



In Defense of an Epistemic Ghost in the Shell

STS, Self-Efficacy and Digital Domestic Health

Sebastian Günnel

sebastian.guennel@wohnforschung.org

Digital health increasingly relocates observation, coordination and intervention from clinical institutions into private households. This development is commonly justified through greater autonomy, participation and self-efficacy. Yet domestic capability is rarely produced by individuals alone. It depends on relatives, professionals, housing conditions, ordinary objects, technical infrastructures and often invisible maintenance and interpretive work. Digital systems may consequently attribute distributed achievements to individual competence, reinterpret refusal as deficient readiness, or generate responsibilities by supplying information without corresponding authority or capacity to act.

This contribution uses literature-grounded thought experiments to examine the changing role of Science and Technology Studies as digital health crosses the domestic threshold. The scenarios concern a resident whose apparent independence relies on an unrecorded caregiver; a temporary technological scaffold whose withdrawal reverses measured gains; a competent refusal classified as low self-efficacy; an accurate alert received by actors unable to respond; and a Living Lab in which participants may shape implementation but cannot question the underlying technological trajectory.

Across these cases, four dynamics are distinguished: efficacy misattribution, where collectively produced outcomes are assigned to individuals; efficacy displacement, where technical capability expands while human discretion or alternatives contract; efficacy responsabilization, where increased observability creates unsupported duties; and efficacy enclosure, where people become capable within a system but less able to contest, leave or replace it.

Drawing on Digital Humanism, care-oriented STS and ethical debates around Living Labs and Reallabore, the paper proposes STS as an epistemic ghost in the shell of digital domestic health: a reflexive presence that prevents technical architectures from appearing epistemically and normatively complete. Its role is not merely to improve acceptance or supply ethical safeguards, but to keep open questions about whose efficacy is strengthened, which dependencies remain hidden, what may legitimately remain unobserved and whether the proposed technological intervention is warranted at all.