

# Radicalizing Care Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating

Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg,  
Lena Fritsch, Birgit Bosold,  
Vera Hofmann (Eds.)



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The Rectorate of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

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# Radicalizing Care Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating— An Introduction

Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg, and Lena Fritsch

The beginnings of this book on curating as radicalizing care through feminist and queer activism date back to the 2018 symposium “Who(se) Care(s),” which investigated the potentials, challenges, and pitfalls of curating understood as a practice of critical caretaking connected to the activist politics of feminist and queer struggles. The symposium was a collaboration between Schwules Museum Berlin curators Birgit Bosold and Vera Hofmann and the PhD seminar run by Elke Krasny in the Art and Education program at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. The Schwules Museum, where the symposium took place, owes its existence to long-standing community activism. Tied to the gay and lesbian liberation movement in West Germany, the museum, which boasts a large archival collection, opened in 1985. Although the museum was instituted through activism, its daily operations, collecting strategies, and programming has been marked by gay androcentrism and what Bosold and Hofmann call out as sexism affecting their everyday work environment. In particular, as an institution, the museum was not accessible, hospitable, or useful for WLINT (women, lesbian, intersex, nonbinary, and trans) communities, especially those of color. In the words of British Australian queer-feminist critical race scholar Sara Ahmed, the two curators finally “snapped” because of this “longer history of being affected by what you come up against.”<sup>1</sup>

This realization led to their approach to curatorial programming as activism against sexist violence and exclusions, declaring 2018 the “Year of the Women”<sup>2</sup> at the Schwules Museum. In addition to exhibitions and guided tours, Bosold and Hofmann established a film lounge, converted the museum café into a dyke bar referencing dating culture, collective resistance, cyberfeminism, and spirituality, and initiated an empowerment series around feminisms with discussions, lectures, and somatic workshops. Julia Hartmann, one of Krasny’s students and a contributor to this volume, had met Hofmann through feminist and queer-feminist networks, and proposed a collaboration between the two Schwules Museum curators and the seminar group, who were keenly interested in extending their seminar discussions on radical curatorial practices, feminist and queer activism, anti-capitalist and anti-racist practices of resistance, and the central notion of care together with the museum. Making time and space for collaboration and exchange in order to share practices and ideas across differences, like in this symposium, are central to building feminist and queer activism in curating. Curating as caring works against the challenges you

- 1 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 190.
- 2 The so-called gender star (\*) seeks to advance gender justice in written language and is a fairly recent phenomenon in the written German language. It is used to avoid reducing the diversity and multiplicity of genders and gender identities to the binary and heteronormative gender order.

Some authors in the book use this symbol as a typographic intervention to refute an essentializing biological notion of gender, such as with, e.g., woman\* and female\*. Recognizing that the gender star does not solve all the challenges of representing gender diversity, it is still an attempt of expressing gender justice.

face, but it also works toward hope, joy, “capacious imagination the ability to create community across social and economic justice struggles.”<sup>3</sup>

Guiding questions for the 2018 symposium were the following: Can resistance be collected? How can one share and how can one show the burden, the worries, but also the joys of caring labor? How can curating become better at identifying, responding to, and caring for specific care needs? While curating was historically bound to the duty of caring for museum objects, we think of care needs here in a much broader cultural, social, corporeal, emotional, affective, and intellectual sense. Such care needs raise ethical concerns connected to the politics of interrelatedness and interdependence between humans and nonhumans. How to respond to activism through a new ethics of curating? How to turn curating into an emancipatory practice useful to social movements and struggles for social and ecological justice? And, finally, how to confront neoliberalism’s relentless exhaustion and co-option of care and activism as resources to be exploited and turned into cultural capital for commodification and spectacularization? Following the two days of exchange and learning at the “Who(se) Care(s)” symposium, with its generous allotment of time for informal discussions and conversations, the participants came away with renewed feminist and queer energy, but also with new questions for “staying with the trouble,” as American feminist technoscience scholar and philosopher Donna Haraway so aptly put it.<sup>4</sup> From these manifold and complex new questions, some of which are summarized below, the idea for this volume emerged. How to move the understanding of curating closer to practices of organizing and programming akin to the cultural production connected to activist struggle and social movements? How to embed curating in the nexus of care running through human and nonhuman entanglements in more-than-human worlds? How to address real-world conditions, scenarios, and conflicts as well as socially lived practices and theories? How to care for conflicts? How to better understand the violent legacies of care and exploitation, neglect, and strategic ignorance as they were historically produced under the conditions of colonial capitalism, racist patriarchy, and mainstream/liberal/white feminism? How to bring theories of reproductive labor developed by Marxist-feminist materialism and critical race theory, political dimensions of care ethics, and more-than-human ontologies of care closer together? How to better understand dimensions of caring labor and care ethics in activism and social movements? How to understand curating as a form of caring connected to the new feminist movement in the twenty-first century, with its focus on care, reproductive labor, and struggles for life and planetary survival in light of climate crisis, and most recently, in the last months of writing and editing, the pandemic crisis? Moving with these admittedly broad and difficult questions for the last two years and witnessing the worsening of what American critical theorist Nancy Fraser called the “crisis of care,”<sup>5</sup> the editors of this book have engaged in conversations with curators, activists, artists, scholars, theorists,

and educators whose practices are involved with the questions raised above. Following these conversations, the book grew to a collection of twenty-five essays by more than thirty authors, who contribute to the vital discussions around radicalizing care with their perspectives, their standpoints, and their specific situated knowledges and experiences joining together curating, art-making, activism, theorizing, and research connected to and embedded in feminist and queer struggles in a wide range of different geographies, including diasporic, immigrant, and Indigenous contexts of practice.

The growing body of feminist and queer approaches to curating’s histories and genealogies has focused on feminist and queer aesthetics, on critiques of the exhibition system, and more generally, on injustices and inequalities within the art world. Important contributions to this field of study, among many others, include long-standing critical work by Xabier Arakistain, Katy Deepwell, Angela Dimitrakaki, Joana Joachim, Amelia Jones, Jonathan Katz, Katrin Kivimaa, Elke Krasny, Fiona McGovern, Lara Perry, Maura Reilly, Hilary Robinson, Jelena Petrović, and Jeannine Tang. Yet the focus of this volume is slightly different. Dedicated neither to the historicization and theorization of feminist and queer exhibition histories nor solely to a critique of prevailing art-world injustices, the contributors, most of them practicing curators and involved in feminist and queer activist organizing as well as activist collectives, engage in activist research and scholarship. They generate their reflections and insights with and through curating understood as knowledge and as practice between art, life, activism, and politics. The contributions to this book were written as real-world crises intensifying social and ecological justice struggles in feminist and queer activism unfolded. The practices of curating reflected in this volume seek to practice care, with its high potential for anxieties, failures, worries, and joys, against the present historical conjuncture. Most painfully, white supremacist, capitalist, imperialist, cisnormative, heteronormative patriarchy not only is alive and kicking but has actually come back with a most brutal vengeance in the real-world conditions of global politics and global economies. Precarization, vulnerabilization, exploitation, and exhaustion of bodies, mind, and matter characterize today’s political-economic relations—in particular, class, gender, and race relations. Alt-right extremism and right-wing populism, besides their advances on the territory of culture via the appropriation of emancipatory and transgressive tactics developed by the Left, are entangled with wars between secularism, Christianity, and Islam. The gender politics of homonationalism and femonationalism are entangled with

3 Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Linda E. Carty, editors’ introduction to *Feminist Freedom Warriors: Genealogies, Justice, Politics, and Hope* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), 12.

4 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

5 Nancy Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” *New Left Review*, no. 100 (July/August 2016): 99.



hegemonic Western liberalism and the Far Right's neo-nationalism as they give rise to new forms of racialized and gendered violence.<sup>6</sup> Anthropogenic climate catastrophe has led to the sixth mass extinction currently underway. The Capitalocene is heightening the effects of what Rob Nixon has called a "slow violence" connected to the often invisibilized effects of oil extraction, oil spills, deforestation, or the environmental impact of war.<sup>7</sup> Taken together, the political crisis of ethno-nationalist and white supremacist populism, the economic crisis of neoliberal flexibilization, the social crisis of hyper-individualism and competition defining all human relations, and the environmental crisis of climate change, have led to the above mentioned "crisis of care."<sup>8</sup> Care is political. Radicalizing care starts from the crisis of care.

Claiming curating for any emancipatory and transformative politics and moving curating, care, and activism closer together is no easy task. The historical legacies of curating and its entanglements in colonial capitalism and patriarchal statecraft loom large. Furthermore, caring labor understood as reproductive labor in Marxist-feminist terminology is the unpaid and underpaid fuel of the capitalist engine, with those performing this work historically understood as dependents and excluded from the idea of modern citizenship. And finally, the modern dichotomy splitting art from life, separating art from non-art, has resulted in radical art, which is embedded in life, social movements, or activist struggles, entering into the system called "art world" at the risk of co-option and instrumentalization with emancipatory and transformative politics reduced to the visibility paradigm of the protective "glass case."<sup>9</sup> Radicalizing care as transformative politics in curating needs to employ a "curatorial materialism" to better understand politics of resources and infrastructures, just as much as it needs to employ a curatorial ethics to better understand the politics of knowledge and emotions.<sup>10</sup> A needs-based approach connecting resources, knowledge, infrastructures, and feelings is necessarily responsive to locally specific conditions and situations. As Joan Tronto explains: "What is definitive about care [...] seems to be a perspective of taking the other's needs as the starting point for what must be done."<sup>11</sup> Politics of resourcing and politics of knowing crucially intersect the interdependence and interconnectedness of body, mind, and matter. This intersection requires radicalizing care in curating to connect to two prominent strands of the feminist theorization of care: social reproduction theory and political theory of care ethics. In what follows, we will first shed light on historical impediments to claiming curating as radicalizing care through feminist and queer activism, moving on to care theorization relevant to curating. We then address why radicalizing care as politics and practice in curating is now more crucial and more pertinent than ever, given the present historical conjuncture of interconnected economic, environmental, social, and political crises. And finally, we introduce the contributions to the book's three sections: "Curating-as-Caring: Ethico-political Doings," "Curating-as-Caring: Material Doings," and "Curating-as-Caring: Activist Doings."

Historically, the cultural practice of curating has always operated in and across the culture of the nation-state and the culture of capitalism. Given these systems' historical convergence in colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy, curating cannot be claimed innocently or naively for any radical practice today. In his 1983 book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Chinese-born Irish political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson identified the museum as one of the key technologies for building the imagined political community of the nation-state.<sup>12</sup> In 1991, American Marxist-feminist art historian and museum scholar Carol Duncan contributed a seminal essay to the emergent fields of critical museology and exhibition studies discussing the art museum as a site for practicing a new ritual of citizenship.<sup>13</sup> This, of course, needs to be complicated by the fact that the Western idea and ideal of citizenship as established by the French Revolution—which also established the new model of the public art museum, with the opening of the royal collections of the Louvre to the nation—was based on systemic exclusion based on race, gender, and class. American gender historian Joan Wallach Scott has written that "slaves, wage-earners and women were initially ruled out of active citizenship because they were considered dependents, and autonomy was a prerequisite for individuality."<sup>14</sup> The modern history of curating is therefore fully implicated in the making of cultural and epistemic violence connected to the nation-state, with its classist, sexist, and racist legacies of exclusionary citizenship widely heralded as embodying the values

- 6 Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Sara R. Farris, *Femonationalism: in the Name of Women's Rights* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); and Patrick Wielowiejski, "Identitarian Gays and Threatening Queers, or: How the Far Right Constructs New Chains of Equivalence," in *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond*, ed. Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), 141.
- 7 Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London: Verso, 2015); Jason W. Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016); and Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
- 8 Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," 99.
- 9 Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, eds., *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

- 10 Elke Krasny, "Curatorial Materialism: A Feminist Perspective on Independent and Co-dependent Curating," *OnCurating*, no. 29 (2016): 96–108.
- 11 Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (London: Routledge, 1994), 105.
- 12 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
- 13 Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 88–103.
- 14 Joan Wallach Scott, "French Universalism in the Nineties," in *Women and Citizenship*, ed. Marilyn Friedman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 37. See also Elke Krasny, "Citizenship and the Museum: On Feminist Acts," in *Feminism and Museums: Intervention, Disruption and Change*, ed. Jenna Ashton (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc, 2017), 74–99.

of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The curator is rendered legible as guardian, protector, and mediator of the hegemonic culture sanctioned by the museum as one of the apparatuses of collecting and disseminating—that is, producing and reproducing the very culture of the nation-state. Indeed, curating’s entanglement in producing the culture of capitalism predates the modern institution of the museum tied to the nation-state. In their introduction to the 2020 edited volume *A Companion to Curation*, Australian artist and activist Brad Buckley and Australian artist and critic John Conomos describe the function of the curator in the early capitalist period as a “custodial mediator between an art collection and its modes of display.”<sup>15</sup> And interestingly enough, the professionalization of the curator through academic programs is tied to finance capitalism, with Paul J. Sachs, American businessman, investor, and partner in the globally known financial firm Goldman Sachs, founding one of the early and most influential courses for curators at Harvard in 1921.<sup>16</sup> This art-museum training course renders legible the function of curating as a service of tastemaking and value-shaping between art, capital, artists, and patrons. We would, of course, need a much more detailed materialist research and analysis examining museum collections and large-scale exhibition funding to fully comprehend the extent to which mining money, chemical industry money, oil money, and tobacco money has built museums and their collections and continues to sponsor large-scale art-world events. Historically, curators as guardians of collections were therefore entangled in the web of capitalist extraction and statecraft. With globalization and neoliberalism taking command since the 1970s, the curator was fast promoted to a mobile and flexible hero embodying the “new spirit of capitalism,” which has given rise to hyper-individualism, stardom, accelerated innovation, and large-scale spectacularization.<sup>17</sup> Under the conditions of today’s relentless neoliberal capitalism, curating is understood as a practice of promising style, taste, and easy recognition through building the self as brand by selecting images and bits of information with which to curate one’s Facebook or Instagram feed, and as a marketing catch-all term used by airlines, the cosmetics industry, or culinary chefs.<sup>18</sup> Today’s feverish adoption of curating in the context of self-branding and brand selling presents a challenge to claiming curating as a radical practice useful to activist and real-world agendas. Yet precisely because of these histories of entanglement and implication, the potential of curating for shared meaning-making and for raising matters of critical and public concern can be *care-fully* and critically employed. Mobilizing curating’s etymological root in the Latin *curare*, which means not only to care and to look after but also to cure and to heal, curating has much work to do given the lasting wounds of colonial capitalism and racist patriarchy. In the words of Franco-Guyano-Danish artist and health-tech-politics practitioner Tabita Rezaire, “The wound is the land of healing.”<sup>19</sup>

Taking literally and seriously the etymological dimension of *curare*, care, for practicing curating, opens up the question of care. American feminist educator

Berenice Fisher and American feminist political theorist and care ethicist Joan Tronto explain that “caring [...] includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so we can live as well possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.”<sup>20</sup> This broad definition helps us to understand that the freedom to care and the burden of caring labor are most unequally distributed. Global care injustice and global care discrimination is pervasive, and access to caring infrastructures, broadly understood to include housing, health, education, and culture, is extremely stratified. Care work has been called “dirty work,” and those who perform it have been historically considered dependent and excluded from political and economic rights.<sup>21</sup> Class, gender, race, and other categories of difference shape and determine pervasive care inequalities. In the twenty-first century, care has become a central node in recent activism and social movements. We may think here of the Women’s Global Strike campaigning since 2000 for pay for caring labor and protection against violence and persecution—an initiative with roots in the 1970s International Wages for Housework campaign. Or of the International Women’s Strike that started in 2017, with the coming together of the Polish Black Monday strike against the government’s abortion ban and the Argentinian Ni Una Menos movement against femicide and gendered violence. And we may think of the Black Lives Matter movement fighting police brutality and racialized violence against Black people since 2013. In 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic and after the brutal police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, American human rights activist and community organizer Opal Tometi, one of the movement’s three cofounders, stressed that Black Lives Matter is “more comprehensive than just the criminal-justice system and policing” as she emphasized the importance of housing and education and health-care systems.<sup>22</sup> The emergence of new vital-feminist, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-fascist activism around the globe has given rise to feminist manifestos written by activist-scholars such as 2019’s *Feminism for the 99%*,

15 Brad Buckley and John Conomos, editors’ introduction to *A Companion to Curation* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020), xxvii.

16 Sally Anne Duncan and Andrew McClellan, *The Art of Curating: Paul J. Sachs and the Museum Course at Harvard* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2018).

17 Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2015).

18 See David Balzer, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else* (London: Pluto Press, 2015).

19 Tabita Rezaire, “Prologue—Decolonial Healing: In Defense of Spiritual Technologies,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration*, ed. Kevin Smets, Koen Leurs, Myria Georgiou, Saksia Witteborn, and

Radhika Gajjala (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2019), xxxii.

20 Joan C. Tronto and Berenice Fisher, “Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring,” in *Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women’s Lives*, ed. Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 40.

21 Bridget Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour* (London: Zed Books, 2000).

22 Quoted in Isaac Chotiner, “A Black Lives Matter Co-founder Explains Why This Time Is Different,” *New Yorker*, June 3, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/a-black-lives-matter-co-founder-explains-why-this-time-is-different>.

coauthored by Marxist-feminist philosopher Cinzia Arruzza, Marxist-feminist historian Tithi Bhattacharya, and feminist social and political theorist Nancy Fraser.<sup>23</sup>

With care being indispensable for human life and survival, and more recently better understood to include environmental care, planetary care, and climate care, specific systemic conditions have arisen that define care within any historical formation. As these conditions are historical, they are also open to change and transformation. A politics and practice of radicalizing care is concerned with counteracting the injustices and inequalities of the conditions of care and with working toward emancipatory and transformative change. With life and survival hinging on the everyday labor of care, which is still mostly performed by women and a persistent conflict among different groups of women, the realm of care has been closely examined in feminist and queer theory and scholarship and has also given rise to new forms of theorization connected to lived experience in political philosophy, ethics, and historical-materialist analysis. Even a brief overview of care theory would exceed by far the scope of this introduction, so we will name just a few of the recent relevant publications that have moved social reproduction theory and care ethics forward. Building on the Marxist-feminist tradition, there has been much new work in social reproduction theory, for example, the 2017 volume edited by Tithi Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory*, which includes a rereading of African American philosopher, educator, and activist Angela Davis's seminal *Women, Race and Class* (1981) as key to understanding social reproduction as co-constituted by vectors of difference.<sup>24</sup> A good example bridging real-world care struggles and activist scholarship is German social scientist Gabriele Winker's 2015 book *Care Revolution*.<sup>25</sup> Chinese American anthropologist Anna Tsing's work has opened new instructive perspectives onto dimensions of "collaborative survival."<sup>26</sup> Multispecies feminist Donna Haraway has introduced the powerful notion of "response-ability," through which we can understand the work of caring as enabling responses to the continuous crisis of living in capitalist ruins.<sup>27</sup> Feminist science and technology scholar María Puig de la Bellacasa's 2017 book *Matters of Care* has brought closer together three dimensions of care—care as "affective state, a material vital doing and an ethico-political obligation"—which is most useful for understanding care in curating, if we understand curating as a practice that encompasses affective-emotional, intellectual, epistemic, material, ethical, and political concerns. Staying with care—to paraphrase Haraway's potent and poignant idea of staying with the trouble—provides a different ontological understanding of activism as continuous care. Such an understanding of care activism serves as the entry point for understanding curating as a care practice aligned with radical social-justice and epistemic-justice struggles. This book is concerned with practices of curating acting as a bridge between real-world conditions of care and curatorial work as a caretaking practice in the cultural field in relation to these real-world conditions.

Acknowledging that curating has historically been part of the epistemic power regime and the accumulation economy of disaster capitalism, this book does not focus on the still highly relevant "curatorial activism," with its focus on gender equality in the art world, and in particular, representative exhibitions as pursued by American feminist art historian and curator Maura Reilly; rather, it is concerned with the sexualized, racialized, and gendered deep structures of systemic injustice produced and continuously reproduced by the real-world conditions we find ourselves in.<sup>28</sup> The approaches to radicalizing care through feminist and queer activism in curating are consciously aware of the fact that vulnerability is political and that care needs to be reliable. Therefore, care requires commitment and continuity. In 1979, African American writer, womanist, and civil rights activist Audre Lorde wrote: "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."<sup>29</sup> In light of the most recent developments, these words provide a profound understanding of the condition of colonial capitalism and racist patriarchy as a "war [...] being waged against women," a war being waged against life and the environment at large.<sup>30</sup> Neoliberalism has transformed self-care into an industrial issue, part of global care chains<sup>31</sup> in the globalized service industry. Self-care is being produced for and delivered to high-performing individuals by a highly racialized, gendered, and sexualized service industry, but it has also been widely and potently rediscovered in activism and social movements. The introduction to the March 2020 issue of *Social Text* on radical care quotes Angela Davis as follows: "I think our notions of what counts as radical have changed over time. Self-care and healing and attention to the body and the spiritual dimension—all of this is now a part of radical social justice struggles."<sup>32</sup> Inspired by, aligned with, or even embedded in social-justice struggles, new forms of curatorial labor akin to organizing and programming are emerging.

23 Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2019).

24 David McNally, "Intersections and Dialectics: Critical Reconstructions in Social Reproduction Theory," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 94–111.

25 Gabriele Winker, *Care Revolution: Schritte in eine solidarische Gesellschaft* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015).

26 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2015), 2.

27 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 140.

28 Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018).

29 Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light, and Other Essays* (New York: Firebrand Books, 1988), 130.

30 Silvia Federici, "Globalization, Capital, Accumulation, and Violence against Women: An International and Historical Perspective," in *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2018), 46.

31 Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value," in *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 130–46.

32 Quoted in Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese, "Radical Care: Survival Strategies in Uncertain Times," *Social Text* 38, no. 1 (March 2020): 1.

Even though art-world concerns might not be the key focus of these curatorial practices, they are by no means outside the art context. Practices like the ones discussed in this book move with and through the art context, in its institutions, in extra-institutional spaces, in self-organized spaces, in temporary alliances, and in collaboration with many non-art actors and communities. The art system's widespread exploitation of care delivered by underpaid and overworked, predominantly female curatorial staff and independent curators, and its co-option of activism as add-on or one-off surplus value for critical programming in art institutions, does not go unnoticed or uncritiqued by the contributors to this book. Yet their critical energy focuses less on unveiling art-world injustices and more on radicalizing care through seeking ways of mending and healing, believing in "the possibility of life in capitalist ruins."<sup>33</sup> Insisting that cultural liberation offers political tools and ethical perspectives for fighting systemic social, political, cultural, and epistemic violence, the contributions collected here bring together practices that show that curating can contribute to radicalizing care by bringing together art, life, politics, activism, "socially lived theories," and ethics of practice through continuous doing, learning, undoing, and unlearning.

This book offers approaches to feminist and queer activism in curating as radicalizing care from specific local contexts, situated knowledges and feelings, and local-global belongings. The contributions take the form of reflective essays, practice-based accounts, and artistic and speculative manifestos. Structured into three thematic sections—"Curating-as-Caring: Ethico-political Doings," "Curating-as-Caring: Material Doings," and "Curating-as-Caring: Activist Doings"—these contributions stay with the entanglements of epistemic and material, affective and social dimensions of curatorial labor. The first section, "Curating-as-Caring: Ethico-political Doings," brings together theoretical essays by Elke Krasny and Lesia Prokopenko, practice-based accounts and reflections by Sophie Lingg, Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, Edna Bonhomme, Vanessa Gravenor, and Nina Prader, and Hana Janečková, and activist and artistic manifestos by k\are (Agnieszka Habraschka and Mia von Matt), Ven Paldano, and as Verena Melgarejo Weinandt and Imayna Caceres. The first two essays address ethico-political matters of care, reflecting upon the state of material and economic conditions as they define care through the local-global nexus impacting on curating in today's global crisis on the one hand, and on the other, philosophies of care that so far have remained unconnected, which highlights that curating can practice the art of careful connections. The practice-based accounts draw on the authors' own curatorial practices, highlighting the ethico-political challenges for curating as care in regard to female artistic performance on digital platforms and in work on health, trauma, and healing in artist-run spaces and institutional contexts; and the challenges of putting into curatorial practice the demands of a feminist killjoy when one relies on commissions from biennials and art institutions as a so-called

independent curator. The manifestos foreground the ethico-political concerns of care, healing, access, transformative change, and collective responsibility.

The second section, "Curating-as-Caring: Material Doings," brings together practice-based accounts from diverse geographies and differently situated knowledges, including Afrodiasporic, crip, feminist, immigrant, Indigenous, intersectional, nonbinary, queer, queer-feminist, and trans perspectives. Bodies, minds, environments, technologies, spaces, infrastructures, institutions, resources, social relations, and communities are not external to care. They are always in processes of care: giving care, in need of care, and receiving care. Therefore, care in curating is always also material, technological, and infrastructural. Care runs through the nexus of enmeshments and entanglements, as bodily, mental, technological, spatial, infrastructural, institutional, environmental, and social needs and doings rub against each other: they are simultaneously complementing and competing with each other, depending upon each other, and in conflict with each other. Given these fundamental contradictions, curating as caring has to be understood as a material, technological, infrastructural mediation between bodies, minds, and their social relations. Curating as caring enters the nexus of material doings concerned both with the maintenance of necessary material supports and with undoing unjust material doings, since these are shaped through specific local historical and present-day conditions, conflicts, and contradictions. Finding ways of addressing these material doings, as they are the source of potentiality and of conflict, is the thread running through all the contributions in this section. Material doings that we encounter in this section range from beading to hacking, from watering plants to online dance parties. The contributions by Amelia Wallin and Cathy Mattes address the question of curating and care in the context of settler-colonial geographies in Australia and Canada, respectively. Coming from different points of entry, both Wallin and Mattes discuss conditions of caring for hospitality in contexts of stolen land and struggles for sovereignty. Carlota Mir, Rosario Talevi and Gilly Karjevsky of Soft Agency, and Jelena Micić bring to the fore questions of infrastructure as a public good in the changing welfare-state systems of multi-ethnic immigrant urban societies in present-day Stockholm, Berlin, and Vienna. Focusing on the spatial dimensions of material doings as they matter to communities, these examples of curatorial labor include domestic and urban material care practices such as doing laundry, watering plants, or practicing climate care in a large-scale rainwater retention basin. The last three contributions in this section, by Fabio Otti, the collective COVEN BERLIN, and Patricia J. Reis and Stefanie Wuschitz, are, in different ways, centrally concerned with digital technologies and physical space as conduits for access: access to and access for women\* and queer-feminist, queer, trans, and nonbinary communities, access to abundance and messiness,

33 Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*.

access to bodily encounters and shared concerns, access to joy and finding belonging. Curating as care through material doings includes activities as diverse as dancing and partying, creating content about art, the body, and feminism in noncompetitive ways, and the joys of hacking norms, tools, language, structures, patriarchy, and gender regimes.

The third and last section, “Curating-as-Caring: Activist Doings,” brings together reflections and manifestos on curating, art-making, and research informed by activism. Structural exclusions, systemic racism, and gendered and sexualized violence, including epistemic violence, are addressed through collaborative approaches informed by decolonial, queer-feminist, and feminist activism. Curatorial and artistic practice, research, theorizing, and activism are understood not as separate from each other, but rather as entry points for developing collaborative caretaking practices. The contributions by Birgit Bosold and Vera Hofmann and by Chantal Küng address, albeit in very different ways, the question of caring for the archives of activism, of caring for keeping alive earlier lesbian and feminist activist practices as sexual and gender politics are radically changing. What Amelia Jones has called queer-feminist durationality is important here in at least two ways: creating durationality over time is mobilized through transgenerational approaches and through long-term commitment. Bosold and Hofmann programmed an entire year at the Schwules Museum (Gay museum) focused on WLINT positions and experiences, declaring it the “Year of the Women\*,” while Küng is mobilizing and reactivating a feminist artist’s archive, and in particular, her educational methodologies. The contributions by Julia Hartmann and Hitomi Hasegawa present activism in curating on the level of research and on the level of exhibition-making, respectively. Hartmann sheds light on a genealogy of self-organized feminist and women-centered exhibitions on motherhood in mainland China, and Hasegawa discusses how she quickly organized an exhibition in Hong Kong in support of a Japanese artist who faced obscenity charges. Practice-based accounts by Lena Fritsch and Claudia Lomoschitz concern themselves with decolonial activism as a practice of care. Considering the relationship between the colonial archive, present-day decolonial activism, museum institutions, and different forms of participation, through interviews with activists or through collective performative embodiment with workshop participants, their accounts open repressed colonial wounds in the German cities of Leipzig and Hamburg, in particular, the colonial heritage of their museum collections. Activism and curating as caring for remembering the wound and for practicing healing is captured through the two manifesto that conclude this volume: Pêdra Costa’s short manifesto insists on theory being the skin and practice coming into being from life, joining together decolonial resistance, post-porn aesthetics, and queer politics, while Elif Sarıcan, Nika Dubrovsky, and Elizaveta Mhaili use the space of an essay for a generative and speculative imagination of a not-yet-existing Museum of Care in Rojava. They leave behind the exhibition

as the format through which a museum operates and imagine the provision of a space where people, artists and non-artists, collaborate in order to change, restore, repair, and heal the social fabric of society.

