and artistic creation project that investigates the complexities of heart transplantation. In collaboration with the University Health Network in Toronto. Available at: <http://www.hybridbodiesproject.com/>. Accessed September 2019.
4. Shildrick M, Carnie A, Wright A, et al. *Messy entanglements: research assemblages in heart transplantation discourses and practices*. *Med Humanit* 2018;44:46-54.
5. Wright A (2014) "Heart of the Matter": Interactive sound installation as part of the interdisciplinary PITH (Process of Incorporating a Transplanted Heart) Project. PHI Centre, Montreal. Available at: <https://www.alexawright.com/heart-of-the-matter>. Accessed September 2019.
6. Wright A (2014) "Heart of the Matter": Interactive sound installation, as part of the exhibition "Hybrid Bodies", PHI Centre, Montreal. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/301058260>. Accessed September 2019.
7. Carnie A (2014) "Heart Project": Artistic Investigation into the experience of heart transplantation. Available at: <http://www.andrewcarnie.org.uk/heart/atenderheart.html>. Accessed September 2019.
8. Wainwright T, Wynne J (2017) "Transplant and life": Exhibition and programme of events exploring organ transplantation. Hunterian Museum, London. Available at: <http://www.transplantandlife.uk/en/>. Accessed September 2019.
9. Wynne J (2008) "Transplant". Editor: Victoria Hume. Contributors: Toop D, Darwent C., Sharpe L, Yacoub M, and Farquhar M. Includes a DVD with 35-minute video by the artists based on their residency at Harefield Hospital in Middlesex. Available at: arts@rbht.nhs.uk. Accessed September 2019.

KEY WORDS art, cardiology, heart transplantation, MEDinART, SciArt