

JNST-000D: Medical Pictures
T/Th 9:25-10:40
Prof. Seiber
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It is incredibly likely that you have encountered a medical picture in your own life. All sorts of technologies, from x-rays to functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) have been developed in the past century and a half to make mechanical images of the interior and exterior of the body, which is useful in diagnosis, treatment planning, and representing medical information to the public. Before that, drawings of ventricular systems and molecular models of invented chemicals transmitted useful medical information. New techniques of imaging without an actual body, including blood flow simulations and L-systems, harness computer power to generate medical knowledge in new ways. But medical pictures are not just confined to the hospital, lab, or doctor's office. Ever see a sonogram in a pregnancy announcement, or just stuck on a fridge with a magnet? How many times do doctors of TV point to a medical picture as part of the narrative development of an episode? Medical reality TV is all the rage right now. You could spend hours on TikTok and never get past x-rays of shattered bones. In this class, we'll ask about how ways of making representations of medical information is both a diagnostic and cultural process, encoding the patient and the viewer in a social system of science that teach us what is healthy and ill, broken or fixed, normal or abnormal. We'll look at pictures of genitalia that supposedly tell us about normal sexuality. We'll study the ways that racialized medical assumptions make their way into the calibration of diagnostic machines. We'll pick up, along the way, theories of embodiment, wellness, and personhood that determine to a striking degree how specialists, but also families, understand medicine now and in the past.