As editors of this book, we are most thankful and most grateful to all the contributors who accepted our invitation and are moving feminist and queer activism forward through their curatorial labor, their research, their work as educators and artists. Academic writing is a labor of love, often performed before and after hours, on top of all those other activities that generate an income for economic survival, on top of all those activities that keep kin, family, and friends alive and well, and on top of all those activities related to activism and artivism in feminist, queer-feminist, and queer groups, anti-fascist, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist struggles, the disability justice movement, and the climate justice movement, to name a few fields that contributors to this volume are engaged with. The editors are thankful to the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and to Sternberg Press. Coeditors Birgit Bosold and Vera Hofmann focused their energy on preparing and hosting the symposium remembered as inspirational, convivial, and generous. Coeditors Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg, and Lena Fritsch focused their energy on the editorial labor. The editors are thankful to each other for continuous support and friendship. With this collection of essays, we seek to inspire hope, imagination, and action for radicalizing care through feminist and queer activism based in the understanding of interconnectedness and interdependence in vulnerability and collectivity in curating and beyond.

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Curating-as-  
Caring:  
Ethico-political  
Doings

# Radicalizing Care Feminist Futures for Living with an Infected Planet

Elke Krasny

Take care. Since the global COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020, these words have taken on a whole new dimension. More than a mere greeting, take care has become the survival imperative for pandemic times. Idiomatically, take care instructs a subject to be careful, to take care of themselves, to not do anything that might expose them to risk or get them in trouble. To take care means to see the world and ourselves as in it together. Very often, thinking of care conjures images of the frail, the sick, the weak, the vulnerable, the newborn, the dying. Those who are most in need of care yet cannot take care of themselves define the commonly held notion of care. This overshadows the fact that humans are always in need of care; fundamentally, humans are defined by their natality, their mortality, and their need for care. While this makes care a matter of life and death, and therefore an ontological category, the way that care is being organized, produced, and distributed within any historical formation is, of course, a product of history, and therefore open to economic, political, and social transformation.

With the outbreak of the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 and the resulting illness COVID-19 affecting the global population, a new pandemic regime has been instituted. Take care, the pandemic imperative, together with new hashtags surfacing and trending online in spring 2020, as I write this, present articulations of the lived everyday realities in COVID times. Such greetings and hashtags are useful for understanding, feeling, and analyzing the ethics of the global present: #stopspreadingthecoronavirus #washyourhands #covercoughsandsneezes #stayathome #wearamask #becalmbesafe #stayhealthy #keepdistance #socialdistancing #quarantinecare #protectothers #wereallinthisogether #takecareofyourself #takecareofothers #takecareoftheworld. With the necessity of care pushing up against the deadly realities of the virus, a new political and public vocabulary has emerged around the labor of care. In particular, those who work in health and social services are being referred to as essential workers. Governmental rationale has it that essential workers are those performing essential services necessary for avoiding sickness, poverty, chaos, and violence, as the Pan American Health Organization stresses in their guidelines for preparedness in disaster management.<sup>1</sup> New political and collective public rituals have emerged to acknowledge and celebrate the essentiality of healthcare labor. Heads of state, like the president of Austria, where I live, publicly express their gratitude to care workers as they stress the essentiality of care. In some countries under lockdown, like Italy or Spain, thousands of people, self-coordinated through social media, have started to come together on their balconies and behind their open windows every night at 8 p.m. Their applause

<sup>1</sup> Pan American Health Organization, "Disaster Management: Maintenance of Essential Services," accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.paho.org/disasters/index>

[.php?option=com\\_docman&view=download&category\\_slug=tools&alias=543-pandinflu-leadershipduring-tool-16&Itemid=1179&lang=en](https://www.paho.org/disasters/index.php?option=com_docman&view=download&category_slug=tools&alias=543-pandinflu-leadershipduring-tool-16&Itemid=1179&lang=en)



fills the streets of their cities. These standing ovations express solidarity with and gratitude to the healthcare workers who risk their lives to keep others alive. In the language of curating, such performative collective public acts could be described as self-curated by the people.

The purpose of this writing is to think what the real-world conditions—with their realities of economic and political configurations of power, rising inequality, and rampant bodily and ecological destruction—mean for radicalizing care, for living with an infected planet in general, and for curating in particular. The “arts of noticing,” thorough information-gathering and studying of real-world conditions, are seen as starting points for curating that engages with the ethical dimensions of the global present.<sup>2</sup> Such curating is envisioned as embedded in and allied with the emergent global feminist movement, which I call care feminism. With economic and social conditions differing widely around the world, but also within communities, cities, and countries, taking care is not possible for all. Following basic COVID prevention rules is impossible for those who do not have access to hygiene infrastructures and sufficient water resources, for those who live in overcrowded conditions or lack a home altogether, for those for whom staying safe at home is not an option. While the pandemic highlights that we are all in this together, globally, it also most painfully foregrounds that the world is divided by care and over care. Hence, we must radicalize care through the political project of a care feminism that joins Marxist-feminist analysis with the agendas of social, health, and ecological justice.

The wheels of capitalist economy have come to a shuddering halt in COVID times and many governments around the globe have prioritized health and survival over short-term economic interests. Yet this is not necessarily a reason for feminist hope. The rhetoric and the vocabulary that foreground the centrality of care are entrenched in the patriarchal war imaginary. Care workers are mobilized as essential workers by heads of governments and political leaders, with one of the central meanings of mobilization being the act of organizing resources in times of war. Recast as frontline workers, with the central semantic dimension of “frontline” connected to the military front, they are seen as waging a war against the deadly virus. The brave care worker is taking the place of the brave soldier, praised for risking the dangers of the viral battlefield. Yet the war imaginary, with its emergency authority, does not stop at the field of politics. Widely read public intellectuals, in particular those based in masculinist thought traditions—I will not name names here—use the state of exception as their key analytic frame to make sense of the state of infection. These orientations derived from the political framework of war and the philosophical tradition of the state of exception offer no assurance for a new international global care order, which is what is most urgently needed for living with an infected planet in post-pandemic times. Living with an infected planet refers to the pandemic situation of COVID times. Living with an infected

planet also refers to the disease of invasive colonial capitalism gone viral. Care has never fared well under capitalism, and it will do even worse if post-pandemic capitalism continues to use the now-established crisis frameworks of war and the state of exception as cure. The framework of war can never be reconciled with the framework of care.

Since the beginnings of colonial capitalism, the planet has been infected with exploitation, exhaustion, extraction, and depletion. The conflation of life with labor as well as the conflation of nature with resource resulting from the rule of capitalism have rendered the planet sick and unhealthy for living. Systemic injustice and discrimination in context of care have long been at the heart of the capitalist project. Precisely because of its indispensability, caring labor was rendered most vulnerable, most precarious, and most easily extractable and exploitable from the perspective of the capitalist organization of life and labor. With life dependent upon care, capitalism cunningly understood that that which humans cannot live without would be delivered regardless of the conditions of payment, value, or rights. Intersections of class, gender, and race concern all dimensions of human lived experience, and in particular, the indispensability of care. Feminist activists and theorists have lucidly diagnosed that Marx himself remained strangely imprecise about the what, the how, and the who regarding the labor necessary for reproducing the living body, to which, from an eco-feminist perspective, we must add the care for nature and irreproducible natural resources.

The proletarian women’s movement at the beginning of the twentieth century and women’s movements around the world in its second half have made crucial inroads toward disrupting, dismantling, and transforming care injustice under the rule of capitalism. The crisis of care is structural, with the aftermath of colonial capitalism defining structures endemic to capitalism’s destruction of life and land still present in the algorithmic technologies of neoliberal surveillance capitalism. Different feminist positions, including radical African American educator, activist, and philosopher Angela Davis, Italian American Marxist-feminist activist and scholar Silvia Federici, practicing artist and theorist Denise Ferreira da Silva, American feminist multispecies thinker Donna Haraway, German eco-feminist sociologist Maria Mies, American anthropologist and filmmaker Elizabeth Povinelli, Indian philosopher of science and eco-feminist activist Vandana Shiva, Chinese American anthropologist and Anthropocene thinker Anna Tsing, or Afro-diasporic French decolonial feminist scholar and activist Françoise Vergès, have developed lines of thought most useful for understanding both the critical condition of care, with care as a site of class, gender, and racial conflict, and the essentiality of finding new ways forward

2 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of*

*Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 17.

for living with an infected planet. The crisis of care is the capitalist disease our planet is suffering from.

The care-crisis nexus runs through bodies, minds, land, and natural resources under the global neoliberal-capitalist world order. The twenty-first century, with the financial/economic crisis of 2007–8, governmental declarations of climate emergency, and the global COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing at the time of writing this essay, has led to the care-crisis nexus being placed at the center of global feminist activism and many feminist movements. The bodies and minds of care workers in the health, social, and education sectors, maintenance workers in the globalized landscapes of tourism, culture, and office spaces, and of course, unpaid care workers in domestic environments are exhausted as their work is violently exploited. These conditions are addressed in feminist manifestos published in 2019: *¿Qué quiere el movimiento feminista? Reivindicaciones y razones*, written by the Comisión Feminista 8M de Madrid, the network that organizes the March 8th Feminist Strike—which is first and foremost a care strike—and *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*, authored by Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, which rallies for an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and eco-socialist feminism. I understand these manifestos, and the feminist movements they are connected to, as care feminism relevant to envisioning a necessarily new international global care order.

The pandemic disproportionately affects women\*. There is no shutdown for care responsibilities: “There’s no ‘pause’ button for care.”<sup>3</sup> The German weekly *Die Zeit* diagnosed the pandemic as “the crisis of women,” with women\* losing their jobs in the formal and informal maintenance and service sectors because of the caring labor they have to perform at home or their working hours skyrocketing as they combine home-office hours and caring labor hours, and with women\* disproportionately exposed to the virus as healthcare workers—in intensive care units but also in mobile health services in underserved rural areas or urban slums. The actual impact of the pandemic on the lives of women\* might never be fully understood, given the world’s prevailing “data bias” when it comes to measuring the unpaid work performed by women\*, which, according to feminist journalist and activist Caroline Criado Perez, remains the “greatest gender data gap” to date.<sup>4</sup> The pandemic throws into sharp relief the feminization of labor power and unpaid household work, but also the rising rates of violence and femicide targeting women\*’s bodies in times of crisis.<sup>5</sup>

Care feminism, particularly in light of the conditions of the global present, is a political project. Care feminism is about what living with an infected planet can, could, and hopefully will be. On March 13, 2020, Vandana Shiva wrote the following on her blog: “We are one Earth Family on one planet, healthy in our diversity and interconnectedness. The planet’s health and our health is

inseparable.”<sup>6</sup> New feminist proposals address the urgency and immediacy of care in COVID times, such as the “Feminist Emergency Plan in the Face of the Coronavirus Crisis” for communally sharing care and collectively fighting against sexualized and gendered violence, published by the Coordinadora Feminista 8M in Chile.<sup>7</sup>

With critical and activist scholarship on the care-crisis nexus on the rise and with the political project of care feminism in the making, I see the possibilities and responsibilities for radicalizing care through curating, with Donna Haraway’s potent hyphenation of “semiotic-material” in mind and body.<sup>8</sup> Raising consciousness in collective meaning-making processes and practicing new forms of collective and mutual care in alliance with care feminism sets the agenda for radicalizing care to regenerate human life, to restore sociality, and to repair land and nature so the infected planet can recuperate and heal. Such curating is not “curatorial activism” concerned with transforming unjust art-world conditions. Curating aligned with care feminism frees up possibilities for collectively imagining, envisioning, practicing, feeling, thinking, and dreaming a radicalized care for living with an infected planet. We need local and global public acts that produce—and reproduce—knowledge, including scientific insights and practice foregrounding the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans and nonhumans, life and land, bodies and nature, in health, earth, social, climate, educational, and as I want to emphasize, aesthetic care. The questions such curating can and could address are far-reaching, widespread, and difficult. There might be public collective acts of remembering and mourning the dead lost to the pandemic, and of remembering and mourning the nonhumans lost to and the environmental destruction caused by the sixth mass extinction and climate catastrophe. There might be new forms of

- 3 Anam Parvez Butt, Amber Parkes, and Dana Stefov, “Coronavirus and the Case for Care: Envisioning a Just, Feminist Future,” *From Poverty to Power* (blog), Oxfam, May 7, 2020, <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/coronavirus-and-the-case-for-care-envisioning-a-just-feminist-future/>.
- 4 Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (London: Vintage, 2019), 239.
- 5 See Wide+, “COVID-19 Crisis from a Feminist Perspective: Overview of Different Articles Published,” accessed May 7, 2020, <https://wideplus.org/2020/03/26/covid-19-crisis-from-a-feminist-perspective-overview-of-different-articles-published/>;
- World Health Organization, “COVID-19 and Violence against Women: What the Health Sector/System Can Do,” March 26, 2020, <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth>

</publications/emergencies/COVID-19-VAW-full-text.pdf>.

- 6 Vandana Shiva, “Ecological Reflections on the Corona Virus: One Planet, One Health—Connected through Biodiversity,” *Jivad—The Vandana Shiva Blog*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.navdanya.org/bija-reflections/2020/03/18/ecological-reflections-on-the-corona-virus/>.
- 7 Coordinadora Feminista 8M, “Feminist Emergency Plan in the Face of the Coronavirus Crisis,” *Toward Freedom*, March 19, 2020, <https://towardfreedom.org/blog-blog/chilean-womens-movement-releases-feminist-emergency-plan-in-the-face-of-the-coronavirus-crisis/>.
- 8 Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 192.

political organizing for public assemblies to decide on the best way forward for care. There might be ways of sharing with the public new research on the climate catastrophe, the global health catastrophe, the imminent food catastrophe, and the global feminization of labor. There might be small-scale localized initiatives organizing caring labor differently. There might be global political campaigns for centering the organization of the economy around care. There might be new public rituals celebrating care and the joy of aliveness. Even though the standing ovations for healthcare workers, which I introduced at the beginning of this essay, are largely symbolic, they are still meaningful. They demonstrate connectedness under social distancing rules, they honor the labor performed by healthcare workers, and they show the capacity for self-organization, for self-curation. At the most general level, joining the knowledge of care, with the joy of care, and the political struggle for structural transformation with an economy based on the mutuality and indispensability of care, is the hopeful, albeit enormous, field for radicalizing care—including in curating.

The historical conjuncture of climate and pandemic crises presents a crossroads for living with an infected planet and its future. The pandemic has shown that governments do not have to subordinate politics to the interests of the economy. Yet the framework of war and the mindset of the state of exception do not inspire hope for structural transformation toward a different economy. These frameworks suggest that we are on the road to so-called normal. With the world before COVID times a frantic world in turmoil, a world teetering on the brink of collapse, a world premised on poverty and precarity with its gender, sexual, and racial injustice, a world of overproduction and overconsumption, including the spectacle-driven, hyper-accelerated art world, the wish to return to normal is the most toxic wish. Care feminism, dedicated to working toward healing our infected planet, is not about rebuilding and restoring the world we knew, since that world was based on capitalist destruction and toxic human exceptionalism. Care feminism is about bodily, cultural, health, social, environmental, educational, and aesthetic justice rooted in the essentiality of care. Care feminism is most profoundly challenged by the economic realities that turn care into a resource exploited as cheap, even costless, women\*-generated fuel, and at the same time, perceives care as a burdensome liability that slows down and holds back the speedy pace of the economy. Progress-cum-innovation, growth-cum-profit, and productivity-cum-independence have been the authoritative master narratives since the beginnings of modern colonial capitalism. The colonial present results in bodies and land being disregarded, rendering them disposable through stripping bodies of their humanity and land of its capacity to recuperate. This is what care feminism is up against. In the words of Black feminist, author, doula, and women's rights activist adrienne maree brown on her blog: "when i listen to my bones the instruction is care: care for this body and all other bodies [...]"

care for each connection, and if it must end, care for the ending. [...] care for this planet [...] care generally for futures [...]."<sup>9</sup> Care feminism starts from the centrality of inseparability, interconnectedness, and interdependence in ontological vulnerability. Care feminism works against the dictatorship of viral capitalism ruled by growth through destruction, productivity through extraction, progress through extinction, and profit through exhaustion. Care feminism stands up for continued living with and taking care of an infected planet where life is not subordinated to labor, and nature is not subordinated to extraction. There cannot be a return to the way it was before. This is what radicalizing care is about—to which curating can, could, and hopefully will contribute.

9 adrienne maree brown, "care for yourself and everything else (transmission)," April 29, 2020, <http://adriennemareebrown.net/2020/04/29/care-for-yourself-and-everything-else-transmission/>.

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# Curating Theory, Mending Care

Lesia Prokopenko

## Curating

Care, seen as an act of reciprocity and a practice of introspection, allows us to reinvent the means of subjectivity production and modes of coexistence.

The understanding of care, however, is usually split into two different vectors that aren't always viewed in their necessary unity, for reasons we will observe in the following. One of these vectors is what we would broadly name the realm of reproduction and preservation of life at its various stages. The other is the realm of philosophical care of the self and care as a tool of knowledge. I introduce this distinction here only as something necessary to overcome—and we are going to see what role particular lines of feminist thought have played in making it possible to look *below* it,<sup>1</sup> as well as how the emancipatory decolonial project invites the reappropriation and repair of some pivotal elements of Western philosophy.

“Doing theory,” writes American feminist science scholar, physicist, and philosopher Karen Barad, “requires being open to the world’s aliveness, allowing oneself to be lured by curiosity, surprise, and wonder. Theories are not mere metaphysical pronouncements on the world from some presumed position of exteriority. Theories are living and breathing reconfigurings of the world. The world theorizes as well as experiments with itself. Figuring, reconfiguring.”<sup>2</sup> When we call doing theory an act of curating, we acknowledge that we are dealing with a multiplicity of voices and possible directions, that we pick and assign concepts and planes, we shuffle and reshuffle them to see which assemblages may have the potency to open auspicious routes for the world’s unfolding. We acknowledge that doing theory is not a transcendental act of authoritative discourse-integrity; it is rather an act of care itself.

French philosopher and psychotherapist Félix Guattari emphasized that the treatment of psychotic patients is “not simply a matter of remodelling a patient’s subjectivity—as it existed before a psychotic crisis—but of a production *sui generis*.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the cure suggested here by curating does not imply returning to a state of nonexistent initial integrity; it implies the ongoing process of reconfiguring that prevents stagnation and untangles repetitive impasses.

1 Zairong Xiang suggests looking *below*, rather than *beyond* dualisms and the logic of either-or; see Zairong Xiang, “Transdualism: Toward a Materio-Discursive Embodiment,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2018): 425–42.

2 Karen Barad, “On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am (v1.1),” in *Power*

*of Material—Politics of Materiality*, ed. Susanne Witzgall and Kerstin Stakemeier (diaphanes, 2014), <https://www.diaphanes.com/titel/on-touching-the-inhuman-that-therefore-i-am-v1-1-3075>.

3 Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 6.

## Proceeding with Care

Care consists of being caring and being careful. Being careful means slowing down, thinking twice, looking to your left, then your right, then your left, before crossing the street on a green light, or moving fast enough to escape a falling brick or a flying bullet. It may also mean hiding, eliminating unnecessary noise. It means moving softly, so as not to spill what you are carrying, applying your sunscreen, keeping flammable items away from fire. In Buddhism, the possibility of compassionate life begins with self-compassion. You can only help all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering provided that you learn how to stop suffering for yourself. Those who claim they want to save the world need to save themselves first, and then their loved ones. The world takes care of itself in many invisible ways, by many invisible hands.

Being careful is a fundamental guerilla tactic: if, while on a mission, you are able to save your own life and stay safe, you are also able to secure the safety of your allies. “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare,” as African American poet, womanist, and civil rights activist Audre Lorde famously proclaimed in 1988. With the understanding that this quote has become rather ubiquitous lately, let’s turn to it, in spite of and precisely because of this fact. As an act of political warfare, care is not what makes one win a war, which is, by definition, always already lost; care is an act that overturns and exhausts the logic of warfare with the very choice to preserve life. As Spinoza wrote, “The foundation of virtue is that endeavour itself to preserve our own being.”<sup>4</sup>

Care appeared in another curious conjunction with warfare some twenty-three centuries before Lorde, in the *Analects* of Chinese philosopher and politician Confucius, where it is claimed that “fasting, war and sickness were the things over which the Master exercised care.”<sup>5</sup> The notion 慎 (*shèn*) was translated by Chinese sinologist D. C. Lau as “care” and by American specialist on early Chinese thought and religion Edward Slingerland as “caution.” The character is composed of 忄 (a version of 心, *xīn*), which stands for heart and mind, or heart-mind, and 真 (*zhēn*)—true, real, sincere. So 慎 implies being careful, cautious, prudent, and also quiet—it comes from subtle intuitive prehension that gives access to the genuine. It stands as much for concern as delicate treatment. Like fasting and sickness, political warfare cannot be a perpetual state. It is a state that yields to care in order to cease.

Being careful stands for a particular type of attentive perception: one may listen carefully, read carefully. It requires being receptive and caring toward the material, entering into a relation of care. The knowledge of relations corresponds, according to Portuguese-born Dutch Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza, to the second kind of knowledge that arises after one reaches beyond

the inadequate ideas, beyond the totality of passive affections and passions: “It is the knowledge of relations that compose me and the relations that compose other things,” as French philosopher Gilles Deleuze explained it.<sup>6</sup> This caring/careful knowledge paves the way to the third type of knowledge and mode of living: the intuitive knowledge or the knowledge of essence, from which “arises the highest possible peace of mind.”<sup>7</sup>

Musing on the ways quantum field theory changes the understanding of being and time, in a situation where “the philosophical terrain is rugged, slippery, and mostly unexplored,” Barad suggests that “the question is: How to proceed with exquisite care?”<sup>8</sup> Care is what ultimately unlocks access to the “true and real.” It’s a conjunction of appropriate intensities, velocities, and checks and balances that allows theory to fix itself, to realign the fallacious knowledge, as the fallacies of knowledge are what interferes with the preservation of life.

How to proceed with exquisite care? Let’s embrace this question in its full iridescence, as an inquiry, a guideline, and a methodology, in order to think about care, with care and carefully.

## Mattering

If we look closer at the aforementioned split in the understanding of care, it becomes clear that it duplicates the split between body and mind—or matter and spirit. This separation implies a consequent hierarchization; thus, as Italian-born, London-based cultural philosopher of technology Luciana Parisi put it, the independence from matter becomes “the most classical of patriarchal dreams.”<sup>9</sup>

This separation can be considered both the defining gesture and the major aberration of the Cartesian tradition, but it would be unfair to say that modernity lacked in projects able to cure the philosophical discourse (which defines the practice of treating various phenomena in many other aspects). Needless to say, such projects were punishable—as in Spinoza’s case. His *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), and the five works published posthumously, including the *Ethics* (1677), were all, of course, alleged to be “profane, atheistic and

4 Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. W. H. White (London: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 2001), IV, prop. 18, 176.  
5 Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2000), 713.  
6 Gilles Deleuze, “Sur Spinoza, Cours Vincennes – St. Denis,” lecture on March 17,

1981, Webdeleuze, <https://www.webdeleuze.com/cours/spinoza>. All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

7 Spinoza, *Ethics*, V, prop. 27, 245.

8 Barad, “On Touching.”

9 Luciana Parisi, *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Biotechnology, and the Mutations of Desire* (London: Continuum, 2004), 2.

blasphemous.” What was it that made Spinoza face excommunication with a curse back in 1656 and kept his ideas in obscurity up until his premature death in The Hague in 1677—and that connects him with the interests of feminist and decolonial agendas? Parisi provides a concise summary of Spinoza’s main line of thought and its context: “The Cartesian split between the mind and the body originates from the separation of the cosmos from matter, of the transcendent God (the power of the soul–mind) from nature (the power of the physical body). Baruch Spinoza’s concept of substance demonstrates that nature is not separated from the cosmos. The body originates in God as God corresponds to an intensive and extensive substance. God does not create matter, but is matter able to manifest itself through the ceaseless mutation of bodies and things in nature.”<sup>10</sup> Stating that “the object of the idea constituting the human mind is a body, or a certain mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else,”<sup>11</sup> and moreover, that “the mind does not know itself except in so far as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the body,”<sup>12</sup> Spinoza reconnects spirit and matter in the nonhierarchical “world of ontological immanence,”<sup>13</sup> as Deleuze elaborated. “If substance possesses equally all attributes, there is no hierarchy among the attributes, one is not worth more than another.”<sup>14</sup> Body and mind are two possible attributes of the same entity: “The idea of the body and the body, that is to say, the mind and the body are one and the same individual, which at one time is considered under the attribute of thought, and at other under that of extension.”<sup>15</sup>

## Becoming

From here, we see that things may move in a very unequivocal direction, whether Spinoza would have liked it or not—and as it may be concluded from his *Tractatus Politicus*, he wasn’t quite ready to take it there yet. But we can over-run the time-specific predicament and conclude that if there is no hierarchy between the attributes of substance, there is absolutely no hierarchical difference between the attributes of masculinity and femininity. It is impossible to identify the female with the (lower) matter, while the male would be identified with the (higher) spirit born ex nihilo, as it was understood in dominant mythologies of the modern age. Seen as attributes, the male and the female, as well as a number of other dualistic characteristics, can refer to one and the same entity.

This situation is what queer and decolonial scholar Zairong Xiang describes with the concept of transdualism, which “furthers the critiques of dualism *without* relying on a dualistic model of critique, the *modus operandi* necessary for a critique against sexual dualism and hetero/cisnormativity.”<sup>16</sup> In particular, Xiang explores transdualism through the Daoist theory of yin-yang: “It is true that yin and yang need to be understood in relation to each other and that their relationality enables yinyang to be nonessentialist, nondeterministic, and

also nondualistic, at least in theory. However, it is also correct to insist that yin is not yang, although it might be and is in fact *becoming* yang (and the other way around).<sup>17</sup> This enables Xiang to address the discourse-matter debates of the feminist, queer, and trans theories in the following way: “The never-outside-language thesis could be seen as following a yang propensity, while the embodied-materiality-matters argument could be regarded as following a yin propensity. I hope it is clear by now that neither yin nor yang should be taken separately, nor should any side of the transdualistic pair dominate the stage.”<sup>18</sup>

Such relationality of mind and matter connects with French philosopher Michel Foucault’s relationality of care, that makes possible the knowledge of oneself,<sup>19</sup> and with Spinoza’s relationality, which consists in the possibility of the mind to know itself only through the ideas of the affections of the body. Deleuze takes it slightly further: “I only ever know the mixtures of bodies and I only know myself by way of the action of other bodies on me and by way of mixtures.”<sup>20</sup>

And this is precisely where, as Barad demonstrates, one arrives by means of quantum field theory: “In an important sense, in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather, what matter is: *matter is condensations of response-ability*. Touching is a matter of response. Each of ‘us’ is constituted in response-ability. Each of ‘us’ is constituted as responsible for the other, as being in touch with the other.”<sup>21</sup> Again, this conclusion is based on the understanding that matter/body and mind/discourse/spirit can’t be viewed separately from one another. For Barad, “thought experiments are material matters.” Based on her exploration of Danish physicist Niels Bohr’s legacy, she claims that “the relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment,” and bodies are viewed, respectively, as “material-discursive phenomena.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, “practices of knowing and being are not isolatable, but rather they are mutually implicated. We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because ‘we’ are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming.”<sup>23</sup>

10 Parisi, 14.

11 Spinoza, *Ethics*, II, prop. 13, 56.

12 Spinoza, prop. 23, 69.

13 Deleuze, “Sur Spinoza,” lecture on December 16, 1980.

14 Deleuze, “Sur Spinoza,” lecture on November 25, 1980.

15 Spinoza, *Ethics*, II, prop. 21, 68.

16 Xiang, “Transdualism,” 426.

17 Xiang, 430.

18 Xiang, 438.

19 Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self: Lectures at University of Vermont in October 1982,” <https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.technologiesOfSelf.en/>.

20 Deleuze, “Sur Spinoza,” lecture on January 24, 1978.

21 Barad, “On Touching.” The following quote is from the same source.

22 Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” *Signs* 28, no. 3 (2003): 823.

23 Barad, 829.

## Mothering

Overcoming—nondualistically—the split between the matter and discourse (as well as “the dualisms of object/subject, knower/known, nature/culture, and word/world”)<sup>24</sup> may require quite a sophisticated overhaul of philosophical and political perspectives. To reject the independence from matter as a patriarchal dream, as Parisi shows, also means to acknowledge the importance of mattering in feminist, queer, and trans theories: “As demanded by feminism, the female body is now free from the biological destiny of procreation. Yet, at the same time, the patriarchal dream of independence from nature and from the female body is also completely reached. The liberation from anatomy, from the identification of women with sexual reproduction, contrasts strongly with the liberation from the material body, the accomplishment of Cartesian disembodiment in the cyberspace of information.”<sup>25</sup> The liberation from essentialism, that is, from the notion that a woman is defined by her reproductive function, happens precisely and only when we stop seeing matter as an empty malleable form or a lower realm, and when we bring the procreating body into the conversation about reproduction—and into theory.

The etymological groundedness of “matter” in the Latin *mater* (mother), and *matrix* (womb), presents a complicated conjunction of outcomes. For Moscow-born scholar of comparative feminist theory and comparative aesthetics Irina Aristarkhova, “This project of recovering the maternal from/in the matrix is not an etymological curiosity, but one of cultural urgency insofar as the question of how one imagines and therefore inhabits space and embodiment (maternal or not) with others will continue to remain a critical sociopolitical challenge.”<sup>26</sup> Locating, accepting, and welcoming the nonmetaphorical maternal in discourse, in social and political dimensions, in a body is a crucial step in undoing and mending the dualist patterns.

How is it possible to do that without falling into the trap of gender essentialism? “Becoming mother implies the realization of a potentiality to make space and matter (not *ex nihilo*). The maternal, thus, needs to be thought in relation to space and matter rather than as space and matter, insofar as the failure to understand this difference conflates the categories of woman, feminine, and mother.” Aristarkhova shows that it is “the nursing hospitality of the matrix” that enables generation (including the production of space): “I term the matrix effect that which enables the positing of space as hospitable, as in materializing and/or engendering space—in a way, providing ‘place’ to ‘space.’”

Importantly, Barad reminds us that “entanglements of spacetime mattering are threaded through and inseparable from the infinite alterity of the virtual,” and thus, “ethicality entails hospitality to the stranger threaded through oneself and through all being and non/being.”<sup>27</sup>

The question of care, embedded in the concept of hospitality, comes to the forefront in the discussions around ectogenesis—that is, the possibility of gestation outside the maternal body. In *Hospitality of the Matrix*, Aristarkhova thoroughly analyzes the history of “ectogenetic desire,” and the respective inventions and interpretations of what it means to create an “artificial womb.” What all the models of incubators or artificial wombs have been lacking is, first and foremost, the ability to nurse and to deal with waste products, along with the possibility to produce space according to the development of a fetus. To date, the technology that gets closest to an artificial womb are neonatal incubators for prematurely born babies. Still, the survival of such infants fully depends on the round-the-clock intimate care of nurses.

Aristarkhova notably suggests that the focus on nursing is, in fact, a means to overcome yet another dualism—which sees the potential of ectogenesis exclusively as either highly desired and beneficial or menacing and delusive. In addition, the labor of care (including matrixial gestational labor, in the case of surrogacy) is habitually outsourced to lower-class and non-Western women—which, for Aristarkhova, reinforces the need to focus “current debates on ectogenetic technology” on the questions of nursing and care.<sup>28</sup>

## Living, Mending

In his notion of nature, Spinoza performed another yin-yang twist: he described its intertwining and inseparable aspects of passivity, *natura naturata*, and activity, *natura naturans*. This is how Parisi sums it up: “Nature is a dynamical and collective ecosystem of intensive and extensive bodies—growth. *Natura Naturans* indicates the activity of nature, the intensive capacity to produce. *Natura Naturata* implies the passivity of being produced.”<sup>29</sup>

It takes courage and humility to accept one’s being produced. However, one is also responsible for producing oneself—and the world. As Barad explains, “‘Human bodies’ and ‘human subjects’ do not preexist as such; nor are they mere end products. ‘Humans’ are neither pure cause nor pure effect but part of the world in its open-ended becoming.”<sup>30</sup>

24 Barad, 820.

25 Parisi, *Abstract Sex*, 3.

26 Irina Aristarkhova, *Hospitality of the Matrix: Philosophy, Biomedicine, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), e-book. The following quotes are from the same source.

27 Barad, “On Touching.”

28 Aristarkhova, *Hospitality of the Matrix*.

29 Parisi, *Abstract Sex*, 30.

30 Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity,” 821.



Mending is a part of such becoming because growth produces ruptures and cracks—Guattarian cracks, from which sprout new social and aesthetic practices,<sup>31</sup> but also breaks and tearings that need to be healed for the becoming to go on and for life to be preserved. To care for the world, we need to mend our understanding of care. To mend care means to produce the discourse that cares for bodies—for every body—and to treat bodies as the only existing carriers, and carers, of discourse: “All life forms (including inanimate forms of liveliness) do theory.”<sup>32</sup>

The world in its open-ended becoming needs care at all times: molecular care, intimate care, careful small-scale care. This care depends not on governments and social institutions: it begins with a plant being watered, a cup washed, food offered, silence kept, silence broken, anger dispelled, a word uttered, an utterance heard, a hand touched.

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31 See Félix Guattari, “Cracks in the Street,” *Flash Art*, no. 135 (1987): 82–85.

32 Barad, “On Touching.”

# Caring Curatorial Practice in Digital Times

Sophie Lingg

In 2017, the painter and performance artist Sophia Süßmilch started a one-year performance on her Facebook and Instagram accounts.<sup>1</sup> She was interested in using social media as a performance space beyond marketing or influencing<sup>2</sup>—to show “everything that came to mind,” as she put it. Interested in the tempo, the fast production, and the mashup of her works with everyday content, Süßmilch disseminated her photos and videos on social media. She weaved her works into everyday life, challenging viewers’ social inhibitions with the unrepresentable and unrepresentative posts she shared. During the performance, putting in long hours of unpaid labor,<sup>3</sup> she posted up to 100 photos and videos per day. She had planned to perform consistently for a year but quit prematurely after eight months because of exhaustion. The project was characterized by fast-forward fame, hyper-visibility, and emotional distress owing to exposure and the rules and proceedings of the social media space.<sup>4</sup>

Since any social media platform already provides a space and its arrangement, and thus an infrastructure for the assembling of works, this text aims to explore additional possibilities of care curators can perform to support artists and digital producers. Based on Süßmilch’s performance, the text introduces new forms of curatorial labor that cares for digital production and focuses on three agents: first, social media as infrastructure; second, audience and artist as digital users; and third, the curator as *caring with*<sup>5</sup> the artist, the artwork, and the platform itself.

1 Sophia Süßmilch (born in 1983) is based in Munich, Vienna, and on social media. Her Instagram handle is @sophia\_suessmilch.

2 Influencers are paid by companies to advertise products and services via social media; see also *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, s.v. “influencer,” accessed May 20, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/influencer>.

3 A discussion of unpaid work in the context of social media would need to be explored in more detail in another article. Nevertheless, I want to mention Laurel Ptak’s *Wages for Facebook* (2014, <http://wagesforfacebook.com>)—the title of which refers to Silvia Federici’s *Wages against Housework* manifesto (1975). Ptak’s manifesto opens with the statement: “They say it’s friendship. We say it’s unpaid work.”

4 This text draws on an interview held with Süßmilch on December 2, 2019. As of time of writing this essay, no other publication on the artist’s social media performance

has been published. The artist made a brief reference to it in a July 2019 interview on Radio 80000, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.mixcloud.com/Radio80K/fructa-talks-nr-1-w-sophia-suessmilch/>.

5 Joan C. Tronto’s “caring-with” has been helpful for shaping my thoughts in this text. The goal of a “caring-with” democracy,” as suggested by Tronto, extended to the digital space would result in a democratic allocation of digital care responsibilities. With Süßmilch’s performance in mind, we can also speak about dimensions of digital as well as aesthetic citizenship and digital global democracy in connection to the role of the curator. For more on Tronto’s “phases of care” and specifically the notion of “caring-with,” see her in *Who Cares? How to Reshape a Democratic Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 15.

Sophia Süßmilch's uncompromising visual imagery as well as the immense quantity of photos and videos she produced and shared challenged some well-established forms of social media representation. She provoked the user's gaze and the platforms' policies, sparking interest and harsh criticism in the digital space and beyond. The attention peaked in fall 2019, long after Süßmilch's performance ended: she faced a shitstorm,<sup>6</sup> a barrage of misogynist, sexist, and anti-Semitic hatred, brought about by a photo she posted that went viral. Many of the relevant debates regarding queer and feminist art on social media can be pointed out here in relation to Süßmilch's experience during and after her 2017 performance. These very same debates can also be retraced and connected to struggles dating back to the pre-internet second-wave feminism. In addition to this contextualization, I will offer a possible vision of how to connect technofeminist<sup>7</sup> practice and strategies of care to the space of social media, and further, to new forms of caring curatorial practices.

I got to know Süßmilch's work through social media in 2017. We got to know each other and started a dialogue on her works, especially those on social media, and the situations they entailed. We became friends.

## The Body as Tool and the Banning of Bodies

As a theorist, educator, and curator, I am interested in social media not only as a tool and a space for representation in daily life or a trashy space for procrastination. While Instagram continues to gain importance for emerging artists and curators especially, at best leveraging between established and lesser known artists, projects, and spaces, the platform operates on very strict terms of use: automated analysis paired with user reports result in the banning of most forms of nudity, with an apparent bias toward nudity read as female.<sup>8</sup> This is rooted not only in the patriarchal body hierarchy as we have known it for centuries, which demands the covering-up of female bodies and body parts, but also in an understanding of gender based on binary principles. The hegemony of the platform in the context of the arts, coupled with the rigid restrictions on use, silences large parts of queer, nonbinary, trans, and feminist art practice, policing naked bodies that are being used as tools for expression beyond the sexualized patriarchal gaze. Süßmilch posts much of her work as altered or censored versions where her nipples are not visible, in order to avoid being flagged as inappropriate or banned from the platform.<sup>9</sup>

## High-Speed Digital Infrastructure and Community

Süßmilch names the constant interweaving of her photos and videos with everyday content as one of her main interests in performing on social media. But

who watched her performance? Showing art on social media involves different agents. The platform itself relies on the community browsing the content to receive, repost, or report. Artists, curators, art educators, and theorists share their work with an interactive digital audience that is able to respond directly and anonymously. The members of Süßmilch's digital audience are individuals, mostly watching on their personal devices, hence the reception is an intimate, individualized form of publicity.

## "We Thought You Were Just One of Those Instagram Artists"

Aside from many positive responses, the imagery that Süßmilch was and still is working with has provoked harsh criticism, ranging from worry, shock, and outrage over her uncompromising depictions the loss of personal and professional contacts. Her social and psychological responsibility and her business reliability were repeatedly cast in doubt. Her performance in a space shared with personal photography and advertisement was also misunderstood by some in the art scene. A previously announced collaboration with a gallery was canceled on the grounds that her works were too explicit and radical. In various cases, the confusion outweighed her contextualization and explanations. Süßmilch described the lack of understanding from experts as the greatest shock. Her performance was not perceived as performance; the persona she created was not seen as such.

Media theorist Annekathrin Kohout frames social media space as a supposedly endless digital community space, where a formerly quite exclusive number of people interested in art merges with a social-media mass audience.<sup>10</sup> Art-historical contextualization of this space, on the other hand, rarely takes place.<sup>11</sup> Classifying something as art is a gesture of power, performed every

6 A storm of outrage, usually on the internet, accompanied by abusive comments. See Wiktionary, s.v. "shitstorm," accessed May 20, 2020, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/shitstorm>.

7 Sollfrank refers to Judy Wajcman's definition, which situates technofeminism at the interface of feminist technology studies and science and technology studies, with a focus on the effects of gender relations and hierarchies of sexual difference on scientific research and technological innovation. Everyday technofeminist practices focus on fighting for a more just and accessible technoscience culture. See Cornelia Sollfrank, "Vorwort," in *Die Schönen Kriegerinnen: Technofeministische*

*Praxis im 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. Cornelia Sollfrank (Vienna: transversal texts, 2018), 9.

8 The platform's censorship is based on algorithms controlling whether the displayed nipples are to be considered acceptable ("male") or inappropriate ("female"). See Kate Gill, "Instagram Held a Private Meeting with Artists about Its Nudity Policies," *Hyperallergic*, October 22, 2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/524099/instagram-nudity-policies-meeting/>.

9 See Süßmilch's Instagram account, accessed May 20, 2020, [https://www.instagram.com/sophia\\_suessmilch](https://www.instagram.com/sophia_suessmilch).

10 Annekathrin Kohout, *Netzfeminismus* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 2019), 19.

11 Kohout, 25.

day by members of the art world.<sup>12</sup> Following Danto, the art world can be defined as abstract space that manifests itself through knowledge about art and art history and interest in and sensitivity toward artistic forms of expression. Subjects participating in the art world are supposed to be able to identify the differences between artworks and familiar objects or situations from everyday life, even though they might look alike or even be the exact same objects.<sup>13</sup>

“We thought you were just one of those Instagram artists.”<sup>14</sup> Comments like these highlight the underlying structures and power relations between the art world and its members and online content with unclear status in relation to art. The separation between the established art space and social media space is often maintained or even encouraged, with the latter’s relevance being devalued. Another aspect Süßmilch mentions is the power of the relatively large public audience online, which poses a threat to the established structures of the art world, undermining its authority in deciding whose art deserves to be interpreted, supported, displayed, recommended, collected, and sold.

## Pioneering in Digital Feminist Instagram Art

Overcoming the division between art spaces and social media sites could support the work of artists as well as foster the interweaving of these different spaces by professionals in the fields of curating and education. Following Kohout’s argument that images produced on social media are not adequately positioned in art-historical discussions around feminist imagery, I would like to draw a connection between Süßmilch and feminist avant-garde artists like Ana Mendieta, Renate Bertlmann, Birgit Jürgenssen, or VALIE EXPORT, to name just a few.<sup>15</sup> EXPORT’s action *Tap and Touch Cinema*, in particular, bears resemblance to Süßmilch’s work: much like social media enables “viewers” to participate by means of comments or direct messaging, EXPORT’s work exposed the artist to the immediate reactions of her audience, which consequently resulted in a pre-digital form of the assault experienced and described by Süßmilch. *Tap and Touch Cinema* was first realized in Vienna in 1968 with the assistance of Peter Weibel,<sup>16</sup> and later repeated in Munich and Cologne, where EXPORT encouraged the public using the megaphone and her friend and colleague Erika Mies wore the apparatus. EXPORT recalled, “This action was very interesting because we were both women, and people got very aggressive. They thought we were prostitutes.”<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the cinema, where the spectators, the voyeurism, the patriarchal gaze and desires remain in the dark, almost private and invisible, *Tap and Touch Cinema* directly addressed this voyeurism through the public display of the performance, and by encouraging the public to touch the performer’s breasts. The performance exposed the patriarchal mechanisms of the technology and infrastructure inherent to cinema itself.<sup>18</sup>

Undoubtedly, there is a connection between the discussions on the patriarchal space of the digital public in today’s queer and feminist art and theory and the patriarchal public of the feminist actions in the 1960s and ‘70s. EXPORT and Süßmilch both expose patriarchal, misogynist structures in public space and test its boundaries. How would EXPORT make use of social media as infrastructure for her art?<sup>19</sup> Süßmilch’s work on social media in the digital public space of Instagram seems to evoke reactions very similar to those encountered by feminist artists in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> Feminist and queer art faces suppression by the platform and attacks from its users on the one hand, and little recognition and support from the art world on the other. Owing to the platforms’ strict terms of use and the sexism and misogyny in digital space, some of the social realities that we thought had been overcome must be discussed anew. Bringing VALIE EXPORT’s historical argument in relation to today’s feminist and queer art sheds light on the patriarchal structures and in large part misogynist technical infrastructures of digital space. Identifying connections like the one above—beyond time, generations, or media—contributes to overcoming the division of art and social media and supports the work of artists while also interweaving the different professions and fields in the arts: curating, education, theory production.

12 Philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto defines the art world as “something the eye cannot decry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art.” Arthur Danto, “The Artworld,” *Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 580.

13 Danto illustrates this concept by referring to artists working with everyday products, which are given new meaning by bringing them into the art world and thus transforming their function from household goods into art. Danto, 582.

14 A gallerist’s comment at the opening of one of Süßmilch’s shows.

15 The Sammlung Verbund is an important source of information on the 1970s feminist avant-garde and allows for a more precise contextualization of Sophia Süßmilch’s work. For initial research I suggest *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s: The Sammlung Verbund Collection*, edited by Gabriele Schor. For further insights into the relation between analog and digital spaces, actions, and actors, Legacy Russell’s *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (2020) may prove useful.

16 *Tap and Touch Cinema* was an action in public space, documented in the video *Tap and Touch Film*. In it, VALIE EXPORT is topless, with her breasts covered by a box, of which one side is open but covered with a curtain. With a megaphone, artist Peter

Weibel encourages spectators to approach and put their hands behind the curtain. While EXPORT’s breasts are touched by male strangers, she keeps a rather neutral, indisputable facial expression.

17 Quoted in Juan Vicente Aliaga, “Life Is in Our Hands,” in *VALIE EXPORT*, ed. Michel Régis (Montreuil: Éd. de l’Oeil, 2003), 85.

18 See Aliaga, 85; and Silvia Eiblmayr, “Territoriale Gefüge/Fluchtlinien: VALIE EXPORT und ‘Die Häuser der Schildkröten,’” in *Valie Export—Trans: Territorien oder die Häuser der Schildkröten*, ed. Barbara Wally (Salzburg: Ed. Galerie Fotohof, 1998), 16.

19 To explore this claim of a transgenerational feminist connection in questions over space and (violent) patriarchal structures further, another article would be needed.

20 In 2017, EXPORT connected the reemerging interest in the work of pioneering feminist artists in the 1960s and ‘70s with the contemporary rise of patriarchal repression, conservatism, and anti-feminism. VALIE EXPORT, “Die Jungen müssen eigene Formen finden,” interview by Jana Demnitz, *Tagesspiegel*, May 19, 2017, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/queerspiegel/medienkuenstlerin-valie-export-die-jungen-muessen-eigene-formen-finden/19820634.html>.

## A Dark, Unleashed Space

Queer and feminist activists and artists risk bullying, threats, and harassment when they use the digital space, with its relatively heterogeneous audience, for performance. In contrast to established art institutions, the digital space of social media provides no indication of who has access to the artistic works and performances.

In October 2019, Sophia Süßmilch's self-portrait as a penis emoji (*Selbstportrait als Penis-Emoji*) went viral and triggered a shitstorm that led to her photographs appearing widely on Facebook and Tumblr. Since that photo went viral, her Instagram account and specific posts have been repeatedly blocked. Moreover, she received sexist, misogynist, and anti-Semitic comments and threats of violence. After addressing the bullying in a public statement, she was victim-blamed by other users, while a significant number of personal



Fig. 1  
Screenshot of Sophia Süßmilch's 2019  
Facebook post that caused a shitstorm

friends trivialized her experience. Süßmilch describes the lack of empathy for her situation having triggered a sense of isolation and misanthropy. The shitstorm she experienced reflected the main characteristics of hate speech, including the claims to freedom of expression repeatedly voiced by aggressors. Sociologist Sara R. Farris argues that hate speech is not interested in an improved or at least a neutral presentation of the situation and should therefore not be connected to freedom of expression.<sup>21</sup> In Süßmilch's case, the extent of the bullying was not recognized, and even if it was, the violence was normalized, focusing on her voluntary self-exposure to the public. Süßmilch's situation indicates that the normalization of violence against women is based on the assumption that a female public person should expect to be attacked, in digital as well as non-digital space. The most compassionate people in her surroundings were those who had experienced shitstorms themselves.

## Deep Care: The Curator as Digital Detoxicologist

The patriarchal mechanisms including violence that erupted in Süßmilch's case were described fifty years ago by the feminist literature theorist Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1970). Millett describes the violence in patriarchal society as taking place when men's "final vanity" is offended, triggered by the economic or educational independence of women. As Millet argues: "The existence of sexual hierarchy has been re-affirmed and mobilized to 'punish' the female. The function of class or ethnic mores in patriarchy is largely a matter of how overtly displayed or how loudly enunciated the general ethics of masculine supremacy allows itself to become."<sup>22</sup> As Süßmilch put it in our interview, artists also need a network of support for their work online, to provide the working conditions they need.

What does Süßmilch's story tell us about curating, doing theory, and art education? Digital infrastructure, as well as the infrastructure of more traditional spaces, is never detached from the conditions of its creation.<sup>23</sup> Care in a cyberfeminist sense should not only observe and represent, but above all, take part in a process of transformation of oneself and the world as a whole<sup>24</sup>—and establishing a close exchange with artists working with social media could happen on different levels. Care needs to take place not only on the level of individual artists' content and establishing serious modes of reception in order to overcome the division between established and new spaces. Curators, theorists,

21 Sarah R. Farris, "Racism and Islamophobia in the Name of Women's Rights" (Lunch Lecture, Insittute for Education in the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, May 12, 2019).

22 Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Equinox Books, 1971), 36.

23 Sollfrank, "Vorwort," in Sollfrank, *Die schönen Kriegerinnen*, 16.

24 Sollfrank, 17–18.

and educators can also take part in demanding infrastructural change. Social media's terms of use and predominant modes of communication are based on hetero-patriarchal power structures that have operated in the art world for generations.

In the midst of the first COVID-19 outbreak, most museums and cultural venues are moving their programs to the digital space and social media. Discussions on the working conditions of artists online have to take place, ranging from payment to new forms of deep care in response to shitstorms. Curators as digital detoxicologists could not only provide a space, a platform, but also maintain, moderate, and above all, normalize the digital as a space of artistic production. Only if this normalization goes beyond off-spaces, and into the spheres within the art world that have access to money, feminist and queer artists on social media could get the attention they need, and thus the art world could actively engage in changing the discriminative structures of the platforms themselves. The curator as digital detoxicologist takes part in the cyberfeminist practices of transforming.

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# Caretaking as (Is) Curating

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez

Following decolonial dyke-queer feminist scholar Paola Bacchetta, who has written about the importance of situating oneself at the beginning of a text or a talk,<sup>1</sup> I will briefly situate myself: I am a white, Eastern European, cis, heterosexual woman from a mixed working- and middle-class family, born in the former Yugoslavia. I am able-bodied but have had an autoimmune disease since childhood and was recently diagnosed with another chronic illness. I have a university degree and have been working in the arts for many years. As a child growing up in Slovenia—the northernmost of the former Yugoslavian republics—I was affected by the racist remarks that children or adults and seemingly reasonable people would make about the countries from which my father's family originates, Bosnia and Ukraine. In the white European imaginary of today, these and many other neighboring regions are aligned with the racialized territories of the Global South. In the Global North, I constantly receive comments about the Slavic accent noticeable in any of the foreign languages I speak, which range from exoticizing to degrading. Throughout my self-education, I had to unlearn the superior position of the Westernized narrative I was brought up with. All this led me to work as a curator and writer on the intersections between social and political practices of art in relation to ecology, feminist activism, and environmental racism. In this text, I will develop the idea of caretaking with a case study of the "Contour Biennale 9: Coltan as Cotton," which I curated in Mechelen, Belgium, from October 2018 to September 2019. At the same time, I will introduce my own experience as an independent curator occupying the role of a "feminist killjoy" in a host institution, following the terminology of feminist writer Sara Ahmed, who works at the intersections of feminist, queer, and race studies.<sup>2</sup>

In the Global North, we are facing the fact that neoliberal as well as extreme right-wing parties are becoming increasingly interested in contemporary art practices and funding, which for the last few decades was more a field of progressive leftist and socialist minds. Such confrontations are most likely to become more and more challenging and frequent; they will affect not only cultural policies and funding applications, but moreover, this will be reflected in the composition of staff members in the institutions. Independent curatorial practice, or what is left of its seeming independence under the hold of capitalist and neoliberal dictates, should remember its origin, from the Latin *curare*, as a practice of caretaking. Caretaking involves taking time and slowing down, taking time can lead to gaining trust, gaining trust can enable (human

1 Paola Bacchetta, in "Who Is Speaking?," KASK School of Arts, Ghent, April 27, 2017, dialogue with Françoise Vergès in the frame of the opening of the exhibition "Show Me Your Archive and I Will Tell You Who Is in Power" at Kiosk Gallery, curated by Wim Waelput and myself; see the video

recording at [https://www.internationaleonline.org/dialogues/11\\_who\\_is\\_speaking](https://www.internationaleonline.org/dialogues/11_who_is_speaking).  
2 Sara Ahmed, "Feminists at Work," *Feminist Killjoys* (blog), January 10, 2020, <https://feministkilljoys.com>.



and more-than-human) voices being heard and being listened to. Caretaking of inspirations, production of relations, and transmission of ideas and values should then entail an understanding of artistic practice as a sustainable, socially responsible facilitation of exchange among citizens, rather than as an accumulation of marketable, product-oriented works.

When I started to research the history of the town that hosts the Contour Biennale, one particular historical event and its direct consequence was of major importance in grounding this research: *Le Belge*. *Le Belge* was the first steam locomotive built in Belgium, in 1835, for the first passenger railway in continental Europe, which linked Brussels to Mechelen. Shortly afterward, a line between Liège and Ostend began to operate, as well as a line that led to Antwerp, which marked the development of the national railway network in Belgium. During the Second World War, this extensive and well-developed railway structure was one of the reasons why the Nazi occupation used Mechelen as a transit camp, one of two outside Germany. Over 25,000 Jews and Roma were sent by rail from Mechelen to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp between 1942 and 1944. In analogy to this genocidal logic, for the colonized countries across the globe, the development of infrastructures such as roads and railways has always served the purpose of extracting either enslaved human labor or natural resources for the colonizer. Looking at the history of Belgian colonialism and the continuation of its coloniality today was the second important field of my research, with the aim to enhance the importance of alternative social, political, and ecological modes of existence at the present moment in which Belgium finds itself. I borrowed the biennial's title, "Coltan as Cotton," from the poem "The Bear / Coltan as Cotton" by the musician and poet Saul Williams. Coltan, short for columbite-tantalite, is an irreplaceable component in nearly every cellphone, laptop, and electronic device. More than 60 percent of the global extraction of coltan, which is known to be one of the major conflict minerals, comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda and is mined by hand and hand tools. By and large, the conditions of its extraction are not controlled by any governmental agency, and there is often child labor involved in its mining. The title of the biennial thus was a means to evoke the catastrophic outcomes of the entanglement of Western technological history and its myths of progress with the resources mined in the Congo Basin. It has long been a site of extraction of resources, such as rubber, uranium, copper, coltan, gold, and lithium that were transformed into tires, atomic energy, bombs and electrical equipment for wiring, engines, communication devices and batteries.

Contour Biennale 9 was inspired also by a personal curatorial motivation, a belief in the transformative role of exchange between human beings through the means of art. I searched for ways to enable intense moments of engaging the public with the artists through their presence and their works. While an

encounter with a work of art can be an emotionally and intellectually charged experience, encountering and exchanging with the artists and activists in a given performative or discursive artistic framework can have even more direct and profound effects on one's viewpoints, perspectives, or even convictions. From this reflection, the structure of the Contour Biennale 9, with a strong emphasis on discursivity and long duration, was proposed as an experimental format. The public moments were planned according to the lunar calendar and its different phases, which offered a symbolic framework that changed with each of the three phases. The stretched duration of the biennial enabled a slowed-down research phase and a more situated way of working within the social, political, historical, and ecological fabric of the city of Mechelen and its surroundings. Different formats of exchange with the public were instigated in the form of walks, heart-to-heart conversations, unscripted performances, listening sessions, dinners, picnics, concerts, and bookclubs. They brought up important local debates about historical and contemporary prejudices, discriminations, and facts. In these formats, the artists Sadies Choua and Robin Vanbesien and the collective On-Trade-Off were able to continuously explore and present different stages of their research along each of the public phases of the biennial.



Fig. 2  
Sadies Choua, *Lamb Chops Should Not Be Overcooked*, 2019. Installation view, Waning Moon Crescent Phase of the "Contour Biennale 9: Coltan as Cotton," Mechelen



Throughout the three phases, Saddle Choua led a reading group about African American writer and Nobel laureate Toni Morrison's book *The Bluest Eye*, from which she developed a walk across Mechelen inspired by sisterhood for the Full Moon Phase of the biennial. This walk was partly based on the herbal book by the Mechelen-born botanist Rembert Dodoens, and it also looked at some local women in the history of Mechelen and the artist's own personal history, such as Audre Lorde, Chantal Akerman, Saïda Menebhi, Ingrid Jonker, Susan Sontag, Heiny Srour, Miriam Makeba, Fairuz, and Yma Sumac. For the Waning Crescent Moon Phase, Choua presented her new installation *Lamb Chops Should Not Be Overcooked*, composed of sounds, books, video, and plants, which dealt with the psycho-physical trauma caused by racism and betrayal, but also the healing of that trauma.

Robin Vanbesien worked on his project *the wasp and the weather* with the founders of the former youth center Rzoemie in Mechelen, who came together in 1978 to build a safe space for youngsters who encountered racism and discrimination on an everyday basis. While working on the film, Robin created an installation for the Full Moon Phase in which he juxtaposed Hugo van Roelandt's archives and poems written by the youngsters of Rzoemie. Poetry walks were organized throughout the city of Mechelen, where certain poems were read and discussed. For the Waning Crescent Moon Phase, the premiere of the film was followed by an emotionally charged discussion, where Rzoemie founding members M'Hamed El Ouali and Abdelhay Ben Abdellah recounted the moment when their poetry production was contested by the mayor and the city of Mechelen, which subsequently led to a reformation of the youth center into ROJM and the departing of the center's founding members. Poets and artists living in Belgium, such as Samira Saleh, Mathieu Charles, and members of the Post Collective—a group originating from the Open Design Course for Refugees and Asylum Seekers at KASK, in Ghent—contributed to this discussion. A general feeling that nothing has changed in thirty years regarding the social and political climate prevailed.

On-Trade-Off was formed out of two artist initiatives, Picha (Lubumbashi) and Enough Room for Space (Brussels), at around the same time as the Contour Biennale began to prepare its ninth edition. The starting point for their research project is the raw material lithium, found in huge quantities in 2017 in Manono, the former colonial tin mine in Congo. A naturally occurring metal, lithium is currently considered to be the new black gold because of its crucial role in the global transition toward a green and fossil-fuel-free economy. Focusing on this one element throughout the duration of the three phases of the biennial, On-Trade-Off proposed installations with videos, such as a strategic plan for the future lithium mine, paintings about different kinds of minerals from Congo that have fueled Western technological progress (gold, uranium, copper), or discussions around the social, ecological, economic, and political phe-

nomena that characterize the production processes currently undergoing rapid growth.

An important element that prevailed throughout the biennial's unfolding was the question of how to care for each other. The projects presented were in many cases inspired by and related to the city of Mechelen, which has hosted the biennial for over a decade now, its inhabitants, and more broadly, Belgium's recent colonial history. The questions of whom a biennial addresses and whether we can find sustainable ways to work on a biennial were the central point of departure for reflection on the manifold aspects of caretaking. In that respect, the biennial established many meaningful collaborations with local initiatives and stakeholders who in different ways accompanied or collaborated with the artists and activists in their research and production. For example, the artist Bie Michels invited a group of Belgian citizens of Congolese origin from Mechelen and the surrounding area to address the necessity to decolonize public spaces in Belgium, most notably monuments dealing with colonial history. The group met a few times and paid a visit to the mayor of Mechelen, to whom they proposed a collectively written text to accompany the colonial sculpture by Lode Eyckermans located in the Schuttersvest. Their inscription, a copy of the monument, and these debates were all part of the documentary film that Michels produced at the end of the biennial. In relation to Daniela Ortiz's project *The Empire of Law*, which brought together feminist criticism and the colonial legacy informing current European laws on migration, a collaboration was initiated with the activist Walter Andino Mince, who lives in Mechelen. He joined Ortiz after the premiere of her film and transformed this invitation into a very moving autobiographical and self-reflexive performance, which included elements of body art and anti-racist activism, giving accounts of his own arrival to Belgium from Honduras and his daily life. Mince also opened the biennial to a possibly different kind of space, a safe space where affects and the vulnerability of exposing oneself entirely can be shared with a public that one does not necessarily know well or even trust. The bookclubs run by Laura Nsengiyumva throughout the yearlong duration of the biennial treated topics of everyday structural racism in Belgium as well as the "Black Pete" tradition. The guest speakers, who were all from Belgium, sought alliances and confrontations with the public and based their observations on facts, lived experiences, and statistics.

Questions around ethics and sustainability of our practices (cultural, artistic, curatorial, educational, etc.) are at the heart of what I do as a curator. With this in mind, I initiated a transnational alliance of different schools and academies that focused on discussing precisely these artistic, institutional, and curatorial practices with the generation of cultural and social producers and artists to come. Over the course of one academic year, the alliance "We Cannot Work Like This: Decolonial Practices and Degrowth" (borrowed from the title of Natascha



Fig. 3  
Bookclub run by Laura Nsengiyumva, with invited guests Mireille Tsheusi Robert and Eline Mestdagh, 2019, Waning Moon Crescent Phase of "Contour Biennale 9: Coltan as Cotton," Mechelen

Sadr Haghghian's seminal installation *I Can't Work Like This*, brought together several departments from Belgium, France, England, and Hong Kong,<sup>3</sup> and enabled students in each of their schools to work together on practical and theoretical proposals for caring, sustainable, decolonial, and inclusive practices in relation to cultural institutions on one hand, and on the other, their own fields (artistic, architectural, design, or research-related). The students were invited to look at sustainability through a self-reflexive and intersectional feminist, anti-capitalist, and anti-racist lens.<sup>4</sup>

With the Contour Biennale 9, I initially posed the question of how to enable an environment that would take care of an international biennial of contemporary art and its ecology, how to decrease its ongoing contribution to unsustainable cultural tourism, and how to infuse change into the socially and racially unjust, classist, and sexist field of intervention. I also tried to expose how "whiteness

tends to be visible to those who do not inhabit it."<sup>5</sup> Together with the artists' projects throughout the entire duration of the biennial, the question of who the institution intends to address was repeatedly asked. The staff of the host institution—which had only recently taken on the management of the Contour Biennale—its program, and its public were in large majority white, in a Flemish city whose municipal records state on several occasions that almost half of the children under the age of twelve living in and around Mechelen are from culturally and religiously mixed backgrounds. As a curator who has worked on the topics of postcolonial questions and feminist activism in previous projects, and who tries to be self-reflexive about my own white privilege, I wished to accompany the development of tools for reforming institutional ethics with reflexive teamwork methods, feminist listening, and caretaking within the team itself and in relation to the artists, and by trying to propose changes toward more diversity in the internal organization.

As expected, tensions and obstacles occur when a reflexive and decolonial position—not only through its content but in its questioning of structure—is introduced within a white institution, even when the necessity of transformation into a more diverse and inclusive environment is acknowledged. These tensions can lead to severe misunderstandings, complaints, and profound deceptions, but also to long-term transformations and self-reflexivity. As an interdependent curator who is economically and professionally reliant on the invitations of different institutions of art but at the same time outside of them, I have come to understand that in situations where an institutional environment follows the critical proposals of the guest curator (or artist) but only on the surface, one inhabits what Sara Ahmed calls the "feminist killjoy" when trying to create space and time for such discussions and practices.<sup>6</sup> In her recent manual-like book, Ahmed explains that living a feminist life requires "asking ethical questions about how we live, about how we relate, how we care, and most importantly,

3 Members of the transnational alliance are HISK (Ghent), the Department of Architecture at Hong Kong University, St. Lucas School of Arts (Antwerp), the School of Architecture at Royal College of Art (London), Royal Academy of Fine Arts (Antwerp), Thomas More University (Mechelen), École de recherche graphique (Brussels), École européenne supérieure d'art de Bretagne (Rennes), and the Open Design Course for Refugees and Asylum Seekers at KASK (Ghent).

4 The necessity of decolonizing art institutions and for anti-racist curatorial practices has been the focus of recent publications, including Natalie Bayer, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, and Nora Sternfeld, eds., *Curating as Anti-racist Practice* (Berlin: De Gruyter,

2017); and Leïla Cukierman, Gerty Dambury, and Françoise Vergès, eds., *Décolonisons les arts!* [Let's decolonize the arts!] (Paris: L'Arche, 2018). See also Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, "Transforming Whiteness in Art Institutions," *e-flux journal*, no. 93 (September 2018), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/216046/transforming-whiteness-in-art-institutions/>

5 Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoys."

6 According to Ahmed, to become a feminist is to kill other people's joy, to get in the way of other people's investments by contesting how will and happiness can be expectations for some bodies and refused to other bodies. See Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 65.

how to keep coming up against histories that have become concrete, histories that have become as solid as walls.”<sup>7</sup> Analyzing her own experiences of being involved in diversity work in academia, Ahmed argues that being a feminist is work, because to exist as a feminist requires one to work on as well as at institutions. She explains that such “diversity work” is

the work we [feminists of color] have to do in order to be accommodated or the work we have to do because we are not accommodated. [...] Trying to transform institutions, ends up being the work of complaint. [...] When we challenge how diversity is happily claimed by organisations, as a sign of what they are already doing, we are heard as complaining, as being negative, destructive, obstructive. We become killjoys at work. [...] If the feminist killjoy gets in the way of happiness, to claim this figure is to be willing to get in the way. We become killjoys at work, institutional killjoys, when we get in the way of institutional happiness or when we just get in the way.<sup>8</sup>

In my own experience with Contour Biennale 9, the transformation that I wished to develop with my presence as a guest curator was formulated around my belief that that the artists and activists that I work with, the interested groups they collaborate with, and the practices they develop collectively or individually should reflect themselves in the methods by which projects they work on are researched, produced, and presented—in short, taken care of—on their side, but more importantly, on the side of the institutions. The curatorial and the institutional should meet in that caretaking endeavor, on the basis of an inclusive and ethical understanding of their practices, and on the basis of how to avoid generating exploitative power relations, in order for a transformation of curatorial practice to take place.

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<sup>7</sup> Ahmed, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmed, “Feminists at Work.”

# Excavating Care in Print Culture, Biometric Scanning, and Counter- archives

Edna Bonhomme, Vanessa Gravenor, and Nina Prader

## Scan the Difference: A Case Study

In the 1980s, the curatorial turn broadly named a shift in the art world where curating as a practice supposedly underwent many discursive transformations, attempting to self-reflexively mediate and transgress abuses of power in the creative industries. Yet still there are widespread European–North American imperial systems of selection for display. Curating is a history of choosing the chosen ones. These decisions are exhibited in institutional frameworks such as galleries, biennials, festivals, or museums.<sup>1</sup> For marginalized people and positions that are pigeonholed, underrepresented, or excluded, the gaze, visibility, and distribution of the exhibition space applied to such platforms is still a negotiation of power struggles across class, gender, sexuality, and colonialism. In the 1980s, the tools of second-wave feminism were used to call into question these hegemonic forms of display while also deconstructing the male gaze; however, today, this gaze, if we can still call it that, is enmeshed within technological systems of surveillance that complicate how bodies move and are governed. Presently, it is impossible to navigate public space without being scanned by inhuman or inhumane means. Difference thus becomes magnified or registered as a pattern,<sup>2</sup> and tools from intersectional feminism become necessary for excavating care within securitized spaces from the hospital to the prison to national borders.

The following text uses the exhibition “Scan the Difference: Gender, Surveillance, and Bodies” as a case study for an attempt at radical curation and radical care practices. It offers a critical reflection on the program and further meditates on care as a concept. Excavating care as a practice of radical care, in this sense, acknowledges untold histories and subaltern perspectives by dismantling hierarchies of power and reimagining a feminism for the 99%. We understand it as unearthing, surfacing, digging out layers, making the invisible visible, searching for the proper rites for dignifying such spaces and people. The exhibition took place at the Austrian Association of Women Artists (VBKÖ)—founded in 1910—in Vienna, for one week in May 2019. The VBKÖ today self-identifies as a queer-feminist association and supported us with the Resonant Heartbeats stipend as part of their annual program. Located in the center of Vienna, the VBKÖ provides a critical discursive sparring ground and platform for intellectual discourses and networks in Vienna. The city of Vienna is known as a historical exemplar of the welfare state model and thus served as an ideal context, though we ultimately questioned its innocence. Simultaneously, the exhibition

<sup>1</sup> See Saskia Trebing, “Debatte um Diversität: Zu viele Männer im Mond,” *Monopol*, July 29, 2019, <https://www.monopol-magazin.de/offener-brief-gender-kunst>.

<sup>2</sup> For an explanation of how identity is at play within cybernetics, see Clemens Apprich, “Introduction,” in *Pattern Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Lüneburg: meson press, 2018), ix–xii.

took place against the backdrop of the freshly leaked Ibiza affair and corruption scandal—which eventually resulted in Heinz-Christian Strache, leader of the Freedom Party, being forced to step down as vice chancellor of Austria. But when the news first hit, in light of global events such as elections in Brazil and the US, and the election of Sebastian Kurz as chancellor of Austria and his coalition with the Freedom Party, it was not clear if Austria’s social democracy could withstand the test of such corrupt, capitalist, and right-leaning systems of power. As curators, our collective vision was to position our intentions as anti-capitalist, decolonial, inclusive, and autonomously do-it-yourself (DIY). We practiced this by incorporating decolonial research methodologies, inclusive invitation and compensation of underrepresented artists, and crediting authorship. Within these shifting contexts, both theoretical and practical, we sought to position ourselves within the scope of artist-educators, academics, activists, and queer feminists to the best of our knowledge and abilities in time and place to teach, learn, and unlearn scanning parameters.

Fig. 4

“Scan the Difference: Gender, Surveillance, Bodies,” VBKÖ, Vienna, 2019, exhibition view



Deviating from the conventional art show, the exhibition’s format was a series of lectures and field trips as well as a zine-making workshop. They aimed to create awareness and visibility around how bodies have been and are being scanned medically, culturally, and politically. Contributors meditated on how to exercise care within the backdrop of the rise of the Far Right in Europe and the Americas. The exhibition used the notion of the “scan” as a point of tension: scanning the medicalized, digitized, or human body, scanning a page for the digital archive, scanning the algorithm. Contemporary curatorial practices that seek to overturn such deeply entrenched mechanisms of power require active structural care in all aspects of managing a cultural production. We argue that care is a process and state of being that is constantly evolving through struggle and negotiation. “Care” emerged from the Old English word *carian*, meaning to “be anxious or solicitous; grieve; feel concern or interest.”<sup>3</sup> While care has traditionally been associated with a site of anxiety and loss, we venture into the realm of African American race, class, and gender scholar Patricia Hill Collins’s *Black Feminist Thought* to consider the ways care is linked to the politics of empowerment.<sup>4</sup> Within the context of radical feminist praxis, care can be a mode of resistance and liberation—that is to say, it provides an entry point for dismantling oppressive modes of power. In light of this, we insist that radical care must exist in multidisciplinary modes of practice that refuse the traditional show, and demand gesturing towards speculation, imagination, and relentless questioning.

Within the context of the curatorial prism, the word “care” has been popularized in urban studies, the art world, and queer-feminist discourses. It is a call to action for sustainability—environmental, economic, public, and private. It also refers to the invisible and often unacknowledged labor of domestic, medical, or emotional work. At the same time, care as a discursive term is at risk of becoming an overused trope in these spheres. The meaning was made corruptible as it became fashionable. And “radical care” must also be unpacked; it is decolonial, queer, anti-capitalist, and slower in its practices, it asks the hard questions about precarious labor conditions and the distribution of suffering. Individually and collectively, how do we experience and provide care for each other when there are systematic, external, and internal abuses of power in place from the project space to the museum, the university, and the medical room? Finally, what does radical care mean for radical curation?

3 Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “care,” [https://www.etymonline.com/word/care#etymonline\\_v\\_33875](https://www.etymonline.com/word/care#etymonline_v_33875).

4 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000).



## Implementing Rituals of Care

Over the course of the week of May 15–21, 2019, we held meetings, excursions, Skype-ins, and screenings in Vienna. Thinking about radical care as an activity in the context of the exhibition, it can best be summed up as an invitation for collaboration and mediation between collective organizations such as the VBKÖ, Power Makes Us Sick (PMS) collective, and the “Scan the Difference” artists, lecturers, and audiences. We viewed this format as an informal educational training seminar by distributing readings and sending out daily schedules and event updates. Being open and accessible became key parts of the curatorial strategy. We imagined the topics to unfold in constellations and invited speakers to meet both in person and online. Before the exhibition even manifested itself, many digital and face-to-face conversations and meetings took place and collective and individual research was carried out, sharing networks and strategizing the working conditions beforehand. In this sense, radical care is understood as a negotiation of opinions, positions, needs, desires, conflicts, and respective struggles, and as providing a hospitable platform to viewers and invited artists. Feminist and anti-colonial theory guided us through this praxis.

Health, embodiment, and the medical gaze were central themes of the exhibition, owing to our commitment to dismantling disease and trauma toward a politics of radical healing. During the preparatory work for our exhibition, we sought to integrate the history of medicine with curatorial practices by incorporating a feminist perspective and working with alternative archives. More specifically, we sought to include the medical histories of the wayward: descendants of slaves, queer feminists, and Indigenous subjects. Our motivation was guided by critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, Black feminist poet Audre Lorde, and decolonial scholar Frantz Fanon.<sup>5</sup> Their works provided a theoretical bridge between our historical and curatorial practice and allowed us to unpack the violent histories of slavery and gender discrimination in the biomedical industry.

Our first meeting was for cultural theorist and curator Elke Krasny’s talk on African American artist Simone Leigh’s work *The Waiting Room*, a participatory artwork responding to the death of Esmin Green, a 48-year-old Jamaican immigrant, whose death in the waiting room of a hospital in Brooklyn, New York, was recorded by surveillance cameras. Krasny’s contribution oriented the discussion on the meaning of display as a mode of revealing viewership and presentation. She posited display as a type of testimony: it makes evident and exposes at the same time. The word “expose,” which is rooted in the French word for exhibition, *exposition*, makes visible the epistemic violence both in the word itself (“to subject,” “to deprive of,” “to lay open to harm”) and inherent to the power paradigm of exhibition structures. We next led excursions to architectural curator Angelika Fitz and Krasny’s exhibition “Critical Care: Architecture for a Broken Planet” to continue the discussions around care we

began the previous night. We then held a symposium on Saturday, with a talk by Vanessa Gravenor, who discussed the implications scanning in both medicine and the military, a Skype-in talk by digital artist and scholar Hiba Ali, who presented her research on Amazon’s use of scanning technology as a tool for the precarization of labor forces, and ended with Edna Bonhomme’s talk “Medical Apartheid, Technoscience, and Afrofuturism”—with a brief intermission and trip to the protests surrounding the Ibiza scandal. The following day, Bonhomme continued with her “decolonial salon,” and we ended the week’s events with Nina Prader’s zine-making workshop that touched on practices of scanning in the creation of printed matter. We were lucky to have a small but dedicated audience who also contributed to our discussions.

## Library of Care: Printed and Care Matters

In the context of the exhibition, independent publishing was a means to monumentalize a conglomerate of local and international printed matter. It took shape in a hybrid community garden-library structure, called *Helianthus: Library of Care*. The library was to be understood as a kind of apothecary and archive of printed matter collected by Prader for healthy escapism and nurturing the mind, heart, and soul. We invited and interviewed PMS, a zine collective that creates anti-copyright digital and printed information pamphlets on autonomous healthcare practices as a form of art and resistance.<sup>6</sup> This turned into a kind of podcast that was exhibited in the *Library of Care*. The collective’s participants wished to remain anonymous, so their voices were distorted in order to respect this condition. The library itself was a mobile structure on wheels, housing publications, a printer, and other tools for DIY publishing. Its zines, samizdat, coloring books, and artists’ books thematized or related to care or healing by making certain voices, bodies, and authorships visible. The very ethics behind zine aesthetics can be understood as care: printing techniques such as Risograph or photocopying, editing principles, educational processes, and distribution tactics.

The zine as a format elaborated on the topic of surveillance. It is an empowering narrative tool and source of information, originally anti-capitalist and used as a megaphone for underrepresented voices. It is an affordable form of documentation and redistributing power and access. Authors of zines can be anonymous, collective, subcultural. Zines are a raw and vulnerable form of book; they are

5 See Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 139–67; Audre

Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984); and Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 2004).

6 Power Makes Us Sick, <https://pms.hotglue.me/>.

haptic ideas that operate under systems of codification and honesty. Though there have been shifts in how zine culture is mediated through the internet and social-media platforms and its infiltration in the art world, it still remains a manifesting and voice-generating format at odds with other, more elitist forms of art production. Its distribution is not about reach in the sense of quantity, but rather about quality. The gesture of trading or giving a zine is more akin to gifting, caring, and creating allyship than based on an economic logic. It is a format that still contains a kind of privacy, intimacy, or secrecy, being simultaneously public and private.

Zines can be understood as a kind of totem, a source of healing. Zines are therapeutic and inclusive in how they are created and received. They are a means to recognize pain, work through trauma, and create a paper monument to restoring dignity. Through readership, it is possible to build communities and safe spaces to take risks in. Concerning zines, reading can be understood as a gaze of care, a type of listening and acknowledgement. In the same way, such pamphlets create awareness for toxic isms and strategies for how to fight them (such as *Breaking the Manacles* or *Don't Be a Dick*) and address taboo topics. Since they defy traditional forms of archiving or organization such as the Dewey Decimal System or ISBN, there are ethical questions around their inability to be tracked or how their content should be made accessible. In this way, they are made with care, handled with care; they are prisms.

## Practicing Care under Biometric Scanning

At the end of her seminal text *How We Became Posthuman*, American literary critic N. Katherine Hayles elaborates on English mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing's test of AI capability: a game that places two human bodies and one computer, each in a separate room, and gives each human the task of determining if the other entity they are communicating with is a machine or another human. Hayles says that what is important here is not only the split of gender or the machine-human binary, but the splintering of cognition into "mutating and flexible machine interfaces."<sup>7</sup> She names this splicing of consciousness a "cybernetic circuit," which is likewise entangled with colonial structures of labor and capital. In spaces of care, technological interfaces are the status quo, specifically within the healthcare sector, where tech coupled with medicine is the means to gaze at the body to detect illness. And yet what is also performed by this "gaze" are other forms of splintering and mutations, which we can now observe through the tools given to us by posthumanist discourse<sup>8</sup> so that we can begin to define a "caring gaze" by first sensing its absence.

As aforementioned, Krasny's talk "Resisting Surveillance, Practicing Healing" served as a necessary case study for such an excavation. Together, we meditated on how surveillance systems discipline spaces of care. It revealed the blockages, especially in Western Europe and North America, as we saw in Leigh's *Waiting Room*, which interrogates the paradoxes of surveillance footage. Presumably, someone observed Esmin Green, since the camera was put into place for security purposes. However, this person either failed to see or failed to act. Or perhaps even more duplicitous, Green was registered, but the very mechanisms of visualizing or lighting the black body were just another means of detecting a threat. In her landmark book *Black Matters*, which begins with a discussion of philosopher Michel Foucault's examination of the panopticon, Black studies scholar and surveillance studies specialist Simone Browne explains that light, fire, and other mechanics that illuminate bodies are very much part of the disciplining apparatus.<sup>9</sup> Locating older forms of security and punishment in the United States that use light as a supervisory tool, Browne debunks the presumed innocence of lighting often heralded by security technologies.<sup>10</sup>

This discussion conditioned our thinking throughout "Scan the Difference," where practicing care often meant first understanding the paradoxes within spaces of care, the technological implications, and of course, the politics of space. We invited the artist, activist, and researcher Hiba Ali, who shared her research on working conditions in Amazon warehouses.<sup>11</sup> Ali discussed the surveillance systems within Amazon that constantly monitor workers' performance, from moving products to bathroom breaks. Once again, it became clear that these monitoring systems were not implemented for the preservation of life or health but meant to enforce inhuman standards of efficiency. Ali explained how the surveillance systems have captured worker's deaths, though unsurprisingly, they did not predict bodily collapse.

In her video *Abra*, which we screened after her talk, Ali paints her face orange, transforming into Peccy, Amazon's mascot. She repeats "no surveillance business, no police business," alluding to how biometric readings often targets marginalized black and brown bodies—which also has resonances to the medical apartheid in the US healthcare system. Understanding how technological

7 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), xiv.

8 Hayles, xiv.

9 Simone Browne, *Black Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

10 Browne, "Torches, Torture, and Totau: Lantern Laws in New York City," in *Black Matters*, 76–83.

11 Hiba Ali, "Facial Recognition, Peccy, Precarious Labour: The Human Cost of Amazon," accessed May 20, 2020, <https://hibaali.info/writings/facial-recognition-peccy-precarious-labour-the-human-cost-of-amazon>.

systems govern and monitor processes of asylum, media scholar, researcher, and journalist Ariana Dongus describes the evolution of the EyePay application, a biometric scanning device used for monetary transactions in UNHCR camps in northern Iraq.<sup>12</sup> Dongus explains that there is no way to opt out of biometric scanning if you are in the position of seeking asylum. The body becomes a source of data and also a testing site for technologies that have not yet been deployed in the Global North. Here care isn't even on the agenda. Though we live in systems designed to engineer total transparency, failure is constantly underwritten in these networks. What happens when this biometric data accumulated by UNHCR is hacked or left open? Who controls the data, and how are these devices violating bodies virtually and physically?

## Excavating Care in Herbal Counter-archives and Eruptions

In *Medical Apartheid*, African American writer and medical ethicist Harriet Washington describes the myriad ways that African Americans were experimented upon and exploited and used as research subjects without their consent. Despite her "long-standing fascination with the more noble history of medicine," she wanted to elucidate how the racially driven medical system produced a condition of medical apartheid between white Americans and African Americans.<sup>13</sup> While her book mostly focuses on the United States, the inequalities within medicine and in what counts in the history of medicine extends beyond this explicit context. For one, traditional practices by women and people of color have historically been sidelined in the writing of history. Yet new scholarship that looks to herbal remedies, such as the book by historian of medicine and science Abena Dove Osseo-Asare—who grew up in Ghana and the United States—*Bitter Roots*, which looks at the relationship between African medicine and healing, or African American interdisciplinary social scientist Alondra Nelson's *Body and Soul*, which outlines the medical practices of the Black Panther Party, highlight how Black and Indigenous subjects were able to participate in collective healing.<sup>14</sup> Given this rich literature, our exhibition sought to incorporate the medical traditions and practices of Black and Indigenous subjects through two contributions—Edna Bonhomme's *Herbal Archives* and the Berlin-based Brazilian transdisciplinary artist Luiza Prado's *Eruptions*.

Bonhomme's multimedia contribution was a meditation on her Haitian heritage and her family's absence in the archives. *Herbal Archives* extrapolated radical care through the memories and alternative archives of the descendants of enslaved persons, who pass on their stories through oral traditions and alternative healing. Using African American literature and cultural history scholar Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives* as a starting point, one can see how Black women, who are often negatively stereotyped, can be bearers of knowledge and provide alternative futures. Starting from a point of speculation, Bonhomme's piece

incorporated care within the framework of alternative archives, especially in light of how official archives erase the history of the oppressed. There are no innocent archives. As such, one driving question of this work was to consider how archives obscure the voices of the wayward and the perspectives of enslaved subjects. In *Eruptions*, Prado examined the biopolitics of population control. In her video installation, the artist removed an entire month's worth of birth control pills into a condom inserted into her mouth, which she held there for as long as she could before expelling the contents. This video attempts to show the particularities of the Brazilian state's attempts to control women's bodies. Taken together, these two works explored how the descendants of enslaved and Indigenous women have used alternative medicine and healing to exercise autonomy over their bodies.

## Final Thoughts

In a political moment where the Far Right has gained popularity on a global scale, it is important to use feminist and decolonial approaches as a training ground to practice radical care in order to work against oppressive regimes. With this in mind, our collective work has given us the ability to think about our past in relation to our present. At the same time, we found multiple nodes of convergence to incorporate the gendered body through trauma (Gravenor), labor (Ali), herbal medicine (Bonhomme and PMS), contraception (Prado), and printed matters (Prader). Building on this and fueled by Audre Lorde's essay "The Uses of the Erotic," we excavated modalities of care by examining archives, collective creation, and pleasure.<sup>15</sup> This led us to generate a cosmology of queer, diasporic, and feminist positions for the visitors and participants of the exhibition. What we found was that rituals of healing were predicated on experimentation and transgression. This gave us the space to think about how curatorial and art practices are also part of embodied experience and require constant reflection and engagement. What we learned is to make time and space for care while also creating our own narratives working through trauma, capitalist labor, and alternative healing practices. What we gathered from the exhibition "Scan the Difference" is that radicalizing care in curatorial work

12 Ariana Dongus and Christina zur Nedden, "Getestet an Millionen Unfreiwilligen," *Die Zeit*, December 17, 2017, <https://www.zeit.de/digital/datenschutz/2017-12/biometrie-fluechtlinge-cpams-iris-erkennung-zwang>.

13 Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 13.

14 Abena Dove Osseo-Asare, *Bitter Roots: In Search for Healing Plants in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

15 Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Power of the Erotic," in *Sister Outsider*.



means taking an intersectional approach to excavating histories; it incorporates speculation and imagination. Healing provides us with the tools to recover from a broken world.

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# Crippling the Curatorial

Hana Janečková

This essay will discuss conceptualizations of care in contemporary art through posthuman ethics, expanding curatorial strategies with the idea of crippling curating. Using as an example the three-year-long curatorial research project “Multilogues on the Now” (2016–19),<sup>1</sup> with a focus on projects by artists Khairani Barokka, Taraneh Fazeli, and the Feminist Health Care Research Group, this essay addresses how power, labor, and agency are distributed through artworks and actors positioned in affective, embodied relations with their temporalities and contexts.<sup>2</sup> The interest here is in crippling the curatorial to destabilize the current system of institutional curating. The curatorial project revolved around questions of health, care, and the politics of the body, which is part of a wider trend in contemporary Western artistic and institutional circles. Care, often intertwined with health activism, refugee politics, and anti-racism, has increasingly been a matter of concern in programming contemporary art institutions, from autonomous artist- and art-worker-run health clinics for refugees, such as Glasgow Autonomous Space, and Klinika, in Prague), to programming at small- and large-scale art institutions like the Berlin Biennale 2020. “Multilogues” was initiated at the contemporary art space Display<sup>3</sup> (until 2017, Tranzitdisplay) in Prague by its directorial team, Zuzana Jakalová and Zbyněk Baladrán. Joining as a curator to conceptualize and research two editions of the program from 2017 to 2019, my own role in the project was to translate the process of inquiry into exhibition formats through feminist curating and institutional practice, examining its potential for activism and politics.

The premise of the multilogue served as a starting point for a conversation of multiple voices and bodies to replace the two-way exchange between audience and institution and explore collectivity and nonhierarchical ways of speaking and working in artistic and institutional contexts. The focus was on trans-local feminist coalition-making through researching existing artistic networks and practitioners dealing with health and care. In the selection of artworks and

1 Multilogues on the Now (2017–ongoing) is a long-term project of Display – Association for Research and Collective Practice, Prague. Until now it consisted of three parts: “Multilogues on the Now: On Health” (May–September 2017), <http://display.cz/en/projects/multilogues-on-the-now-on-health>; “Multilogues on the Now: On Health, Work and Emotions” (March–June 2018), <http://display.cz/en/projects/multilogue-on-now-o-zdravi-praci-a-emocich>, and “Multilogues on the Now: Technologies of the Body” (March–June 2019), <http://display.cz/en/projects/multilogues-on-the-now-technologie-tela>. The fourth edition, *Multilogues on the*

*Now: On Membranes, Glands and Cavities*, 2021, adopts the form of a peer-reviewed publication with new commissioned texts.

2 Klara Kemp Welch draws on Bruno Latour’s *Reassembling the Social* as a tool for viewing artwork as a site in her book, *Networking the Bloc: Experimental Art in Eastern Europe 1968–1981* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

3 Display – Association for Research and Collective Practice, [display.cz](http://display.cz) is a contemporary art institution and publisher based in Prague. It follows the Feminist (Art) Institution code of practice; see <http://feministinstitution.org/code-of-practice/>.

live programming, we attempted to foreground care and collectivity as an organizational tool for curating centered around the politics of the body, rather than the representational, formal approaches that often conform to the art-world status quo. The effects of artistic processes embedded within artworks and between artists and curators are recognized and evaluated as what, following French philosopher and science and technology scholar Bruno Latour,<sup>4</sup> we can conceptualize as configurations of interest and agency connecting human and nonhuman actors, allowing for social imaginaries to arise as relational, and with the addition of care, as affective bonds. Key to “Multilogues on the Now” was the commitment to working beyond the representation of care or illness by engaging in long-term processes of collaboration, identifying allied practical and theoretical projects.

In their influential text “Sick Woman Theory,” genderqueer Korean American artist, writer, and astrologer Johanna Hedva writes: “The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other’s vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care.”<sup>5</sup> In addition to Hedva’s work, the writings of Alyson Patsavas, who works at the intersections of disability studies, queer theory, and feminist theory with a focus on epistemologies of pain, and Carolyn Lazard, artist, writer, and cofounder of Canaries—a network of cis women and trans and nonbinary people living with autoimmune conditions and other chronic illnesses—are influential in feminist art and health activist networks. They are all attempting to address the issue of exclusion from the politics of representation in the US health system along lines of disability. This echoes historical civil rights movements, with the politics of the body highly resonant in their struggles.<sup>6</sup>

## Care Beyond the Representational

Unlike other curatorial efforts which resulted in care as representation, “Multilogues on the Now” focused on practicing care institutionally, curatorially, and together with the audience. For one of the main commissions, Feminist Health Care Research Group (Feministische Gesundheitsrecherchegruppe, or FHCRG, then comprised of Julia Bonn, Alice Münch, and Inga Zimprich), a group of Berlin-based feminist artists, focused on the entanglements of cultural capital, politics of care, and community health activism. Commissioning FHCRG serves as an example of the curatorial ethos of establishing caring networks and alliances instead of the prevailing art-world model operating on the quick, trendsetting turnover of artists with high-profile names. Inga Zimprich, Zuzana Jakalová, Alyson Patsavas, Tabita Rezaire, Kateřina Kolářová,

and Kata Mach participated in an open-table discussion that launched the series in May 2017. FHCRG worked on the program further with artist-activist collective Power Makes Us Sick (PMS) in September 2017. FHCRG were invited again by the curators to Prague for the second part, “Multilogues on the Now: On Health, Work and Emotions,” in spring 2018, as part of its (and Display’s) strategy of curating as care, designed to support artists’ practices over an extended period of time. FHCRG’s Zimprich presented her ongoing research on the West German anti-psychiatry movement in the late 1970s, which sought to dismantle patriarchal hierarchies between psychiatric patients and doctors through group therapy based on principles of feminist collectivity. This was done as a performative reenactment of a self-organized group therapy circle in Berlin as well as a mural and a new artwork printed for free distribution in the gallery. “Would You Support Me? An Introduction to Radical Therapy” was a three-hour performative workshop run by Jess Ward (F\*oRT, Berlin)<sup>7</sup> and Zimprich at Display in April 2018. The participants had to commit to the full three hours with no food or drinks allowed. To address a possible issue with the cultural capital arising from this artistic performance, Zimprich, a member of F\*oRT’s yearlong group therapy, negotiated consent with the Berlin F\*oRT group to use this community-based activity in an institutional art context. According to Ward, it was FHCRG’s trustworthiness and long-term activist engagement with alternative health centers such as HeileHaus in Berlin and the institutional format of “Multilogues” that was a decisive factor. To practice the politics of care, time and trust are necessary for coalitions of care to emerge between art institutions, artists, and communities they work with and from within.

The collaboration was complicated by disparities in funding culture between Germany and post-socialist states like the Czech Republic. The institutional commitment to care for artistic development and sustainability had to be negotiated, as it is relatively much cheaper for a Western institution to support an Eastern European artist than for an Eastern European institution to support a Western one. Equally, the highly positive feedback that “Would You Support Me?” received from Display’s audience was symptomatic of the current sociopolitical landscape where contemporary art institutions attempt to provide and deliver social, health, and community-based provisions that are lacking in society.

4 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

5 Johanna Hedva, “Sick Woman Theory,” *Mask Magazine*, January 2006, <http://maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory>.

6 One such example is the understanding of the importance of forming coalitions around bodily autonomy emphasized in Boston Women’s Health Book Collective,

ed., *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women*, 2nd ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1976).

7 F\*oRT stands for Frauen\* organisieren Radikale Therapie (women\* organize radical therapy). FHCRG and F\*oRT have collaborated in the past. See <http://www.district-berlin.com/en/would-you-support-me/>.



Fig. 5  
Feminist Health Care Research Group and Jess Ward (F\*oRT), "Would You Support Me? Introduction to Radical Feminist Therapy," workshop during "Multilogues on the Now: On Health, Work and Emotions," Display, Prague, 2018

The frustration with an insufficient provision of psychological welfare is a prime example of this shortage (which seemed to be shared in both Berlin and Prague), as some participants of the workshop expected Display's curators to establish and run a full F\*oRT group in the institution. We must question frameworks of evaluation for events such as "Would You Support Me?" Do we judge them on the basis of audience attendance, engagement, and impact? How do we position such a practice, which was developed for a specific institutional commission, in the histories of live art and performance, and are these categories even useful toward a new political demand of art in the future? While these questions cannot be answered in this essay, for now it can be suggested that such practices turn art spaces into laboratories, forming social imaginaries<sup>8</sup> of the political without succumbing to the necessity to present tangible outcomes and statistics.

## Crippling the Curatorial

Feminist and intersectional curating often fails to consider the impact of normative representations of the body in artistic practices concerned with discourses around health and well-being, where those represented are often stylized as young, Western, abled, attractive, wealthy, and white. And feminist and intersectional curating often fails to address the lived realities of bodies when it comes to international mobility and access. Social media's regime of visibility and erasure—where image economies tend to downgrade and erase the sick/disabled, aged, or non-white, nonnormative bodies—poses a challenge to curators, artists, and institutions trying to address how the lived experiences of underrepresented groups can or cannot be used in PR images and on social media.

In "Multilogues on the Now," curatorial care beyond the representational has manifested in a conscious and long-term focus on enablement: to give space to artists experiencing and living with nonnormative embodiment. This practice of "cripping the curatorial," a term that came out of discussions with the Czech disability scholar Kateřina Kolářová, who advised "Multilogues," encompass a range of approaches to selection, care, and labor. The resounding principle of disability studies and the disability rights movement, "Nothing about us without us,"<sup>9</sup> with its implication of the power of voice and representation, serves as a useful tool. In his book of the same name, American author and disability rights activist James I. Charlton identifies this motto as following the concerns of civil rights movements in the US,<sup>10</sup> which resonates with disability rights leader Ed Roberts's assertion: "If we have learned one thing from the civil rights movement in the U.S., it's that when others speak for you, you lose."<sup>11</sup>

Through discussions with participating artists, activists, and theorists, it became evident that a program about health and its politics must involve participants reflecting on the direct lived experience of disability, sickness, and economic and social precarity, yet without too much intervention in the work presented. In many ways, this opened the question of whether it is possible to establish a trans-local curatorial strategy, probing and questioning artistic strategies around health activism and the body in the United States, and finding its relevance to local Eastern European art institutions and audiences.

8 Kateřina Kolářová, "The Inarticulate Post-socialist Crip: On the Cruel Optimism of Neoliberal Transformations in the Czech Republic," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 3 (2014): 258.

9 Disability rights activists Michael Masutha and William Rowland, quoted in James I. Charlton, *Nothing about Us without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

10 Charlton, 4.

11 Quoted in Charlton, 14.

While the practice of “holding space,”<sup>12</sup> which highlights access and participation, certainly has a positive impact, crippling the curatorial can shed light on how neoliberal cultural politics are co-opting care. Considering the precarious and funding-dependent status of most health-related projects within art institutions, it is hardly possible to assume that on its own an institutional curating practice foregrounding access and care can truly provide a solid and stable center of support for artists with disabilities. It does, however, suggest that curating as care concerned with the politics of the body, practiced in projects such as “Multilogues,” might actually result in affective coalitions and show the way such social relations form artistic practices. In the following section, I’d like to focus on the political potential of sick bodies, healing, and cure in institutional curating.

## Sick Time

In her long-term itinerant curatorial and commissioning project “Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time” (2016–ongoing), American curator and researcher Taraneh Fazeli draws on queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman’s notion of chrononormativity as defining “proper” subjectivity, where efficiencies of work and leisure are organized to ensure maximum productivity. Delivered as an opening lecture for the second “Multilogues on the Now,” in 2018, Fazeli expanded on Freeman’s queer time and crip time by adding “sick time,” positioned as a time-space where temporalities of debility and disability, connected to the collective instead of individualized wellness may function as an anti-capitalist strategy. Fazeli writes about the project: “Beyond merely representing the various political conditions around corporeal spaces of impairment, the artworks and programs will re-envision collective wellness [...] many artists (will) consider how the leaky and porous bodies can provide new possibilities for collectivity, privileging interdependency while negotiating and maintaining difference through radical kinship and forms of care.”<sup>13</sup>

Margrit Shildrick, who draws on feminist and queer theory with a research focus on critical disability studies and bioethics, discusses how disability and anomalous embodiment,<sup>14</sup> leaky and porous bodies such as displaced persons, conjoined twins, or futuristic cyborgs, pose a threat to the value systems within normative paradigms. This position is articulated through discussion of the porosity and permeability of boundaries—both of nonnormative embodiment and of disability as a category. As disability studies scholar G. Thomas Couser states, “Part of what makes disability so threatening to the non-disabled then may be precisely the indistinctness and permeability of its boundaries.”<sup>15</sup> Shildrick stresses that the idea of interdependence professed by such relations exposes the myth of the modernist subject: “Where physical and mental autonomy, the ability to think rationally and impartially and interpersonal

separation and distinction are valued attributes of Western subjectivity, then any compromise of control over one’s own body, any indication of interdependency and connectivity [...] are the occasions of deep seated anxiety.”<sup>16</sup> Such a position, however, entails for Shildrick and many others the possibility of “regenerative” politics. Following Shildrick, interdependency brings to the fore touch as the membrane of porous bodies and as a haptic technology of care where touch serves as a receptacle and enabler of caring encounters, dismantling subject-object distinctions (to touch is to be touched). Most importantly, the corporeal relationality of touch challenges the modernist emphasis on mimesis and art’s autonomy, privileging what Bellacasa calls “touching visions,” vulnerable and relational ways of seeing “a world constantly done and undone through encounters that accentuate both the attraction of closeness as well as awareness of alterity.”<sup>17</sup> In institutional curating, touching visions politicize the inclusion of nonnormative bodies where “vulnerable seeing” is one of the tools for forging coalitions of care.

## Illness as a Form of Knowledge

One of the key aspects of crip studies, instrumental for curating as care, is a recognition of illness as a space of resistance. Barokka Khairani, a London-based Indonesian artist and performer, was invited for “Multilogues on the Now: On Health, Work and Emotions” in April 2018. Her performance *Indigenous Species* highly influenced by her own experience of exclusion as a disabled artist (her eponymous collection of poetry is transcribed to Braille), yet the specific condition of her disability (multiple autoimmune disease that greatly restricts her day-to-day mobility) is not addressed directly in this performance or her other work. As a non-Western, disabled woman of color, her legal status and artistic practice are dependent on visa requirements and travel restrictions. Her participation in contemporary art projects requires curating as care, challenging the systemic issues of access, mobility, and ableism in art institutions. Barokka’s poetry performance was carried out in the space of a brain-injury support center ERGO Aktiv, alongside talks by disability scholar Kateřina Kolářová and ERGO Aktiv’s coordinator Veronika Slepíčková. One of a number of complicated organizational arrangements, Barokka’s visa

12 Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018).

13 Taraneh Fazeli, “Notes for ‘Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time: Against Capitalism’s Temporal Bullying’ in Conversation with the Canaries,” *Temporary Art Review*, May 26, 2016, <http://temporaryartreview.com/notes>

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14 Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002).

15 Quoted in Shildrick, 4.

16 Shildrick, 6.

17 Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 115.

application was originally refused by the Czech Consulate in London, requiring the curators and the Czech Centre London to intervene before her visa was finally issued. This uncertainty significantly postponed promotion of the event. Due to accessibility issues at Display, the event was organized together with ERGO Aktiv in their barrier-free facilities. The partnership was based on the idea that the program would be collaborative, and as such a meeting point for the clients of ERGO Aktiv and the audience of Display.

Discussion between artists and curators around the selection of Barokka's contribution revolved mostly around multifaceted questions of access: the audience planned for was comprised of nonnative English speakers, ERGO Aktiv's clients, and Display's audience unfamiliar with ERGO Aktiv's space and ethos. *Indigenous Species* was eventually selected as most suitable for the space, audience, and artist's needs. To make the performance of highly poetic text in English more accessible, it was accompanied by a projected presentation of illustrated pages from her sight-impaired-accessible artist's book *Indigenous Species* (2016), which is a mediation of the global interconnectedness of environmental disaster in Barokka's native Indonesia. In the mesmerizing performance, Barokka often rested and lay down throughout, her body reflecting an ailing landscape, while her powerful voice connected her body to gendered violence and conflicted pasts, searching for a reconciliation. Told by a female narrator, kidnapped and traveling up a jungle river in Borneo, it is a testimony about the large-scale deforestation driven by palm oil production. The story navigates a complicated terrain of transnational feminisms, postcoloniality, ecology, and consumerism. Cosmetics such as lipstick are often made of palm oil, sold to women worldwide as a consumer-driven feminism of choice. Yet, as Barokka emphasizes, without posthuman ethics of care, such "feminist" choices of self-presentation are burdened by a further exploitation of the non-Western and nonhuman world.

For care ethicists Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, care includes "everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. This world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web."<sup>18</sup> *Indigenous Species* attempts to create this life-sustaining web by enabling a vulnerable seeing while turning away from mimesis—for example, allowing sight-impaired people to access the content of the book by touch and as a spoken performance. Care for the environment, the body, and each other as the content of the artwork and an organizational principle of the event was formalized as a loose structure that allowed Barokka plenty of time to rest and talk to other people present. It must be mentioned, though, that complexities of attempting to address a web of issues and sometimes contradictory demands came at the cost of audience engagement. Many members of Display's audience were discouraged by the unfamiliar surroundings of the medical center in Žižkov.

And the clients of ERGO Aktiv hardly attended the event, either. According to a later feedback session with Slepíčková, who co-organized the event, this was a result of the uncertainty caused by the visa delays: an audience with disabilities generally needs much earlier notice to plan around mobility issues and specific health demands. If there had been enough time, personal invitations could have been issued by the center's staff and curators themselves.

## Multilogues of Care

Through the organizational practice of this event we must recognize the value of such failures. As mentioned, it is a challenge to chrononormativity, enabling new modes of institutional engagement with a complicated set of expectations and nonnormative bodies. As Farhan Samanini points out, empirical studies of care stress the "deeply situated, embodied, and temporally-unfolding nature of relations of care,"<sup>19</sup> which might seem an inward-looking instead of a more outwardly applied way of thinking. However, if we consider the alliances made through care as affective bonds, such as friendship and intimacy, they can emerge as access intimacy<sup>20</sup> through addressing the specific needs that working with nonnormative embodiment entails. This would change the ethos from maximizing productivity and performance at any cost, which consequently would be reflected in institutional structures. In this respect, it is essential that curating as care must go hand in hand with deeper changes in institutional structures that will be projected outward to that institution's publics. For Display as an art institution, "Multilogues on the Now" highlighted the importance of restructuring the organization in terms of access, long-term care for artists, and developing partnerships with activist groups. Most importantly, it shows that curating as care needs a much longer time for preparation, feedback sessions, and communication with publics, including long-term engagement with partner institutions and artists while thinking through the distribution of cultural capital not only with the participating parties but through transversal communities.

18 Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 103.  
19 Farhan Samanini, review of *Matters of Care*, by María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Society+Space*, January 8, 2019, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/matters-of-care-by-maria-puig-de-la-bellacasa>.

20 See Adelita Husni Bey, "Relations of the Undercommons," in *The Constituent Museum: Constellations of Knowledge, Politics and Mediation: A Generator of Social Change*, ed. John Byrne et al. (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018).

Such a positioning of the project poses questions about the wider value and political relevance of the politics of care and institutional curating as a tool for creating social imaginaries. Curating as care highlights issues of sustainability, performativity, and productivity that need to be addressed not only on the level of small institutions but through the demand for and reimagining of a widely different politics, in which a posthuman ethics of care is not only envisioned as a system but spoken and thought about with its varied sites and actors—human and nonhuman worlds.

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# Collective Care Manifesto

k\are (Agnieszka Habraschka and Mia von Matt)

Owing to the global crisis caused by COVID-19, we are facing the results of an economy that has always put profit first instead of care and prioritized individualism over interdependency. Care work as an area that is devalued, privatized, mostly unpaid and outsourced to women and minority communities is not being seen as a collective and system-relevant duty. Owing to underfunded, understaffed, and overburdened hospitals and nursing homes, health and care systems are collapsing, putting the lives of many in danger. In order to help slow down the spread of the coronavirus and to prevent more deaths, we have to practice physical distancing. This leads to an increase of intimate partner violence, mental illness, existential need, isolation, and loneliness. But isolation has been a reality for many elderly people, disabled people, people with chronic and mental illness, people in abusive relationships, sex workers, homeless people, refugees, etc., long before this crisis, and it is becoming an existential threat now more than ever. One important reason for isolation is exclusion through inaccessibility, which happens on many levels: architecture, information, care, welfare, inaccessible education, culture, sociality, democracy. The standardization of bodies, communication, and mental ability is at the core of this exclusion and leads to segregation and isolation. This is highlighted in current discussions around forced isolation of the elderly and chronically ill in order for the “rest” to return to business as usual.

At the same time, police and border-control brutality, national isolation, the instrumentalization of fear, the spreading of false news, state control, and surveillance support the global mobilization of right-wing and autocratic forces. It is more evident than ever that we need to take joint responsibility for a failing care structure and start collectivizing care. Caring collectively is not just a concept of a utopian world but something that could be created here and now. We call for Collective Care and interdependency. Assuming that the seed of capitalist exploitation lies in individualism, with its commodification and normalization of our bodies, then interdependency and Collective Care are the most radical counter-concepts to this. Interdependency means caring collectively for each living being as well as for the planet we live on. We want a collective structure that brings together people and initiatives showing solidarity in the struggle for a just, sustainable, and accessible world. The rapid formation of mutual-aid initiatives and self-organized groups all around the world that are becoming visible is staggering. Not only are they filling the gaps in the overburdened state and private health institutions, they also point to lived alternatives. We want a collective structure that ensures access for all to the whole range of aid services, while centering those who have been most harmed. To provide this, we have to rethink our organizational structures. This starts with the design of accessible documents, including translation of texts into various spoken, simple, and sign languages, as well as audio descriptions of videos. But above all, in order to move together it is essential to understand that access differs for everyone.



We link Access and Collective Care to political demands for building an economy that is just and holds care and environmental sustainability at its core. We want access for all to resources like political education, and to find accessible forms of protest. Each person must be able to participate in whatever form possible for them. We want to make space to imagine a different and just world, that will allow ALL of us to live abundantly.

The seven principles of Collective Care:

#### 1. Collective Care needs Access.

We can no longer leave anyone out. Access needs to be the foundation for all our actions, Collective Care the way, and justice for all the goal. We need to ask ourselves about our own access needs, and listen to each person's access needs, rather than making assumptions:

What areas of care can you identify that need support now and in the near future?

Think about yourself, your family, your friends, your community, and your neighbors.

What do you and your communities need to have access to basic services, care, and information?

What forms of resilience have you and your communities built through your everyday experiences?

What do you need to be able to formulate political demands, to participate in protests?

What are your political demands arising from your experiences, from this current crisis, and from your access needs?

What do you think everyone should know and learn about to be able to create an accessible, just, and sustainable world together?

#### 2. Collective Care needs to center those who have been most harmed by an unjust system.

Centering the needs of those who are most vulnerable because of an unjust system is the only way we can build a just world together. The following list doesn't seek to impose a vulnerability, but creates an awareness of those most harmed:

- People with physical disabilities
- People with chronic illness
- People with learning disabilities
- People with mental illnesses
- => We use the word "disability" as a political term for all these different impairments
- Elderly people
- Sex workers
- People without residence status
- People of color (currently, especially people of Asian backgrounds)
- Women
- Trans and nonbinary people
- Children

- Queer people
- Precarious self-employed small entrepreneurs
- Single parents
- People with caring responsibilities
- People experiencing homelessness
- People living below the poverty line
- Asylum seekers
- Refugees
- Prisoners

#### 3. Collective Care needs self-organized care structures.

We want accessible platforms that explore ways to collectivize care. Centering access and interdependency, we want to strive towards a caring, sustainable collective structure to address isolation. Those platforms will become spaces of collective learning about access intimacy, access needs, experiences, and care. In order to reach people who are in danger, isolated, or have no access to care structures or communities, outreach and neighborly care need to be an important part. We need to support facilities that practice street outreach—this concerns unregistered sex workers, homeless people, etc.

We need to connect with health and care workers and facilities, to think together about ways how to make care a collective responsibility.

We need to give an accessible overview of the different groups, initiatives, projects, neighborhood groups, help offers, actions, and funds.

#### 4. Collective Care needs political demands.

People experience different degrees of exclusion and discrimination based on ability, health, gender, skin color, sexual orientation, age, origin, religion, and many other factors. The demands formulated from these experiences and this crisis need to be supported and made visible. The unconditional goal must be access, justice, and nonviolence for ALL.

Beyond this crisis we want to seize this opportunity to finally demand an economy centered around care and environmental sustainability. We want fundamental rights that put the well-being and integrity of ALL first.

Examples of such demands are:

- Right to physical integrity
- Accessibility
- Unconditional basic income
- Right to self-determination
- Higher wages for care work
- Free health and nursing care
- Environmental sustainability
- Affordable and self-determined living for all
- Free use of public transport
- Open borders and the right to asylum for all

5. Collective Care needs accessible education for all.

We want to build resources through education to be able to create a just world together. Instead of competition, individualism, and hierarchies, we want to acknowledge, appreciate, and learn about

- The different struggles for justice
- Accessibility
- Antidiscrimination
- Interdependency
- Environmental sustainability

6. Collective Care needs accessible forms of protest.

Since we are currently unable to take our protest to the streets, and since most forms of protest have never been accessible anyway, we have to think about different strategies. Any form of protest has to start with the question about access needs.

7. Collective Care needs imagination.

We want to create platforms that allow the sharing of ideas for a just world based on our access needs.

Beyond the virtual, this needs to be connected with the outreach work to include people in isolation or without access to the internet.

Collective Care begins with understanding that we are and have always been interdependent. It begins with understanding that trauma and pain is a reality for so many, and that each one of us is accountable for dissolving the pain. Understanding that we are accountable for our actions, and accepting the responsibility that arises from that, can help create a world that is just and where integrity and liberation for all is possible. Collective Care begins with understanding our emotions as an integral part of ourselves, not inferior to our analytical minds. To acknowledge that all of us need love is the greatest tool to transform our own hurtful habits into compassion for others. Rooting Collective Care in our everyday actions, in little gestures that carry solidarity and love, all of us can learn how to be in this world without harming others. Collective Care begins with our dreams. Envisioning interdependency, compassion, justice, and liberation for all paves the way to a just world. Our dreams are powerful.

**Collective Care Needs Wages for All**  
**Collective Care Needs Transnational Solidarity**  
**Collective Care Needs a Sustainable World**  
**Collective Care Needs Access and Justice for Everyone**

This manifesto would not have been possible without the work of many, including Mia Mingus, Park McArthur, Constantina Zavitsanos, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Arika, the whole disability justice movement, Doug Boatwright, Norbert Witzgall, and Felix Meyer. Thank you.

# Curating Is One of the Master's Tools An Open Letter to the Gatekeepers of Space

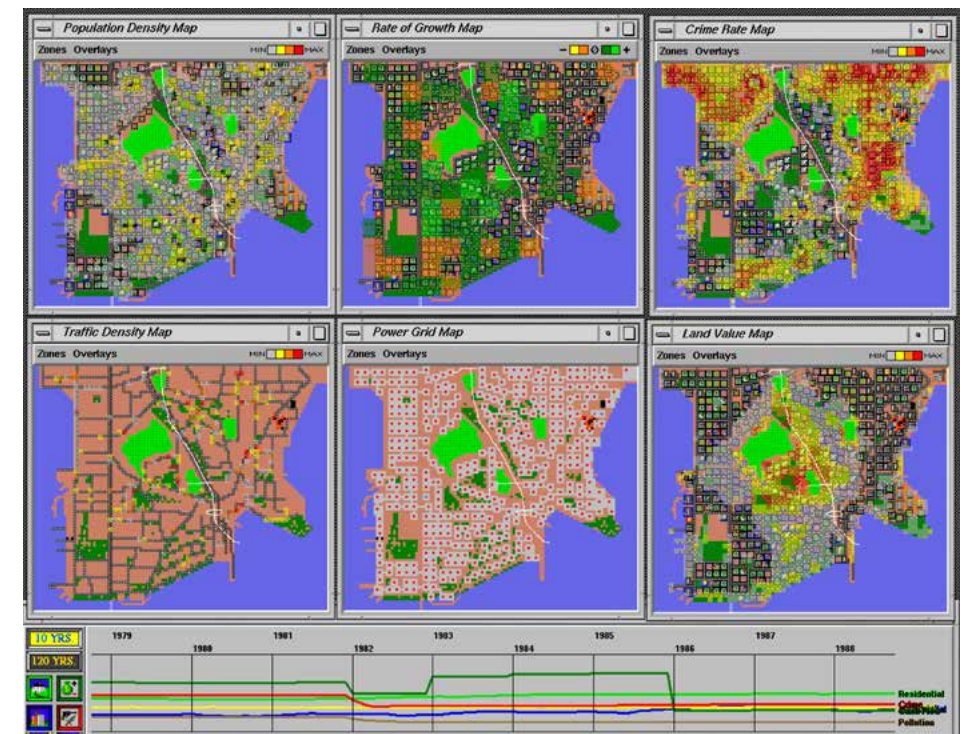
Ven Paldano

Even in the face of powerful structures of domination, it remains possible for each of us, especially those of us who are members of oppressed and/or exploited groups as well as those radical visionaries who may have race, class, and sex privilege, to define and determine alternative standards, to decide on the nature and extent of compromise.

—bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (1989)

The twenty-first century has brought in zoning and border policies that keep people navigating the world's surface area each day like a version of SimCity, though the recent COVID-19 pandemic appears to have paused this particular level of 2020 quite abruptly.

Fig. 6  
Zoning maps in SimCity, 1993



A convergence of the interruption of movement through public space and confinement to private space seems to have made us all more aware of the policies imposed on us by the curators of space. For many UK citizens, the transnational hostile environment policy and the Brexit referendum passed without too much scrutiny as they strengthened nationalist interests focused on securing borders against all noncitizens. While the emergency Coronavirus Act brought a very different reaction, its draconian powers (which also include detention, detainment, and limited public-health rights) over the monitoring

Fig. 7  
The author's aunt (Jen) and mother (Stella) working as nurses,  
Epsom, 1979



of social distancing faced mass opposition, and a review period was set for six months instead of two years. It is obvious that COVID-19 has removed a veil, exposing the ease at which our rights can be revoked and “the right to have rights”<sup>1</sup>—particularly in community mutual-aid organizing—despite what the governmental curators of space order; it is the first time that the majority have tasted the wrath of policy-induced inaccessibility of public space.

For me, this has been an unexpectedly optimistic progression toward the limits of conventional accessibility of institutions; it has taken a pandemic to prove that disability access, as a curatorial starting point, is possible for the whole population. As a carer and as someone who has chronic health struggles, it has become clearer how neoliberal austerity economics perpetually holds the reins of control that teer the productivity of the majority. Even during this pandemic, the focus is on segregation and protection of particular social classes and able-bodied members of society, in order to quick-start the economy once temporary restrictions of movement are lifted. The limpidity that all tangible and intangible space is curated by a necropolitics-driven government has not come as an epiphany following the ramifications of COVID-19. As a nonbinary-transmasculine-identified QPoC (queer person of color) whose parents and their siblings immigrated to the UK as part of the Windrush generation—previous to this displacement, my family's diasporic history involved migrating to the Caribbean as indentured slaves, for survival and improved quality of life—I am all too aware of how people get reduced to categorizations of body type within a predetermined periphery of space, ultimately ranked and controlled by a oppressive kyriarchal system. These graded distinctions began being recorded via identifying “passports”<sup>2</sup> during the fifteenth century, when chattel slavery and body ownership commenced. It is absurd that a small burgundy booklet inscribed with the UK's royal coat of arms can allow me the privilege to navigate most international borders while presenting authentically as a gender nonconforming QPoC—in comparison to people who identify similarly but have no European or North American passport, who are at certain risk of brutality or death at the hands of the state they reside in.

The sacrifice of family ties and thus commitment to a lifetime of displacement has procured my family, after almost fifty years of residing in the UK, citizenship status, access to training, no limit to work except physical ability, rights to state benefits, rights to buy assets, and means of assimilation. These fringes have come with numerous invisible oppressive systemic clauses around public space: surrender of access to community space, policing when utilizing

1 Stephanie DeGooyer et al., *The Right to Have Rights* (London: Verso, 2018), 2.

2 Leo Benedictus, “A Brief History of the Passport,” *Guardian*, November 17, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2006/nov/17/travelnews>.

public space, conditioned societal harassment within public space, and the proviso to perform cultural norms in order to navigate public space and avoid negative repercussions. Needless to say, these restrictions create a clear segregation—strangely, a fracture unnoticed by the majority—as those curatorially forced out of public space become camouflaged and thus uncountable.

Growing up as a Brightonian brought with it a nagging feeling of isolation: it was never something I could acknowledge or quantify, owing to a lack of knowledge and therefore understanding. My upbringing was very much rooted in self-preservation through attainment and ownership. I can now recognize how neo-colonialism continues to control multiple generations of its subjects, considering that “property can be understood as a spatially contingent relation of belonging.”<sup>3</sup> When we pause to reflect on the progression of chattel slavery, where an individual and their offspring are the property of another person for life—in comparison to the indentured slavery that evolved later, where the enslaved individual is also held by law, but only for a set period time, in exchange for a specific payment such as transportation to a new place or land ownership—we can begin to fathom where the deep-conditioned desire to possess tangible space derived from, before developing into the additional association of belonging. This need to belong is an intrinsic part of life, for all beings; it is something that I have always craved but felt a deep dissociation to in relation to physical space in the UK. It was during my time spent living in Trinidad and then the US, specifically Miami, that I felt a sense of belonging, through the acknowledgement of a melting pot of cultures. This feeling of affiliation is what gave me the strength to sustain my upbringing in the UK: it gave me a sense of strength to find another means of connecting to those around me through craft. Later, this fascination and drive to improve spatial experience through materiality and technique led me to the field of architecture.

It was through my studies toward becoming an architect that I realized why I felt so disconnected from my physical surroundings, as my final design project allowed me to center my research on the Atlantic slave trade. This gave me an opportunity to understand that the histories I had learned at school in the UK centered a Eurocentric epistemology, to recognize that all colonized countries had their histories violently erased only to be retold later by ethnocentric European anthropologist narrators in colonized countries and then purposefully unpublished in the history books of those countries that commissioned the colonial legacies. This information was a revelation to me: it showed me that peoples’ histories are being silenced for a reason, causing the inability to recognize one’s sense of belonging in public space, with the outcome of exclusion. The access that I had to this knowledge made me recognize what a privilege education is, as this awareness of my own untold history within the fabric of the urban sprawl allowed me to maneuver through space with a new sense of dignity. Many disassociations began to

make sense, like the idea of conservation and why architecture that alludes to “othered” design histories felt so performative. I feel that it is impossible to pay sincere homage to a narrative if you cannot acknowledge how it sits against and within your own history. The design methodology for these spaces can never include a sincere functional ritual, as they are rooted in a culturally appropriated performance of a bourgeois form based on the grandiose display of wealth, and used to prove that the uncultured “other” has now been civilized. This agenda of exclusion is furthered when the marginalized try to gather to take up private space and form communities: this much-needed ad hoc mobilizing becomes ghettoized in order to shatter its power to disrupt the false ideology that the marginalized are a homogenous group.

Societal homogeneity is a notion that has been entrenched into the world at large over hundreds of years, with the Condorcet winners being the surreptitious 1%. The subliminal rules that we are steadily conditioned to follow lead us toward a belief that anything diverging from the predominant rhetoric is inherently negative and equates to the uninvited subaltern. These integrated beliefs are the wind that fills the sails of consumerism; they have created narratives so magnetic that local vernacular symbiotic living has become an undesirable custom of the past. Our urge to conquer death, and in turn nature, has paved the way for the most affluent members of society to wield humanity’s greatest fears against humankind, by industrializing so-called solutions into carefully narrated plights. In many cases, it is these proposed mass-manufactured design products that are causing the most environmental pollution. For instance, Le Corbusier’s dream of realizing a factory-like static climate through air conditioning, in which “every building, around the globe, will be 18 degrees.”<sup>4</sup> This move toward using the same technologies around the world feeds into global uniformity by not considering the uniqueness of place as a factor in the design process.

In order to create the demand for goods, those in power release propaganda insisting that human potential can be greatly improved through consumption of material goods. To envisage the processes behind the realization of these products, we will explore the form/matter theory also known as the hylomorphic schema, as architecture is said to have “this concept at its base.”<sup>5</sup> It is a philosophical theory developed by Aristotle, and later René Descartes, Gilbert Simondon, Gilles Deleuze, and Roland Barthes, who maintain that forms are ideas that are imposed onto inert matter, both being abstract. However, it is

3 Sarah Keenan, *Subversive Property* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 6.

4 Le Corbusier, *Precisions on the Present State of Architecture and City Planning* (Zurich: Park Books, 2015), 66.

5 Katie Lloyd Thomas, ed., *Material Matters Architecture and Material Practice* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3.



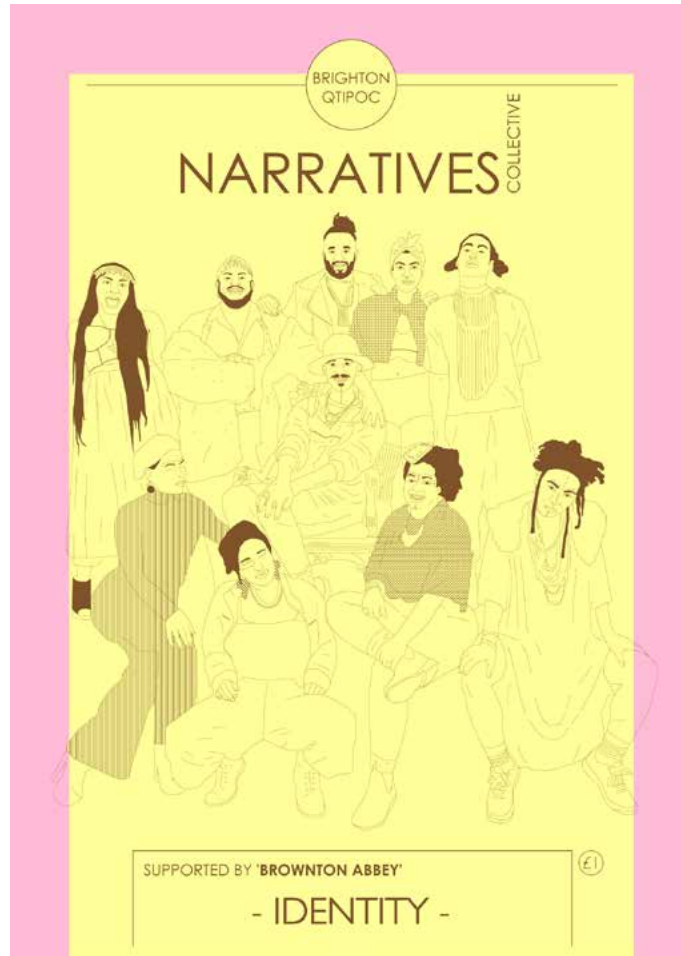


Fig. 8  
Cover of QTIPoC  
Narratives Collective  
Zine, 2018

the mediation itself that should be given thought, as it is difficult to consider the notions of form and matter as innate ideas. Technology theorist Adrian Mackenzie further explains that “the basic problem with the hylomorphic scheme is that it only retains the two extreme starting points—a geometrical ideal and formless raw material—of a convergent series of transformations, and ignores the complicated mediations and interactions which culminate in matter taking-form.”<sup>6</sup> This, as Simondon explains, “renders invisible the process of form-taking and their preparations.”<sup>7</sup> It implies that these philosophically

idealized materials are inherently dependent on the provision of form, when in fact they are, as architectural researcher and theorist Katie Lloyd Thomas states, “rendered plastic through complex chains of operations prior, during and often after casting. Its matter-like properties are not pre-given or *natural*. Rather they are intentionally produced, or even simulated, through techniques that edit and censor the variegations, behaviours and historical singularities the material might otherwise exhibit.”<sup>8</sup>

By applying these ideas at a formal level to industrially processed products, we can begin to explore why the consumer is portrayed as a homogenous population being offered a solution to overcome nature. On a functional level, it appears that curated public urban areas consist of an undistinguishable majority, though in reality the census tells a different story. We can also see from the effects of global warming that most products carefully packaged and sold as necessities for all human beings tend to result in more long-term environmental damage. This raises questions as to why so much industrial merchandise is produced with the intention of delimiting their capacity of expression toward a nonexistent homogenous user. This could be a result of the hylomorphic schema on the built environment: Thomas argues that it has “set up a discourse in which form must be realized in matter, with the material being seen as merely interchangeable.”<sup>9</sup> Arguably, the resulting desire for straightforward interchangeability is an important catalyst behind the uniformity we see in material construction. In order to feed society’s craving for material goods, man had to find a way to conquer *nature’s* matter or resources in order to create a consistent and speedy production line. *Natural materials* have been in most cases processed into miniscule pieces, *rendered plastic*, and cast into shapes that make production predictable, and homogenous for users equally depicted as uniformed. Industrialization and modernism are strong disciples of this concept of interchangeability. I would argue that interchangeability is the driving mechanism that allows the 1% to keep feeding their wealth through new product lines. I will go on to say that the interchangeability of the hylomorphic schema is also what underpins systemically oppressive structures that the most fiscally wealthy have created and use to gatekeep industrial lines, labor, material desire, and private and public space.

This interchangeability is what keeps the homogenous majority preoccupied, endlessly laboring on production lines. The 1% subconsciously indoctrinate this workforce into believing that their worth is intrinsically linked to their

6 Adrian Mackenzie, *Transductions: Bodies and Machines at Speed* (London: Continuum, 2002), 48.

7 Katie Lloyd Thomas, “Casting Operations and the Description of Process,” *Journal of Architecture* 20, no. 3 (2015): 430.

8 Katie Lloyd Thomas, “Rendered Plastic by Preparation: Concrete as Constant Material,” *Parallax* 21, no. 3 (2015): 272.

9 Thomas, 279.

ability to purchase; the truth is that their worth is defined by their ability to feed into the tax systems and profits of multinational corporations. The majority are so engrossed in the rat race of continuous production and individuality, believing the myth of meritocracy and unknowingly upholding the systemically oppressive structures that declare there has never been a need—or indeed, the ability—to stop and question the overarching policies that dominate our existence in this modern-day slavery. For those who believe that their status is a meritocratic result of following the rules correctly, COVID-19 has catalyzed the unveiling of unfair working contracts and medical practices. The pandemic has stalled labor enough to enable even the more privileged among us to consider who holds the reins of power in their lives.

Although this is a relatively new revelation for some, for those with the most intersecting struggles, this has always been their lived experience. They are routinely policed out of all physical spaces, unable to easily access medical care, mental-health care, and financial support, while being pushed into private isolation with an impending sense of hopelessness<sup>10</sup>—and many turn to taking their own lives.<sup>11</sup> For these groups who are let down so callously and routinely, not only does failure become a perpetual reality, but the burden of responsibility is routinely assigned to the individual and their behavior. Those, like myself, who are lucky enough to come from a family where social class or educational privilege cushions their fall, are able to access protective knowledge. This knowledge warns us of necropolitical regimes, so we can begin to make informed, privileged, and conscious choices. We are afforded the knowledge of the intentional neglect designed into the system and the punishing cruelty toward those who fall foul of the social order. In this way we are protected, but not necessarily exempt, from the belief that we are responsible for the financial and social repercussions of realities such as ill health, care needs, and immigration status. In my case, aspiring to thank my family for all their sacrifices, by aiming to attain a profession that could make use of the education that was painfully gifted to me, taught me that perfectionism while trying to “keep up with the Joneses” and “aim higher” is also part of the master’s systemic-oppressive structures. People like myself must not only navigate an educational system that excludes our heritage but also tries to visually silence and suppress any appearance of all other intersecting struggles we face, in fear of not making the cut, bringing shame to those we love, and not finding a place on the production line of existence.

Making my debut on different forms of production lines in my late teens afforded me an early lesson that sacrificing my authenticity would not save me from being “othered” by the majority and only alienate me from myself. It is only when the output of the finished product I was involved in creating, changed from involving physical labor to a focus on knowledge-production through craft that I began to feel frustrated by the lack of consideration, space, and presence



Fig. 9  
Anti-deportations by British Airways, community grassroots flyposting, 2018

10 May Bulman, “Attempted Suicides by Disability Claimants More than Double after Introduction of Fit-to-Work Assessment,” *Independent*, December 28, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/disability-benefit-claimants-attempted-suicides-fit-to-work-assessment-i-daniel-blake-job-centre-dwp-a8119286.html>.

11 Liam O’Hare, “Death in Detention: Suicide Attempts Soar in the UK,” *Al Jazeera*, February 12, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/02/death-detention-suicide-attempts-soar-uk-170205114101287.html>.



people like myself are afforded in society. This frustration around the fact that the only spaces being offered to allow people like me to discuss struggles of the marginalized came at the cost of tokenization and with the agenda of focusing on “trauma porn” as opposed to empowering narratives. It was through this need to take space that I cofounded QTIPoC Narratives Collective some years ago through a call to local QTIPoC (queer, trans, and intersex people of color) inviting them to create a community zine exploring our gender identities.

This initiative made me realize the importance of knowledge production and dissemination of information, as a result of editing and in effect curating the zine. This positionality and my lack of experience in organizing showed me what a powerful tool the arts are for the most marginalized: space to claim freely and record our narratives away from the kyriarchal gaze, for ourselves and for each other. The local success of the zine became both a gift and a burden, in that it brought us visibility that we needed to prove our existence



in the city, with potential supporters offering resources. Local public organizations and private businesses made small financial offers to the collective with the requirement of our labor so they could publicly advertise their tokenistic support and proof of diversity; our labor was always in the format of a top-down commission, a way to show proof, not a moment to encourage or learn from our content. Over the last few years, organizations led by marginalized leaders have proved to be the most empathetic and genuine toward collaborating and supporting our agenda to claim and make space for QTIPoC in the city.

For the doors of space to become unlatched and welcome the most marginalized of society, the insidious systemic-oppressive structures at play need to be disrupted and changed. Those who have access to both dominant and minority spaces, owing to their double position as insider and outsider, need to use their privilege to promote radical care within their own marginalized communities. We can only mobilize and resist if we can support each other's mental health, advocate in numbers for each other, share resources, and move away from the narrative of scarcity. Through forming symbiotic community care via horizontal methods of leadership, we can begin to start to collectively acknowledge and heal intergenerational trauma and begin the process of grieving. In strengthening and empowering isolated members of our community, the marginalized will begin to feel strong enough to resist and to support each other in holding interventions in space together.

These new formations of community grassroots, groups and their spaces are the precedents that need to be encouraged and horizontally nurtured by existing organizations. It is part of the master's systemic-oppressive structure to have us believe that we must expend our energy fighting against the narratives they created instead of pouring our energies into the dissemination of knowledge that will dismantle their rhetoric. Masters holding the keys to space need to constantly ask themselves if they are using their privileges to share their own access while breaking down the doors for the most marginalized to pass freely. In this way, they may support in holding space and creating new safer, horizontal, anti-oppressive systems. Space is not a gift to be offered, it is every being's right.

Fig. 10  
The collective participating at the Brighton Community Democracy Protest, 2019



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# Curating as Healing

Imayna Caceres and Verena Melgarejo Weinandt

Images from the projects:

"Wer Hat Angst vor dem Museum?" (2015)

"Trenza in Cantina Corazon" (2016)

"Trenza's intervention to a Columbus statue" (2017)

"Back/s Together: Gloria Anzaldúa, her drawings, our connection to her" (2018)

"Condor, Puma, Serpiente" (2018)

"The Ritual. Art as healing practice" (2018)

Credits: the artists and kunstdokumentation



## Curating as Healing



Connecting our own artistic work, also physically, to a wider net of works that we relate to artistically, in content and aesthetics and to make physical encounters possible.

Self-organized interweaving of desires, ideas, needs and experiences marked by a Latinamerican migratory experience.



Recuperar otros caminos posibles. Doing your/our thing.

Afectividad y amor como base o elemento de creación (de conocimiento) para descolonizar la manera cómo producimos, pensamos y generamos esta afectividad.

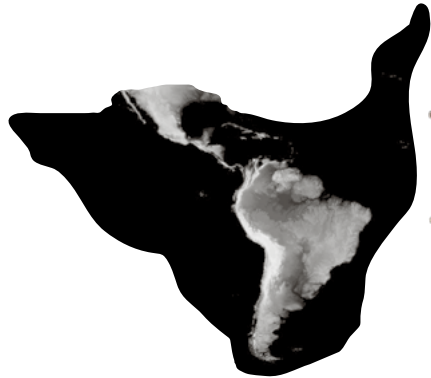
Change and healing as a collective act.



How to visualize knowledge? How and what we want to pay attention to?

connect struggle to structure

Self-organized collective spaces outside of the institutional frame.



Exchanging strategies joining forces, learning from each other, sharing our weaknesses and by that, becoming stronger.



Other forms of knowledge.

Perspectives, luchas and strategies that have been developed in Abya Yala.



"We don't want to be stars but parts of constellations"  
- Gloria E. Anzaldúa



We do what we know from home as healing and knowledge.



### Spaces

We use space to mourn, to think-feel and to have joy in kinship.



Dancing together in a project is the clearest sign that something worked.



Spaces are not neutral and are charged with the energy of our transgenerational doings.



We ground the works to specific contexts and power structures.

The more the art space is interwoven with daily life, the better.



## Caring is a source of knowledge in itself

Healing colonial wounds,  
is a transformation that  
passes through the  
body and implies the  
reconfiguration of a  
new consciousness.



Healing as an  
indigenous  
and feminist  
tradition.



The ritual is a  
technology of  
survival,  
a remembering  
of our inter-  
connection with  
the planet.



Care and the  
teachings of  
nonhuman beings  
as political cosmic  
wisdom, as a  
practice of  
interconnectedness.



Cómo podemos  
compartir  
nuestro  
conocimiento  
de una manera  
más sana?

Curating-as-  
Caring: Material  
Doings



# Instituting Care in Times of Radical Uncertainty

Amelia Wallin

Within the landscape of contemporary art, care is a methodology, a thematic, and paradoxically, a means to both combat and propagate the surplus labor on which the industry thrives.<sup>1</sup> In the last five years, care has been transmuted, as both content and method, into a number of art exhibitions, writing, and publishing projects.<sup>2</sup> Many of these activities cite the etymological entanglement of “care” and “curate” to elucidate the idealized working relationship between artist and curator. To counter the hyper-productivity performed under cognitive capitalism, curatorial programs on care were accompanied with calls for slower or smaller institutions.<sup>3</sup> In response the “radical uncertainty” of our current moment, defined in this text as post-2016, institutions of art are being reimagined as potential agents of change, and particular attention is being paid to their internal operations. This includes workers’ rights to unionize and the expansion of the W.A.G.E. model, as well as Art Workers Italia demanding protection in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although these movements are generally organized through artist-led collective action, a small number of institutions are publicly turning their focus to their internal operations in order to address the political dimensions under which they operate. This chapter argues for the redistribution of resources as a long-term strategy of care that surpasses the programmatic or the rhetorical.

- 1 Curatorial discourse from the last decade regularly cites curating’s etymological entanglement with care. The original usage of “curate” was linked to the care of souls in the form of a spiritual guide, but by the eighteenth century, it came to refer to the care required in attending to objects of value—namely, collections of historical or art objects. More recently, this etymology has served as motivation or reminder for greater care in curatorial practices, and for curators working with contemporary interdisciplinary artists; it has circled back to its relational roots to elucidate the working relationship between artist and curator, as a means of capturing the often intangible or opaque work that is bracketed under “the curatorial.”
- 2 Some recent examples of exhibitions on care include “Care + Repair,” a public workspace and symposium curated by Angelika Fitz and Elke Krasny as part of the Vienna Biennale (2017); “Sweet Home? Pedagogies of Curating and the Politics of Care-Taking,” a public lecture and workshop organized by Barbara Mahlkecht (2017); “How Do Buildings Care?,” a three-part seminar organized by La Loge in Brussels (2017); Karen Archey’s curated program “Practicing Care” at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2018); and “Take Care,” a five-month

exhibition project at Blackwood Gallery, Toronto (2018). Recent publications include e-flux journal’s *What’s Love (or Care, Intimacy, Warmth, Affection) Got to Do with It?* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017); the SculptureCenter publication *Who Cares? Inquiries into Contemporary Sculpture* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2019); Angelika Fitz and Elke Krasny, eds., *Critical Care* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019); and Elena Gomez and Rosie Isaac, eds., “Care,” special issue, *un Magazine* 14, no. 1 (May 2020). Publications such as the edited volume *How Institutions Think: Between Contemporary Art and Political Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017) and *Paper Monument’s As Radical, as Mother, as Salad, as Shelter: What Should Art Institutions Do Now?* (Brooklyn, NY: Paper Monument, 2018) are indicative of a new kind of institutional thinking relating to care.

- 3 See Anthony Huberman, “Take Care,” in *Circular Facts*, ed. Mai Abu ElDahab, Binna Choi, and Emily Pethick (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011); and Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, “For Slow Institutions,” *e-flux journal*, no. 85 (October 2017), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/85/155520/for-slow-institutions/>.

Building on a Marxist-feminist understanding of care as the un(der)paid and undervalued work of social reproduction, the first section of this text identifies care's acquiescence to exploitation, specifically the racialized and gendered division of labor performed under what is called care work. Following Italian social researcher and journalist Cristina Morini's argument that neoliberalism subsumes care work and its gendered origins into daily work habits, this section evidences how care is exploited under capitalism. The following section considers how this exploitation may be countered, rather than perpetuated, via practices of alternative instituting. The final section considers the work of three institutions who have invited artists into their organizational structure in long-term positions of power and critique. From these examples of institutional (re)structuring, it is possible to reimagine how the concept of care may move beyond the exhibition to inform daily work habits, and to reimagine systems of operations and the structural hierarchies of power. As the director of a small non-profit art institution in Melbourne, and as a white benefactor of settler-colonial privilege, the question of institutional care is at the forefront of my mind. Can institutions practice care within this context, in a way that is healing and reparative rather than extractive or exploitative?

Women have long labored under love—caring for children, the wage worker, the sick, and the elderly. The term “care work” refers to low-wage reproductive labor, such as childcare or elderly care, cleaning, and other domestic duties, and its gendered and racial division of labor reproduces inequitable social relations under capitalism. Feminist battles of the 1960s and 1970s sought to dismantle the divisive domains of waged productive labor and domestic reproduction. The 1975 Wages for Housework campaign in Italy, led by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici, and Selma James, aligned the class struggle and feminism to critique the autonomy of production by politicizing the unpaid domestic labor performed by housewives.<sup>4</sup> The feminists behind the Wages treatise took up Karl Marx's concepts of productive and unproductive labor to assert that reproductive labor in the form of housework is indeed productive labor, despite its failure to produce surplus value, as it maintains the processes of capitalist accumulation and reproduces the conditions that enable capitalism to continue.<sup>5</sup> The transformation of the sphere of reproduction and its division along lines of gender and race is central to any anti-capitalist revolution. As American Marxist-feminist theorist Kathi Weeks reminds us, affective labor remains fundamental to contemporary models of exploitation, and the possibility of overturning them.<sup>6</sup>

Morini's article “The Feminization of Labour in Cognitive Capitalism” analyzes the shift in contemporary work habits to mimic “multi-activity and the quality of female labor” as well as the increase of women workers in the global economy.<sup>7</sup> Writing specifically in regard to cognitive capitalism, Morini argues that “there does, in fact, exist a female tendency to transfer the modalities and logistics of care work, particularly in the context of the mother-child relationship which, practically, does not have limits of time and dedication.”<sup>8</sup> In the unregulated

art world, as in global relations more broadly, the feminization of labor goes hand in hand with its exploitation.<sup>9</sup> In our current post-Fordist work climate, which claims that more work is more productive, and where overwork is rampant and productivity drives ceaseless (re)production, the possibilities of post-work futurity press upon us. The Wages campaign resonates with the contemporary discourses of strike and work refusal, such as that put forward by artist collective Claire Fontaine. In the face of the “libidinal economy” of late capitalism, only a human strike can destabilize the affect of care, which looks after us but also exploits us.<sup>10</sup>

The contemporary art-worker is bound by passionate identification to an industry that exploits this affinity through the ceaseless production of unpaid affective labor. “Apart from domestic and care work—art is the industry with the most unpaid labor around,” writes German Japanese artist and theorist Hito Steyerl, “free labor and rampant exploitation are the invisible dark matter that keeps the cultural sector going.”<sup>11</sup> Recent discourse on work practices in contemporary art draws connection between the measureless and entropic nature of feminized care work and affective labor of “art workers,” or what Australian feminist art historian and curator Tara McDowell has termed the “art-worker at large.”<sup>12</sup>

- 4 Silvia Federici, “Wages against Housework” (1975), in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Brooklyn, NY: Common Notions, 2012). The wage, rather than paying for the work you do, hides all the unpaid work that goes into profit. But the wage at least recognizes that you are a worker, and you can bargain and struggle around and against the terms and the quantity of that wage, the terms and the quantity of that work. To have a wage means to be part of a social contract, and there is no doubt concerning its meaning: you work, not because you like it or because it comes naturally to you, but because it is the only condition under which you are allowed to live.
- 5 Maria Mies has argued that unwaged care work has been systematically naturalized and privatized through “the process of housewifization” to form the hidden measure of exchange value upon which capitalism depends. See Maria Mies, “Colonization and Housewifization,” in *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 74–111.
- 6 Kathi Weeks, “Life within and against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics,” *Ephemera* 7, no. 1 (2007), <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/life-within-and-against-work-affective-labor-feminist-critique-and-post-fordist>.

- 7 Cristina Morini, “The Feminization of Labour in Cognitive Capitalism,” *Feminist Review*, no. 87 (2007): 43.
- 8 Morini, 47.
- 9 For Stakemeier and Vishmidt, art that transcends its form as object to “materialize social relations and subjectivity” shares common ground with the measureless and entropic character of reproductive labor. Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy: Work, Money, Crisis and Contemporary Art* (London: Mute, 2016), 73.
- 10 Claire Fontaine, *Human Strike Has Already Begun, and Other Essays* (London: Mute, 2013).
- 11 Hito Steyerl, “Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-democracy,” *e-flux journal*, no. 21 (December 2010), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/>.
- 12 Tara McDowell, “The Post-occupational Condition,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 16, no. 1 (2016): 22. See also Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2006); and Angela Dimitrakaki, “Feminism, Art, Contradictions,” *e-flux journal*, no. 92 (June 2018), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/92/205536/feminism-art-contradictions/>.

For McDowell this new cognitive art laborer is the result of the collapse of traditional roles within artistic production—artist, curator, critic—into a hybrid, mobile, flexible worker, embodied not in “the male freelancer hunched over his laptop, but rather the unpaid housewife.”<sup>13</sup> The reproductive labor of the housewife is epitomized by the figure of the caring curator, who is hospitable, flexible, nomadic, and above all, always working. Each bound to their role through overly affective identification, the purported love of their work justifies and intensifies the un(der)paid labor. Exceeding any possible wage, care is relational—what has come to be known as affective or emotional labor.<sup>14</sup> As invisible affect, care resists easy quantification and therefore remuneration. In this way, care maintains a double character, its ineffable qualities mask transitions between nurturing practices and exploitative measures. For the gendered labor of the art-worker at large, care or the labor of love, functions as a theoretical and methodological “remedy” for the alienated experience, a justification or rationalization of the unpaid labor that exploits affective relations between artist and curator and perpetuates a model of ceaseless work.

Under late capitalism, the institutions of art are facing a crisis of purpose, as well as a reduction of resources. The years following the 2007–8 financial crisis have seen the pervasive expansion of neoliberalism and right-wing populism result in the increased privatization of the arts. Peer organizations are often in direct competition for dwindling public and private funds, and there is a consistent pressure for growth and expansion to justify and maintain government support. British feminist researcher and curator Helena Reckitt argues that in finding ways to work within capitalist systems we run the “risk of providing the social lubrication that maintains capitalist relations.”<sup>15</sup> Post-2016, institutions are asking “what *else* [can] they do besides house art.”<sup>16</sup> In this time of radical uncertainty, characterized by Trumpism, Brexit, catastrophic changes in weather, and the current global health emergency, a number of small alternative or independent institutions have responded by questioning their role as sites of art, culture, and community. The ways in which an institution works to reproduce itself, through staffing, funding, programming, community building, organizing, marketing, design, architecture, and communications, can become a methodological exercise in care. As argued by German educator and writer Kerstin Stakemeier and American writer and critic Marina Vishmidt in their book *Reproducing Autonomy*, art that transcends its form as object to “materialize social relations and subjectivity” itself “behaves as a form of social reproduction.”<sup>17</sup> Yet like care, reproductive labor too has a double character. It is “work that reproduces us and valorizes us not only in view of our integration in the labor market but also against it,” as noted by Federici.<sup>18</sup> In the following section of this text, I will give examples of institutions that are experimenting with institutional structures in an attempt to address the political conditions under which they operate beyond the discursive the rhetorical, and the programmatic.

Institutions are continually in process: their material and immaterial infrastructures are in flux, as gentrification runs rampant, staff move, funding priorities change, buildings require repair, and governments, artists, and publics shift. In an article for *un Magazine*, “Forgetting Architecture and the New Aboriginal Kitsch,” Australian artist Lauren Burrow and Indigenous writer, researcher, and cultural critic Tristen Harwood examine how art organizations in Melbourne, despite taking on “decolonizing chatter” in their programming, fail to address their own “colonizing tendencies—settlement, displacement and resource exploitation—in the processes of gentrification.”<sup>19</sup> The tools that enable organizations to maintain stability and sustain their operations, such as government funding and private fundraising, equally reproduce the conditions of a neoliberal society. In finding ways to work within capitalist systems, art institutions and their workers may adopt neoliberal/colonial/ableist work habits such as hyper-productivity, urgency, self-neglect, burnout culture, free labor, wage disparity, and hierarchical staffing structures. German art historian and theorist Beatrice von Bismarck, among others, has argued that contemporary curators’ management of audience, artists, and exhibitions recalls the relations between host, guest, and space.<sup>20</sup> The proposition that hospitality is a product of curatorial care is undone when the gallery occupies stolen land, in which case the contemporary gallery and its infrastructures are uninvited guests on sovereign land. The notion of curatorial hospitality reflects the bracketed time of the traditional exhibition format and is suggestive of a temporary rather than continuous state, which is at odds with the ongoing colonial project. A key difference between guest and settler is that one intends to leave. A conversation involving care or curatorial hospitality in the context of so-called Australia,

13 McDowell, 36.

14 Emotional labor, a term coined by Arlie Hochschild in 1983, refers to the imperceptible yet significant task so often demanded of women and low-income workers (which she also describes as “pink collar workers”) to resolve interpersonal problems. This complex form of labor is rarely valued or even recognized. See Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

15 Helena Reckitt, “Support Acts: Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction,” *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 5, no. 1 (2016): 21.

16 “Particularly with respect to the project of opposing the real and symbolic violence being carried out by the current administration [of the United States]?” Petrovich and White, *As Radical, as Mother, as Salad, as Shelter*, 3.

17 Stakemeier and Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy*, 70.

18 Silvia Federici, *Revolution from Ground Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2012), 2.

19 In the context of Australia’s east coast, the authors identify the shared aesthetic and economic relationships between private development and public art institutions, whereby “Aboriginality and decolonising are inverted as marketable resources—forms of ‘authentic’ cultural capital used to legitimise colonial presence.” Lauren Burrow and Tristen Harwood, “Forgetting Architecture and the New Aboriginal Kitsch,” *un Magazine* 12, no. 1 (2018), <http://unprojects.org.au/magazine/issues/issue-12-1/forgetting-architecture-and-the-new-aboriginal-kitsch/>.

20 See Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, eds., *Hospitality: Hosting Relations in Exhibitions* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016).



where I am writing, must address White Australia's role in the destruction of First Peoples' land, culture, and lives. However, this address must move beyond the visible and marketable "artistic program" to consider the internal and operational structures of the settler-colonial institution.

In the October 2017 issue of *e-flux journal*, Slovenian-born, Paris-based curator Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez made an appeal for "slow institutions"; underlying her entreaty is an awareness of the daily, lived, changing, durational experiences of institutions. She calls for "practical solutions that relate to the actual buildings and their infrastructure."<sup>21</sup> How can institutions equip themselves with systems of care that are long-term, reflexive, self-determinative, and responsive, in order to practice care at a level that considers the institution, its material infrastructure, its position and context, and its laborers as a holistic and sustainable entity? Surpassing care as thematic or discursive, this line of questioning is intended to move discussions of institutional care beyond measurable policies to consider a more radical model, such as proposed by *New Habits*, Wood Land School, and "O2020."

Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons—formerly Casco Office of Art, Design and Theory—refers to itself as an anti-capitalist institution, and as such maintains a political commitment to acknowledging social reproduction in its institutional structure and labor relations. The organization's relocation to a new building in the center of Utrecht's museum district in 2014, and the anticipated increase in public attendance because of this geographical shift, gave rise to the project *New Habits*. A self-reflexive, multi-year artwork, *New Habits* invited long-term Casco collaborator German-born Utrecht-based artist Annette Krauss into the organization to work with staff to unlearn certain behaviors. *New Habits* acknowledges care as institutional accountability rather than personal responsibility, and as such structured time for reflection and assessment is incorporated into their ongoing labor practices. As South Korean Utrecht-based curator Binna Choi states, "To put institution only as a background support structure for art, we may only perpetuate our habit of operating in a representational realm."<sup>22</sup> Instituting can enable radical change in relation to the intersecting issues that stem from the work of social reproduction. By assessing the conditions under which they operate and foregrounding the reproductive labor that sustains them, institutions can reproduce themselves against the dominant labor market.

In 2017 the Indigenous Canadian collective Wood Land School presented a yearlong evolving exhibition that operated from a position of Indigenous self-determination, taking over SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art in Montreal. The collective presented an iterative program of events and exhibitions that unfolded over twelve months. Their initiating letter, signed by co-curators and organizers Duane Linklater, Tanya Lukin Linklater, and cheyanne turions,

with Walter Scott, states the following: "Contemporary civic institutions and social structures are built upon systems that have silenced, ignored and destructively classified Indigenous people, ideas and objects. In response to this history, Wood Land School calls upon institutions to give labour, space, time and funds to support Indigenous ideas, objects, discursivity and performance."<sup>23</sup> SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art was erased and renamed Wood Land School, including on the website and the gallery's original signage. Reflecting on practices of instituting in Turtle Island/Canada, curator and then director of SBC Gallery Pip Day calls for a "situated approach to the practice of instituting," one that acknowledges the institution as partial and influenced by broader political forces.<sup>24</sup> Wood Land School was never intended to be a model that could be adapted by other institutions; it grew out of relationships, long-term research, and the specific context of Montreal in 2017.<sup>25</sup> The strategies of self-determination and the handover of power proposes a radical example of rethinking institutions toward the establishment of repatriation and reparation policies against the ongoing effects of colonization; however, the collaboration between BIPoC collectives and the institutional spaces that have historically excluded them demands scrutiny.

In so-called Australia, the First Nations collective this mob takes advantage of spaces and resources for young First Nations artists to come together, learn from each other, and make art. Following a short-term residency at Footscray Community Arts Centre, this mob staged a six-week takeover of West Space, an artist-run gallery, during which the collective set up art studios, rehearsal spaces, and organized workshops, events, and parties for First Nations artists. The space and resources of the gallery were handed over to the collective, who subverted the dynamic of artists as "guests" and organization as "host." Instead, for the six-week period the gallery was closed to the general public, and an open invitation on behalf of this mob was extended to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate, work on projects, or just hang out. Made up of a shifting group of participants from various countries across so-called

21 Petrešin-Bachelez, "For Slow Institutions." She invites curators to "slow down their ways of working and being, to imagine new ecologies of care as a continuous practice of support, [...] in order to render our organizations palpable, audible, sentient, soft, porous, and above all, decolonial and anti-patriarchal."

22 Binna Choi, "Working for the Commons: A Conversation with Binna Choi of Casco Art Institute," interview by James McAnally, *Temporary Art Review*, November 30, 2017, <http://temporaryartreview.com/working-for-the-commons-a-conversation-with-binna-choi-of-casco-art-institute/>.

23 Duane Linklater, Tanya Lukin Linklater, and cheyanne turions, with Walter Scott, "Wood Land School: *Kahatenhstánion tsi na'tetiater ne lotohrkó:wa tánon lotohrha / Drawing Lines from January to December*," SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal, 2017, <https://www.sbcgallery.ca/wood-land-school-gestures-c19i2>.

24 Pip Day, in O'Neill et al., *How Institutions Think*.

25 Specifically, the yearlong event coincided with "Canada 150," the Canadian government's promotion of the 150-year anniversary of confederation.

Australia, founder of this mob, Kate ten Buuren, points to the relationality in the very name of the collective: “It means you’re included in this group of people, but it also means not expecting people to divorce themselves of their mob or mobs. It’s creating a moment that can only exist because of who’s there. It’s that kind of transient nature of whoever’s in the room.”<sup>26</sup> Art institutions’ handing over of space and resources may draw attention to issues of access, influence, and representation; however, to move beyond the performative, it should also change the power dynamics of who is in the room. In the case of West Space, the takeover marked the beginning of a relationship between the institution and the collective, with ten Buuren serving on the artistic advisory committee of West Space, and the collective now operating their own space directly above the gallery. However, as Australian curator and critic Andy Butler argues, “The heavy lifting in transforming our institutions needs to be redistributed, so it doesn’t just sit with those artists most affected by these structures.”<sup>27</sup> Institutions must find ways of working with artists that are non-extractive, long-term, and based on reciprocity and care.

Performance Space New York’s artistic program, “O2020,” followed a twelve-month format, where the institution’s resources were handed over to a group of New York-based artists and collectives, including members from BRUJAS and New Red Order.<sup>28</sup> Coinciding with the organization’s fortieth anniversary, “O2020” was described as an “artist-recalibrated institutional mission as a catalyst for futurist art practice.”<sup>29</sup> The artists leading “O2020” were afforded complete artistic control and full transparency into the organization’s inner workings. The annual half-million-dollar production budget was diverted to pay artists’ wages and fund the “O2020” programmatic platforms. The program was incredibly prescient: initiatives such as BRUJAS’s experimental union and an “anti-imperial” radio station took on new urgency in a city in the throes of mass quarantine. From mid-March 2020, much of “O2020”’s activity and programs were moved online, prioritizing resources for mental health and well-being, and also included sharing funding opportunities and livestreaming work and conversations.

New Red Order write, with biting irony, “During times of political turmoil and environmental catastrophe, Indigenous knowledge is increasingly recognized as a commodity with rising value, capable of remedying modern ills.”<sup>30</sup> This argument brings an important perspective to the programs at SBC Gallery in 2017 and West Space in 2019. Art institutions of the future must recognize their role and ongoing benefit from the displacement of Indigenous people, migrants and refugees, nonhuman animals and material resources, without commodifying or extracting Indigenous knowledges for their own cultural capital. For organizations such as Casco, SBC Gallery, West Space, and Performance Space New York, inviting artists as external agents into the organization enabled institutions to “wear their vulnerabilities,” exposing their colonizing tendencies and neoliberal business plans to critique.

The global pandemic has accelerated capitalist conditions, exposing the most vulnerable to even greater income and health disparities. While many art institutions have been forced to close due to public health and safety measures, artists and art-workers have been organizing and collectivizing, practicing mutual aid, enacting social economies, and speaking out against harmful institutional practices and the generalized precarity of the cultural sector.<sup>31</sup> COVID-19 has exacerbated the necessity of urgent reform, for institutions to pay close attention to their methods of social reproduction, to resist reproducing capitalist conditions. The radical rethinking of Performance Space New York’s mission has come at precisely the right moment, no doubt building upon the legacies of Casco’s *New Habits* and Wood Land School. Each of these programs make clear what artists can do for institutions—the unlearning of habits, the provision of cultural capital, the decolonizing of the institution, the nimble and networked transition to digital programs—but what are institutions doing for artists? As the artists in “O2020” make clear in an interview in the *New York Times*, “We produce value for institutions, companies and governments, not the other way around.”<sup>32</sup> As the “O2020” program continues to unfold, along with the radical uncertainty of our current moment, what remains to be seen is whether asking artists to do this work shifts responsibility away from the institution. Or, does it succeed in redistributing power and disrupting normative social reproduction? By addressing the very nature of their operations through long-term collaborations with artists, these institutions have situated care as a long-term strategy that exceeds the seasonal exhibition.

26 Kate ten Buuren, email correspondence with the author, September 28, 2020.

27 Andy Butler, “This Mob at West Space,” *Saturday Paper*, August 10, 2019, <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2019/08/10/this-mob-west-space/15653592008590>.

28 Participating artists include Janice Amaya; BRUJAS members Arianna Gil, Dada Coz, Sarah Snider, Antonia Perez, and Ripley Soprano; Jonathan González; Monica Mirabile; and core contributors of the New Red Order collective Adam Khalil, Zack Khalil, and Jackson Polys.

29 Sarah Michelson and Jenny Schlenzka, press release for “O2020,” Performance Space New York, accessed May 18, 2020, <http://performancespacenewyork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/O2020PressReleaseWeb.pdf>.

30 New Red Order, “Join the Informants,” *Triple Canopy*, December 3, 2019, <https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/join-the-informants>.

31 One example is the open-source document produced by the group Indebted Cultural

Workers, which exposed the wage disparities at North American institutions. “There is no solidarity, transparency, or care to be found,” stated one of the group’s representatives. Indebted Cultural Workers is an organization, founded in 2019, dedicated to exposing the wage disparities, annual operating budgets, and endowments of major US museums and art institutions. Many of these institutions furloughed or fired staff, while the directors continued on full salary or took minimal pay cuts despite massive budgetary cuts. See Hakim Bishara, “Spreadsheet Highlights Major Income Disparities at Cultural Institutions,” *Hyperallergic*, April 29, 2020, <https://hyperallergic.com/560132/spreadsheet-highlights-major-income-disparities-at-cultural-institutions/>.

32 Siobhan Burke, “The Artists Are in Charge. Step 1: Upend the Status Quo,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/10/arts/dance/performance-space-new-york-collective.html>.

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# Wahkootowin, Beading, and Métis Kitchen Table Talks Indigenous Knowledge and Strategies for Curating Care

Cathy Mattes

Driven by the need to assert individual and collective cultural narratives, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit curators organize art projects and exhibitions that intervene within Western art organizations, contribute to social change, and push conventional understandings of curators as organizers of art displays and arbiters of taste. Some prioritize participatory, collaborative, and dialogic processes with artists and stakeholders. Operating from within Indigenous paradigms that privilege Indigenous knowledge systems like *wahkotoowin*, we contribute “to the continuance of Indigenous peoples’ way of life and existence.”<sup>1</sup> Since 2017 I have attempted to do so by co-curating and hosting Métis Kitchen Table Talks, which often include individual and collective beading sessions as a strategy to help strengthen kinship, community, and nationhood ties among participants.<sup>2</sup> As an offering and gesture for relationship-building, I want to first introduce myself: I am a member of the Métis Nation from Manitoba, Canada, and a mother to two children. My grandmother was Red River Métis from Southwest Manitoba, and my grandfather’s Saulteaux family was originally from Sandy Bay First Nation, with some familial ties to the Métis Nation. Both my grandparents spoke the Michif language, and my mother was raised visiting and connecting with both sides of her family. My father, who is non-Indigenous, was born and raised in Winnipeg and is of Austrian and Polish ancestry. My sister and brother and I were brought up in a military family that moved often, yet we were fortunate enough to have had access to both sides of our family. This often happened around the kitchen tables of loved ones. I have been curating and writing about art for twenty-one years now, with a focus on contemporary art by Métis and First Nations artists. I consider contemporary art, art caretaking, and curating care as reflections of cultural continuance and continuum. Community contact with art and artists exchanging with community have therefore been vital to my practice. I consider this more than “adjacent programming” or “community outreach,” as often categorized by the Western art world; it is integral and involves assisting artists and gallery workers to contemplate and deconstruct ideas of community while encouraging others that contemporary art can play a central role in creating culturally grounded, holistic communities and nations.

1 Kathleen E. Absolon (Minogizhigokwe), *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2011), 78.

2 The Métis Kitchen Table Talks discussed in this chapter initially began as a research methodology for my PhD dissertation, “Métis Curatorial Pedagogy and Praxis—

A Jig in 3 Parts.” Having found that they were appreciated by curators and artists alike, I continue to co-organize and host them as a collaborative and community-driven curatorial practice. This chapter includes some content from my unpublished dissertation.

## Wahkootowin as an Indigenous Knowledge System

How Indigenous people seek understanding about individual and collective relationships they hold with other humans and the natural and spiritual worlds is an expression of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) shift through time, are tested by the impacts of colonialism, but never wane. They are cohesive parts of a whole and are grounded in culturally specific stories, songs, ceremonies, art-making, learning, and political and social structures. Some may define worldviews as the outcome of IKS, while I consider them to be the same, albeit carrying variant names, understandings, and definitions. When curating exhibitions, gatherings, and projects, I try to operate on a nation-to-nation basis that recognizes Indigenous sovereignties, as guided by wahkootowin. According to Métis scholar Brenda MacDougall, this important IKS is “a worldview that privileged relatedness to the land, people, (living, ancestral, and those to come), the spirit world, and creatures inhabiting the space.”<sup>3</sup> Métis poet and knowledge keeper Maria Campbell also shares that “wahkotowin meant honoring and respecting those relationships. They are our stories, songs, ceremonies, and dances that taught us from birth to death our responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to each other.”<sup>4</sup> Our Métis ancestors shared these values with our Cree kin, which they brought into their engagements in the nineteenth century with fur trading companies, the Canadian government, and the Church. These values were not reciprocated by colonizers, which greatly impacted several generations of Métis in continuing and strengthening wahkotoowin. I have been fortunate to have family, artists, and community to culturally ground me. I attempt to operate as a conduit for them and negotiate the curatorial space in ways that are useful, reciprocal, and productive, but that cannot be misused or extracted in harmful ways. This is the responsibility that comes with igniting wahkotoowin. It requires recognition that Indigenous people stand on the shoulders of extremely resilient ancestors, and those of us who have had access to cultural teachings and opportunities carry a responsibility to those who have not. It entails commitment to make good relations with other Indigenous people and non-Indigenous allies. It also involves recognizing that we learn much from those who have had limited exposure to cultural practice or experiences with art yet kindle their cultural kinship ties with remarkable vigor. When IKS are prioritized in curatorial practice, the pulsations of intertwining human, spiritual, and physical realms become apparent. Although manifested differently than with our ancestors, they are current and active. They strengthen when we gather in culturally significant ways, and when we collectively make our hands dance by moving beads with our fingers. Beads, one of the most coveted art materials of our ancestors, help us to feel and hear the pulsations in significant ways.

## Beading as Cultural Continuance

Dr. Tiffany Dione Prete (Blood Tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy), a scholar and beadworker, writes that “beadworking is rooted in the historically and geographically located epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies of Indigenous Peoples.”<sup>5</sup> While discussing Blackfoot ways of knowing and beading as an Indigenous research paradigm, she names three principles that form the conceptual basis of beadworking: firstly, beadworking as an act of resistance; secondly, beadworking as an act of knowledge transmission; and thirdly, beadworking as an act of resilience.<sup>6</sup> These principles name how beadworkers sew us into relation with one another and provide cultural grounding and space for artistic action and resistance to occur. They are relevant when incorporating beading as a curatorial strategy, because they can help curators to enhance ways to align artistic actions and community in relation to one another. Since time immemorial Indigenous art-makers have elaborately adorned clothing, ceremonial items, containers, baby carriers, horses, footwear, and jewelry with a variety of natural objects like shells, animal bone, dried seeds, and dyed porcupine quills.<sup>7</sup> By doing so, they present cultural visual signifiers, provide mnemonic aids, and express the interconnectedness of human, natural, and spiritual realms. Beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Indigenous art-makers from the Prairies began using trade beads imported from Europe for their embellishments. Brilliantly colored and perfectly shaped, they did not require laborious harvesting or preparation as did natural materials. They became highly sought after and were recognized as *manidoo minens* or “spirit seeds.”<sup>8</sup> With them, ancestor artists beaded geometric shapes or floral designs onto hide, velvet, or stroud cloth, to intricately map the land, interpret dreams, and name their kinship ties. They wrapped their loved ones in these beaded prayers in an effort to protect and guide them, to aid them in ceremony, and remind colonial settlers that the wearers of beaded garments were of this land. The beads helped produce and transmit knowledge.

3 Brenda MacDougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 3.

4 Maria Campbell, “We Need to Return to the Principles of Wahkotowin,” *Eagle Feather News*, November 2007, <https://mgouldhawke.wordpress.com/2019/11/05/we-need-to-return-to-the-principles-of-wahkotowin-maria-campbell-2007/>.

5 Tiffany Dione Prete, “Beadworking as an Indigenous Research Paradigm,” *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal* 4, no. 1 (2019): 30.

6 Prete, “Beadworking,” 30.

7 Malinda Joy Gray, “Beads: Symbols of Indigenous Cultural Resilience and Value” (MA diss., University of Toronto, 2017), 5.

8 Sherry Farrell Racette, “My Grandmothers Loved to Trade: The Indigenization of European Goods in Historic and Contemporary Canada,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 20 (2008): 71.



Figs. 11 and 12  
Beading as cultural continuance, 2019

Indigenous peoples' lives changed drastically and negatively owing to intensified land encroachment by colonial settlers in the mid-nineteenth century. In an effort to provide for their families and communities who began to struggle with the effects of poverty, beadworkers began making heavily beaded objects for trade and sale, including coats, purses, and tea cozies. Unbeknownst to European purchasers, the beaded floral designs on their purchased items carried visual signifiers of sacred plants and medicines from their makers' inherited land. Beading them on items made for sale during government-led Christian indoctrination was an act of spirited and spiritual resilience. As Canada deepened its efforts to colonize Indigenous lands in the later nineteenth century, artists were faced with new laws that outlawed ceremony and cultural gatherings. This impeded opportunities to sell wares or openly sport beaded attire, and led some ancestors to stop these practices altogether, while others continued on quietly and undetected. Their resistance made it possible for those who came after to produce and transmit knowledge with beadworking. In contemporary times, whether making contemporary art, jewelry to



sell, or powwow regalia to wear, beadworkers help mend the disruptions of current colonial impositions and remember this important art practice as cultural continuance.

Beading has been present in my life since before I became an art curator. I learned how to bead from my aunty Jean Baron-Ward, sitting around my parents' kitchen table with my mother Darlene and sister Leslie present. I was twenty years old, and this was one of the first times that, as a young woman, I felt culturally tuned-in. As my aunty taught us to bead, she shared stories and provided teachings. It was the very first time that my mother, sister, and I collectively and consciously immersed ourselves in a culturally based arts practice. It is only recently that I began employing beading as a curatorial strategy for culturally grounded and dialogue-driven practice. This is in part because the Western art world has impeded contemporary Indigenous artists and curators' ability to build relations through art-making and art-caretaking as our ancestors once did. We are relegated to divides of "traditional" versus "contemporary" art, and artist versus curator. Yet learning about my culture with beads has been a foundation of my curatorial goals and practice. Those moments of collective and collaborative bead actions and personal growth became motivation for co-curating and hosting Métis Kitchen Table Talks.

### Métis Kitchen Table Talks—A Curated Affair

Historically, in Métis households the kitchen table was the center of the home—it is where loved ones were fed, clothing mended, beadwork and embroidery completed, and where political and cultural scheming occurred. The kitchen was the warmest room in the home, since it was there that the stove, often the only source of heat, was located. This meant that the majority of domestic tasks happened there: bathing, cooking, gathering, and preparing to go out into the world. It is important, however, not to relegate the kitchen to a gendered site of domesticity. As Kiera Ladner and Leanne Simpson recognize, ancestors "engaged in countless acts of hidden resistance and kitchen table resistance aimed at ensuring their children and grandchildren could live as *Indigenous Peoples*."<sup>9</sup> For many Indigenous people, kitchen tables are an electric and activated space out of necessity.

Since 2017, I have co-curated and hosted a series of ongoing public and private Métis Kitchen Table Talk (MKTT) gatherings that include lively conversations, food, and bead actions. They have been held at symposia, universities, art galleries, coffee shops, Indigenous community centers, and restaurants. Some I initiated, while others were more collaborative efforts, instigated by invitations from colleagues and friends.<sup>10</sup> Although the majority were held in Winnipeg and Brandon, Manitoba, some were held in Honolulu, Hawaii;

Halifax, Nova Scotia; Kelowna, British Columbia; and Edmonton, Alberta. Artists, academics, knowledge keepers, family members, allies, arts administrators, students, and curators from around the globe have participated. (I am so thankful to them all.)



Fig. 13  
Métis Kitchen Table Talk, 2020

<sup>9</sup> Kiera Ladner and Leanne Simpson, "This Is an Honour Song," *This Is an Honour Song: Twenty Years since the Blockades*, ed. Leanne Simpson and Kiera Ladner (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2010), 8.

<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Julia Nagam from the University of Winnipeg, Dr. Sherry Farrell Racette from the University of Regina, the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, and Dr. Erin Sutherland and the Ociciwan Contemporary Art Centre for their generosity and collaborative efforts.

Food and tea made by family or community members are offered by helpers when guests first arrive. This gesture is essential, as this is how we first welcome guests into the home. The helpers are usually students, curators, and artists who express interest in enhancing how they culturally ground themselves and contribute to community. Their contributions are vital to the public gatherings, and their experiences, knowledges, and insights often lead the direction of the MKTT. I introduce myself in my grandmother's language to honor her, and for those Métis participants who have never heard our language spoken. Many Indigenous people were penalized in schools and churches for speaking their language, and I speak Michif as an act of resistance. After introductions are made and guests are settled, they are encouraged to separate the pile of mixed colored beads placed on a piece of felt in front of them. Separating beads is often the first step of learning how to bead. Teachers will request that learners separate beads to become familiar with their different colors and shades, learn how to hold a small needle, and most importantly, develop patience and respect for the tiny objects. I include this teaching because moving beads with our hands is meditative and allows time for self-reflection and collective contemplation. Artists or curators are invited to help ignite conversation, by sharing stories about their practices and the impact of their kinship ties, critical thoughts about art and theory, and whatever else they wish to share. Guests who know how to bead bring items they are working on, including medallions, clothing, jewelry, beaded paintings, and sculptural works. Sometimes they will offer to quietly teach other guests how to sew beads while relevant topics are discussed. Everyone's hands move in a calm manner as we sew ourselves into relation. There is much laughter, debate, and the occasional discomfort that occurs during MKTT. But there are also quiet, potent moments that contain encouragement, personal reflection, remembering, and activated listening. Sometimes a collective exhale can be felt, and the pulsations of IKS are ignited.

It is important that MKTT be an embodiment of wahkootowin, and not a cultural performance. Gatherings are meant to provide agency and affirmation to Indigenous collaborators and guests, first and foremost.<sup>11</sup> I co-organize and host them with the hopes that participants feel empowered to continue with caretaking strategies specific to their communities and lived experiences that embody their own engagements with IKS. This includes ensuring non-Indigenous guests understand their participation as witnesses and activated listeners. They are invited to separate or sew beads for reconciliation, self-reflection, and transformative growth. If there is any derailment from that, as host I must address it swiftly and effectively, so that there is minimal disruption to the other guests around the table. This is all part of attempting to ignite IKS and curating care for Indigenous people, in solidarity with non-Indigenous allies.

## Conclusion

In process-based curatorial work, I take the heart of the love I found around the kitchen table, and attempt to create opportunities to fill perceived voids with actions that ignite wahkootowin and contain Indigenous movement and lateral love. I do so because there exist challenges for Indigenous curators to find and negotiate spaces that allow for personal transformation in ways that do not shroud the artist's process, or the experiences of communities and the larger public. By co-organizing and hosting Métis Kitchen Table Talks with collective and collaborative bead actions, I attempt to curate care. By looking to those who beaded and strategized around the kitchen table to ensure that we can now live as Indigenous people, I hope to return the generosity I have received from other curators, artists, colleagues, community, and kin.

Marsii poor toon temp.

<sup>11</sup> Fran Hebert-Spence (Sagkeeng First Nation), in conversation with author, March 17, 2020.



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# Moving Plants, Finding Fissures On Feminist Latencies in Curating Public Art

Carlota Mir

Carlota Mir

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As latency of virtuality, the past is larger, more complex and more laden than any history can present, including feminist history.  
—Elizabeth Grosz

Fig. 14  
Maidor López, *Moving Plants*, Hammarbadet, Gothenburg, 2019



*Moving Plants* is a public artwork by Spanish artist Maider López located in Hammarbadet, a public bathhouse in the suburban area of Hammarkullen, in Gothenburg, Sweden. Newly open to visitors since May 2019, the installation was commissioned by the Public Art Agency Sweden (Statens konstråd) as part of a larger refurbishment scheme that took place after the public baths, threatened with closure and demolition, were saved amid strong public criticism in 2015. Led by a core group of women of Somali origin,<sup>1</sup> the local community's protests to save Hammarbadet were decisive for the conception of the project. Open only to women on Wednesdays, the bathhouse is a key meeting place for local women in an environment otherwise dominated by privatization, governmental neglect, and masculine presence in public space. After the pool was saved from demolition, the community engaged in conversations with the municipality, initiating a three-year participatory curatorial process, which Maider López and the team of Public Art Agency took on. Since the beginning, the curatorial process aimed to sustain a public space where women could meet on their terms, a space "with such strong expression that it could counteract male appropriation—that is, change structures, and create a better situation for everyone, regardless of gender and culture."<sup>2</sup>

As a site-specific public artwork that responds to a complex urban ecosystem, *Moving Plants* is the result of grassroots activism, research, collaboration, and negotiation between the artist, urban developers, state curators,<sup>3</sup> private property developers, architects, external collaborators,<sup>4</sup> and the local population. The artwork consists of 120 movable plants that create a shifting interior architecture. Bringing outdoor nature from the adjacent lake and mountains into the bathhouse, plants of different species, shapes, and sizes are placed along rails that cover the building's interior, forming a malleable, kinetic sculptural body. This apparently simple feature is key: the plants can be redistributed along the inside of the building's large glass windows, giving the bath's users agency to create privacy. Reminiscent of the way plant pots on windowsills are typically used in Sweden to cover the windows of a domestic space from the inside, the plants invite user engagement in the interior space and subtly indicate to the outside viewer to look away, creating a safe space for swimming and being together.<sup>5</sup> In contact with the outside landscape, the interior, the water, the community, and each other, the plants can become different bodies with each user intervention, problematizing the modernist legacy of the transparent features of the building and pointing to multiplicity and difference as the defining characteristics of public space.

*Moving Plants* is an installation that needs regular care and maintenance. López initially envisaged caregiving as a shared task between the bathhouse staff and its users: "Just like houseplants in a home, [care would] become a part of the life of the place."<sup>6</sup> However, matters of care soon got complicated, and the issue became the subject of arduous discussions between the Public Art

Agency, the municipality, and the bathhouse's owner—the real estate company GöteborgsLokaler. The matter was finally solved through a ten-year maintenance contract that can be revoked by the property owners at any point, and after which the future of the artwork remains uncertain.<sup>7</sup> The issue, which Swedish researchers Markus Jahnke and Jenny Lööf have described as "the tension between care and efficiency,"<sup>8</sup> is paradigmatic of the state of fragility that currently characterizes noncommercial, community-oriented public space in Sweden.

How can a municipally managed public bathhouse be owned by a real estate company? In late-welfare-state Sweden, it is increasingly common to find mixed urban management models where neoliberalism and social democracy converge in unprecedented ways.<sup>9</sup> In recent years, entire cities and district centers have been sold off to companies in a move that, along with processes of abandonment, privatization, and "renoviction" of welfare-state housing, is illustrative of the neoliberal tendencies of the shrinking Swedish welfare state. Privatization directly and visibly affects public space and its uses: as the Stockholm-based collective Mapping the Unjust City points out, "In a privatized, public space, we are expected to act as consumers, not citizens."<sup>10</sup> The Hammarbadet bathhouse was originally built in 1973 as part of the Million Programme, an extensive public-housing program implemented by the social-democratic government between 1965 and 1974 in response to a lack of housing in Sweden. Once thought of as the place where "modernist ideals

- 1 The core community and consultancy group consisted of Halimo Elmi, Muna Ali Nuh, Habiba Ali Jama, Malyun Yusuf Jama, Fatuma Abdi Osemal, Sahra Elmi Haad, Jamilo Ahmed Guure, Saga Hassan Abdulle, Amal Said, Idil Adan Ali, Halimo Mursal, Nimo Adam Lord, and Zainab Shire.
- 2 Marcus Jahnke and Jenny Lööf, "Konst händer Hammarbadet: När konst tar plats," Statens konstråd, September 19, 2019, 4, <https://statenskonstrad.se/guides/forskarrapport-konst-hander-konst-hander-hammarbadet-nar-konsten-tar-plats/>. All translations mine unless otherwise noted. This is the original text for the application to "Konst händer," the Public Art Agency's curatorial program with a focus on the Million Programme areas. The first stretch of the participatory research process was carried out by urban developers Marcus Jahnke and Jenny Lööf, from the agency RISE.
- 3 The Public Art Agency team involved in *Moving Plants* consisted of Marti Manen, Joanna Zawieja, Lena From, Emma Engström, Peter Hagdahl, and Alba Baeza.

- 4 I came into contact with *Moving Plants* as part of my role as a cultural project manager at the Spanish Embassy in Sweden, which became involved as an external collaborator and partner of Public Art Agency Sweden during the project's later stages.
- 5 Jahnke and Lööf, "Konst händer Hammarbadet," 10.
- 6 Maider López, in Jahnke and Lööf, 11.
- 7 Jahnke and Lööf, 11–12.
- 8 Jahnke and Lööf, 11.
- 9 Héléne Frichot and Helen Runting, "The Queue," *e-flux architecture*, September 2, 2019, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/overgrowth/282654/the-queue/>.
- 10 Elof Hellström, from Mapping the Unjust City, in conversation with the author, November 2017. The corporate statement by Hammarbadet's property owner GöteborgsLokaler, for whom the users of public spaces in Gothenburg city and metropolitan area have become tenants and customers, is indicative of this ongoing shift; see the GöteborgsLokaler website, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.goteborgslokaler.se/om-oss/>.

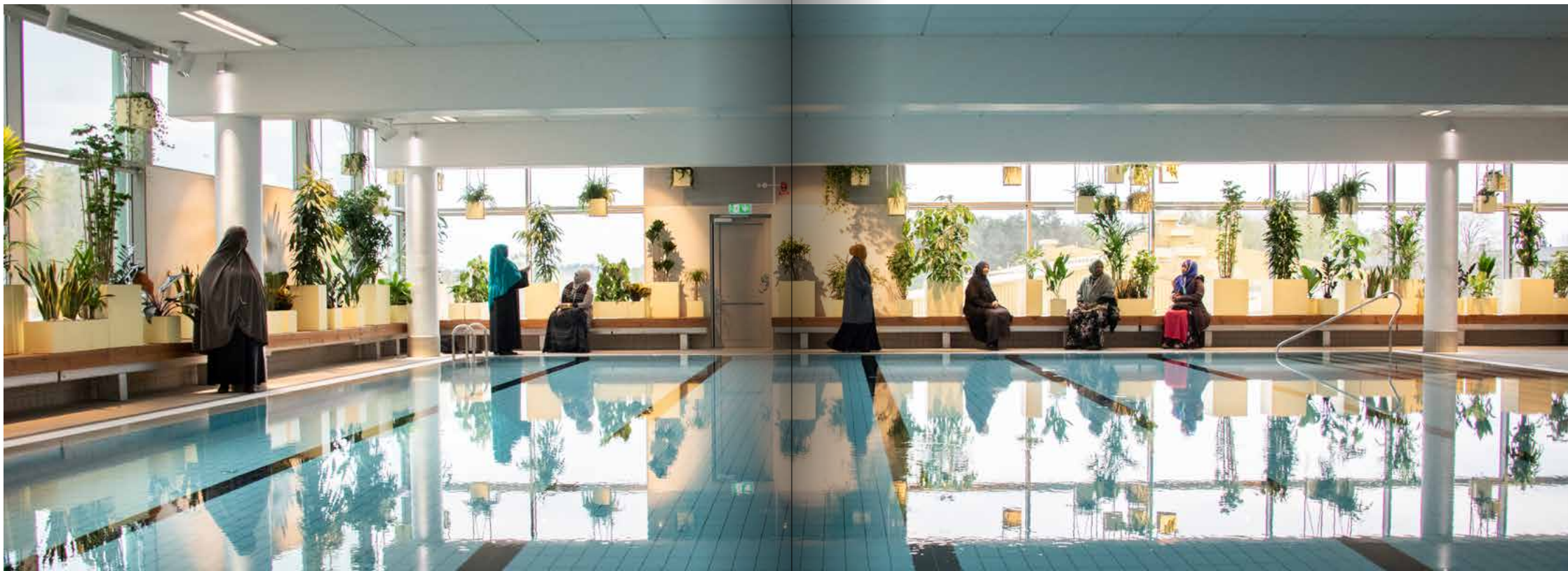


Fig. 15  
Maidier López, *Moving Plants*, Hammarbadet, Gothenburg, 2019

about light, function, and society were fully realised in the built environment,”<sup>11</sup> the Million Programme suburbs have become home to the non-Western migrant and refugee populations that began to arrive to Sweden in the 1980s, fleeing from civil wars in the Horn of Africa<sup>12</sup> and the Middle East.<sup>13</sup> Hammarbadet was in need of renovation after more than forty years of use, but instead of repairing the public facility, attempts were made to demolish the bathhouse and refer its users to the neighboring Angered Arena, a privately owned, newly built sports complex—a move that represented a huge threat to the municipality’s social fabric. On this note, Saga Hassan Abdulle, one of the Hammarkullen women involved in the project, adds: “It is all about self-help [...] We back each other up, and support one another. [...] We are a society, we have to fight and be involved and work for it to be good. Nobody else will come and help you.”<sup>14</sup>

- 11 Erik Stenberg, “Restructuring Swedish Modernist Housing,” *Nordic Journal of Architecture* 3, no. 2 (2012): 89.
- 12 According to Madubuko A. Diakité, one of the few academics researching the African diaspora in Sweden, despite the fact that there is evidence of Africans and African diasporans living in Sweden since the 1300s and throughout the colonial period, the written and oral histories of Africans and African diasporans in Sweden are unfortunately not yet a priority. See Madubuko A. Diakité, “African Diasporans in Sweden: An Unfinished History,” *Lundian*, 2005, 1–9.

- 13 Statistics from 2018 show that 19 percent of Swedes were born in another country. However, the migration shift is a relatively new phenomenon. Sweden was mostly a country of emigration until it opened up its doors to white labor migrants, mostly from Germany and Nordic and Baltic countries, after World War II. It was not until the 1980s, parallel to the end of the *Folkhemmet* years and Sweden’s entry into the global economy, that the number of asylum seekers began to rise. See “Sweden and Migration,” *Sweden.se*, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://sweden.se/migration>.
- 14 Jahnke and Lööf, “Konst händer Hammarbadet,” 1.



Thought and work on care still has to confront the persistent idea that care refers, or should refer, to a somehow wholesome or unpolluted pleasant political realm,<sup>15</sup> which remained persistent throughout the application of modernist ideas in the social fabric of twentieth-century Sweden. Commonly known as Folkhemmet (the people's home), Swedish social democracy was depicted as a big, open home, a metaphor for a society living under one common roof, sheltered by government care, equality, solidarity, and welfare. Care was framed within a paternalistic logic that saw state optimization of reproductive labor through the modern home, social rights, biopolitical control,<sup>16</sup> and "democratic design"<sup>17</sup> as its main duty. Indeed, the material dimension of social-democratic Sweden, which operated under the triad of architecture, design, and body politics, prioritized both the public spaces of citizen life and housing as sites par excellence for the production of a free and democratic society. In this conception, nature, leisure, and health became deeply intertwined: state-produced architectural infrastructures—such as Hammarbadet—conferred great importance to collective rituals of leisurely health and hygiene, such as bathing, swimming, and outdoor sports, which were seen as essential in the making of the modern Swedish social body, a body seen as "naked, true, healthy, pure, trim and 'as free of decoration as Modernist buildings and household goods.'"<sup>18</sup>

## On Feminist Latencies

It is worth noting that, throughout the curatorial process of *Moving Plants* and subsequent media representations of the bathhouse's renovation, there were no direct allusions to a feminist agenda. In a similar manner, a curatorial decision was made to avoid addressing the Muslim culture of the women protagonists to prevent further othering, placing emphasis instead on their status as locals and Swedish citizens, and letting the artwork, images, and facts speak for themselves.<sup>19</sup> However, the caring, emancipatory, and transformative nature of the project in regard to dominant Western conceptions of public space is undeniable. How can we understand the complexities of this ecosystem in ways that add a new layer of meaning, eschewing political or cultural appropriation, victimization, or simplification?

According to Abdulle and the nine other community members who formed the project's consultancy group, the bathhouse was "a home" to them and "a space like no other."<sup>20</sup> For the community, who, along with their gender and cultural background, share the conditions of caregiving for large families and heavy-duty work,<sup>21</sup> Hammarbadet was a much-needed space where they could "meet each other," "talk undisturbed," and spend time together "unscrutinized." During the project's workshops they described bathing as "a space of recovery for body and soul, a safe space of images and colors where thoughts

could vanish and dreams could grow, where people are united by water and greenery."<sup>22</sup> The colors, emotions, memories, stories, and feelings describing their experience of the ritual of bathing evoke a sense of physical and spiritual relief, a shelter of sexed intimacy and connection where bodies marked with the bearings of sex, labor, and color can heal, let go, forget, remember, be cared for, and experience collectivity.

A series of "feminist latencies," which I define as transformational space-times of potentiality, action, and futurity, as opposed to discursive identity claims or outward declarations of intention explicitly aligned with feminism are at play. Through the act of carving out time and space for themselves where there is none, this group intervenes into women's history of fragmented and interrupted time and a history of bare life in public space, a space that is inconvenient at best and life-threatening at worst. Collectively enjoying pure leisure and self-care at nobody's expense becomes a radical act of courageous and subversive resistance.

Expanding on Australian feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz's notions of "latency" as essential to processes of feminist history writing that sees the past as a virtuality contained within the present which allows for multiple histories to be told,<sup>23</sup> feminist latencies point to a universal, unconstrained desire for a fulfilling, sexed existence in which the possibility of becoming "many" is rendered conceivable. The women's collective desire for a soft space that resists scrutiny and surveillance suggests a latent form of decolonial feminism and prefigures an autonomous strategy of collective care, placemaking, and

15 Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 7–8.

16 See Sven-Olov Wallenstein, *Biopolitics and the Emergence of Modern Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009).

17 See Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, eds., *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption, and the Welfare State* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008).

18 Gertrud Sandqvist, "Art and Social Democracy," *Afterall*, no. 0 (1999), <http://www.rollon.net/artiklar/gertrud/indexe.html>.

19 From conversations with Alba Baeza, Marti Manén, and Maider López.

20 Extracts from the workshops with Saga Hassan Abdulle and the members of the consultancy group, named above (see note 1), in Jahnke and Lööf, "Konst händer Hammarbadet," 4–9.

21 Jahnke and Lööf, 3.

22 Jahnke and Lööf, 4–9.

23 In a 2000 text that expands on Luce Irigaray's thought on difference by suggesting the evolution from binary thinking to sexed multiplicity ("of at least two sexes"), feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz uses the term "latency" to describe time in processes of feminist history writing, in which the past is reinscribed into the present, paving the way for "producing conceivable feminist futures" that "dramatically diverge from [it]." According to Grosz, "The past is always contained in the present as its latency, its virtuality, its potential for being otherwise. [...] The past always and essentially gives rise to multiple histories." Elizabeth Grosz, "Histories of a Feminist Future," *Signs* 25, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 1017–21.

knowledge-making as pleasurable relating that impacts directly on what feminist science and technology studies, environmental humanities, and political ecologies scholar María Puig de la Bellacasa has termed “the mattering of worlds.”<sup>24</sup> Brought forward and sustained through López’s artwork, a nest of female collectivity subverts a cartography of public space dominated by multiple violent epistemologies: modernist hyper-transparency and coloniality, the male gaze (both Western and Muslim), Western othering and racialization, and urban segregation and privatization. The artwork mobilizes the role of art in public space to support the autonomous creation of an affirmative existential territory, sustaining a field of care relationships.

Speaking of feminist latencies in curating and making, public art allows for an empathic, caring, situated understanding of sexed and subjective difference that is multiple and can create a soft space in fragile balance, but also in strength, alliance, and solidarity. Sustaining difference becomes a curatorial work of care: reclaiming this situated possibility of existence means reappropriating “a toxic terrain, a field of domination, making it again capable of nurturing.”<sup>25</sup> Throughout, López thought of ways to respond to the women’s need to feel at home, their shared sense of fragility in relation to the baths’ visibility, and their desire to play with “transparency and integrity.” She recalls how they wanted to be able to look, but not necessarily be seen.<sup>26</sup> “Integrity” appears as a multilayered desire espousing latencies that, in opposition to transparency, denote both the value of female purity and moral virtue in Muslim culture *and* the state of being unbroken, “safe,” a united and “unsurveilled” whole. Liberation from the male gaze emerges as a desired collective condition that is achieved through opacity and female collectivity. Feminist latency therefore speaks to an ancestral, universal desire for agency, pleasure, and women’s reconquest of public life.

When asked about the separatist gender dynamics present in the site of *Moving Plants*, López replied that she had made it an absolute priority to listen to the women’s stories and needs, a consistent sensibility that echoes throughout the entire process.<sup>27</sup> It naturally follows that when listening constitutes the beginning of an artistic process, the business-as-usual reality of participatory artistic processes in public space where communities come *last* is undone, allowing, if not fully devoid of contradiction, for art to become something else, to become somebody else’s voice, a challenging entity “that pushes to redefine.”<sup>28</sup> This question—How many are we?—which the artwork mobilizes in latency, can be thought of as a fissure that continually mobilizes the relationship between care, feminism, art, time, and place. A feminist care ethic reminds us that “reclaiming care requires acknowledging poisons in the grounds that we inhabit rather than expecting to find an outside alternative, untouched by trouble, a final balance—or a definitive critique.”<sup>29</sup> Could we say, then, that in the realm of curating public art, mobilizing feminist latencies and enacting care

has mostly to do with the act of finding fissures? Triggering this question constitutes the quintessential task of feminist curating as embodied care work and of the collective practice of feminist history writing: it signals feminism’s “movement from policing to production,”<sup>30</sup> espousing a shared determination to view difference anew, to create relationships among and across multiple sexes *and multiple sexed subjectivities*, and “supporting feminist futures”<sup>31</sup> as futures of multiple alliance. According to Grosz, multiplicity is rendered more complex through the necessity of recognizing what the fissured and latent past enables.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps these fissures appear as cracks that make possible a space-time of alliance, negotiation, and redefinition, pointing to shifts that have already occurred: potentially indelible shifts that respond to the vulnerable yet inescapable imprint of feminism in processes of placemaking and history-making, but fundamentally, to feminism as a universal latency, as the desire for living a fulfilling sexed existence and as a survival tactic capable of developing and growing autonomously in markedly hostile environments, enacting care while pointing toward future ways to *become many*.

24 Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 28.

25 Bellacasa, 11.

26 López, in Jahnke and Lööf, “Konst händer Hammarbadet,” 4–9.

27 López, in Jahnke and Lööf, 4, 9.

28 López, in Jahnke and Lööf, 4, 9.

29 Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 11.

30 Elisabeth Grosz, “Feminist Futures?,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 16.

31 Grosz, “Histories of a Feminist Future,” 1019.

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# Climate Care

## A Curriculum for Urban Practice

Gilly Karjevsky and Rosario Talevi (Soft Agency)

As day-to-day changes in weather patterns are experienced in ways that can no longer be ignored, public awareness of the current climate crisis has reached a tipping point, and civic action is picking up in cities around the world. Yet these varying protest movements, organizations, campaigns, and events are confronting the crisis by using the rhetoric of urgency, fatality, and catastrophe.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it's no wonder that the most common response to the situation is either denial or depression—an inability to act.

As much as the urgent need for action on our changing environment is vital and valid, this rhetoric of crisis is arguably rooted in a crisis of representation.<sup>2</sup> The recognition of changing climate systems in mainstream discourse is not some grand discovery, but more a process of catching up with the larger climate science community and the marginalized environmental movements that have long advocated for action on climate change. Perhaps it is finally time for all of us to acknowledge that climate change is rooted in the perpetuation of a system of extraction, depletion, and unequal distribution of the earth's limited resources. And perhaps what is most crucial to be aware of is the entanglement of this ecological crisis with struggles for racial, gender, social, and economic equality on a planetary scale.<sup>3</sup>

But are we really equipped to deal with this? How can we shift the ways in which complex social, economic, and political systems shape our lives? What alternatives can really be incorporated into current dominant lifestyles? Ethics of care challenge us to construct social relations and social systems based on relational and situational morality, beyond abstract notions of justice, to allow us to shift our attention to processes of care, repair, maintenance, and recuperation. The theory is explored by feminist thinkers in political science and theory, literature and other comparative humanities, psychology, law, and more influential to our curatorial practice, ethics of care in critical

- 1 "I want you to panic" was perhaps one of the most cited quotations of activist Greta Thunberg in 2019. In his *New York Times* opinion piece, David Wallace-Wells suggests that fear may be the only thing that saves us: "We are all living in delusion, unable to really process the news from science that climate change amounts to an all-encompassing threat. Indeed, a threat the size of life itself." David Wallace-Wells, "Time to Panic," *New York Times*, February 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/16/opinion/sunday/fear-panic-climate-change-warming.html>.
- 2 Bruno Latour adapts the postmodern critical theory concept of the crisis of representation to his political-ecological theory. He proposes that the environmental

crisis of representation stems from the modernist nature-culture dichotomy, in which humans are represented by politics and things are represented by science. He imagines a nonmodern political ecology that assembles humans and nonhumans together to mutually reconstitute the political and scientific representations of the world. See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

- 3 For more on the topic, see Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); or Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (London: Verso, 2019).



spatial practice as they relate to social and spatial infrastructures.<sup>4</sup> These theories and practices of care offer other ways of relating and living, of perceiving and making, both as a society and as individuals engaged in mutual responsibility, attentiveness, and responsiveness. As critical spatial practitioners we experiment with alternative formats, rethinking economy, political relationships, and alternative modes of participation. Beyond the theoretical framework of care, we focus as much on the processes of setting up contexts, relations, and situations as on thematic explorations and artistic output.

In our work as Soft Agency, we respond to the challenge set forth by American multidisciplinary media scholar Shannon Mattern to provide a bigger public stage,<sup>5</sup> to replace the financialized-capitalist narrative of innovation with the caring attitude of maintenance. To reimagine systems and processes as an



Fig. 16  
The site of the Floating, Berlin, 2019

act of repair and not an act of invention. To care for instead of getting rid of. To recuperate rather than replace. Practicing curating as a critical spatial practice with a focus on the application of care ethics allows us to take on a site such as the Floating, in Berlin, to examine its materiality and context, its political and social geography, and to act out of those specified conditions. Our approach to programming at the Floating was centered around the site itself as the world in which we act, as both the origin and the receiver of our intentions. Being on site is being in nature, with nature, with all our senses engaged and informed by the environment we inhabit. Being on site is being in interaction. We sought to employ that quality and express it through our curatorial programming.

In December 2018, the newly formed association Floating e.V. signed a two-year extension to their lease. The association continues to develop both the social and physical infrastructures at the water basin that hosts the Floating University: an open organizational structure that requires the active hosting, curating, and facilitation of all kinds of content and activities. This transition from a project to a more formal organization was manifold: it demanded a more permanent presence on site, a commitment to nonhierarchical decision-making processes, a concentrated effort to incorporate caretaking routines and habits, and an effort to expand the initial concept of the Floating University by incorporating other voices. Most importantly, this gradual evolution raised questions regarding how the association imagined its long-term role as caretakers on site. What was the association caring for? And how could it nurture the processes that the natural and political history of the site ignites?

4 In addition to a long list of books and edited volumes looking at feminist ethics and theory in architecture and spatial practice since the 1970s, we also look at long-term projects such as the traveling exhibition and book *Critical Care: Architecture for a Broken Planet*, edited by Elke Krasny and Angelika Fitz (2019), as well as the Bartlett Ethics Commission, led by Jane Rendell since 2015; see "Ethics in the Built Environment," <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/about-us/our-values/ethics-built-environment>.

5 Recently, Shannon Mattern proposed that before maintenance can challenge innovation as the dominant paradigm, we'll need to build a bigger public stage. She argues that given the degree of brokenness of the broken world (and the expense of fixing it), we need all maintainers to apply their diverse disciplinary methods and practical skills to the collective project of repair. See Shannon Mattern, "Maintenance and Care," *Places Journal*, November 2018, <https://placesjournal.org/article/maintenance-and-care/>.

## The Floating

On the site of the Floating, a diverse range of animals, plants, and algae have taken root and given birth to a unique landscape: a man-made environment reclaimed by nature, where polluted water coexists with the relatively new presence of the university, forming a natureculture<sup>6</sup> or a third landscape.<sup>7</sup> The site was designed in the early 1930s as a rainwater retention basin to serve the Tempelhof airfield and adjacent venues, and it remains a fully functioning infrastructure today. It is surrounded by a *Gartenkolonie* (community garden) and is therefore almost invisible to passersby. Community gardens were introduced in Germany during the nineteenth century as a means of enabling the new urban poor, who had been dispossessed of their land, to grow their own food within the city.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the century, most German cities had begun to lease designated spaces with small garden allotments. This was done primarily in order to provide inhabitants with access to food, which was particularly crucial during the First and Second World Wars, but also to provide a healthy, green environment where both children and adults could benefit from being in nature.<sup>9</sup>

After the Tempelhof Airport closed down in 2008, the city's redevelopment plan proposed to relocate the basin as a pond situated within the 300 hectares of the former airfield site. This would have transformed the 7,000-square-meter area of public land occupied by the basin into a valuable, profitable asset for Berlin's real estate portfolio. However, in a 2014 citizen's referendum, Berliners voted against the city and prevented any kind of construction on the airfield. The result of this referendum not only protected the unique inner-city green space, but also provided protection for the basin.<sup>10</sup>

The basin plot was closed off to the public for over sixty years, and when Berlin-based architects raumlaborberlin opened the site as the Floating University in 2018, it was in solidarity with the history of the space and with the lineage of alternative urban-development narratives. The Floating University was established as a temporary urban laboratory for collective learning, and situating a pedagogical experiment in this location was a deliberate form of political engagement. From April to September 2018, the Floating University invited various constellations of students, professors, summer schools, and self-organized groups, mainly from the fields of design and art, to develop their own curricula and experiment on and with the site. Beyond inviting institutions to free themselves from their own rigid or even restrictive structures, the open program engaged with the general public by offering a wide range of activities, including theater performances, BMX riding, and beekeeping workshops.<sup>11</sup>

The founding year of the Floating University saw a diverse range of visitors involved to varying degrees with the activity on site, creating a unique eco-

system. Like an orchestra without a conductor, this apparent chaos not only encouraged diversity, but more importantly, it allowed the unexpected and the unplanned to emerge. Moreover, the program consolidated a network of practitioners, who decided to continue the experiment by transitioning from a "temporary" project into an association, Floating e.V., which became the

- 6 "This concept is created by Donna Haraway in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) in order to write the necessary entanglement of the natural and the cultural, the bodily and the mind, the material and the semiotic, etcetera. 'Naturecultures' offers us an important route to rewrite these modernist oppositions in such a way that rather than representing parts of the world, a transcription with the world is being proposed. Concepts thus do not capture or mirror what is 'out there,' but are fully immersed in a constantly changing reality." Jussi Parikka, "New Materialism: Naturecultures in Utrecht," March 21, 2011, <https://jussiparikka.net/2011/03/21/new-materialism-naturecultures-in-utrecht/>.
- 7 "The Third Landscape—an undetermined fragment of the Planetary Garden—designates the sum of the space left over by man to landscape evolution—to nature alone. Included in this category are left behind (*délaissé*) urban or rural sites, transitional spaces, neglected land (*friches*), swamps, moors, peat bogs, but also roadsides, shores, railroad embankments, etc." Gilles Clement, "The Third Landscape," accessed May 20, 2020, <http://www.gillesclement.com/art-454-tit-The-Third-Landscape>.
- 8 The implications, especially for women and children, of the transition from feudalism and rural communal life into capitalism and deprivation of land are notably explored in Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004).
- 9 In 1919, one year after the end of WWI, the German government passed legislation for the "Small Garden and Small-Rent Land Law." This law provided security in land tenure and fixed leasing fees. For more on this topic (in German), see BMVS and BBR, eds., *Städtebauliche, ökologische*

- und soziale Bedeutung des Kleingartenwesens*, Forschungen Heft 133 (Bonn: Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung, 2008).
- 10 The referendum on Tempelhofer Feld was held in Berlin on May 25, 2014. It saw a majority of Berliners vote in favor of preserving the 380 hectares of the former airfield. The campaign that led to the referendum was initiated by the citizens' initiative 100% Tempelhofer Feld: "an initiative that is committed to the preservation of the entire 380 hectare Tempelhofer Feld because of its performance and functionality in the natural balance, the uniqueness and beauty of its landscape, its recreational function, its cultural and historical significance, and as a place of remembrance for the victims of National Socialism. The aim of the citizens' initiative is to permanently preserve Tempelhofer Feld as an inner-city open space with special characteristics and functions, to develop it further in this sense and to protect it from endangering and changing interventions. [...] Of 2,491,365 Berliners entitled to vote, 1,149,145 (46.1%) participated, of whom 739,124 (29.7% of eligible voters) in turn voted for the legislative initiative of the initiators of the referendum." "Volksentscheid zum Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin," Wikipedia, accessed December 1, 2020, [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volksentscheid\\_zum\\_Tempelhofe\\_Feld\\_in\\_Berlin%2523cite\\_note-2](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volksentscheid_zum_Tempelhofe_Feld_in_Berlin%2523cite_note-2) (our translation).
- 11 For an idea of the variety of activities offered during the Floating University's 2018 program, see raumlaborberlin, Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius, and Florian Stirnemann, eds., *Floating University Berlin 2018—Illustrated Report* (Berlin: raumlaborberlin, 2019), <http://raumlabor.net/floating-university-berlin-book/>.

custodian of the site of the Floating University.<sup>12</sup> Soft Agency are active members of the managing board of Floating e.V., and we volunteer as curators on site. Among other activities, we look at how to create an autonomous economy on site and how to develop its citywide network, both with the local community and with the political decision-makers affecting the site. We volunteer together with other association members to build working groups attending to all aspects of the Floating site—from maintenance to designing new architectures, from events and programs to learning modules and curriculums, from communications to gardening. One of the things that keenly resonated for us at the Floating University was a sense of fragility—not the fragility of the basin itself, but the inherent fragility of becoming an ecosystem of practices. This ecosystem has developed (and continues to develop) through open research, conducted independently by different people and groups. A large number of the academic and artistic programs that emerged on site were bounded by loose instructions and infrastructures, and emphasized open intentions and frameworks. The Floating University grew into a site where heterogeneous interests translated into projects, interventions, events, and installations. Becoming the Floating University was a constant process of searching, discovering, figuring out, and paying knowledge forward. As the site and its manuals and rituals unfolded, we looked for programs through which operating the floating infrastructure on site captured these practices and pedagogies.

## Climate Care

When contemplating how to reopen the site in 2019, we conceived the public program as a curriculum for everyone: for the fledgling association, for the neighbors and visitors, and for the site itself. To be on site at the Floating University is to experience connection with the surrounding environment: with greenery, rain, still water, algae, birds, unusual smells, and wide-open sky. We found that being present at the site raised the layered question of how we might care, daily, for our earth, ourselves, our community, and our education. What kind of infrastructure could we as curators create at the Floating University in order to support practices of care at different scales? And how did those practices draw on and relate to the physical surroundings and the environment? Throughout the program, curiosity became the driving pedagogical tool: observing, mimicking, trying out, and ultimately, engaging. The very nature of the site demanded exchange with others, both human and nonhuman. Nonverbal signifiers evolved to replace spoken or written instructions, a perfect example of this being the rubber boots lying around everywhere. The boots had no signs or directions. People would simply wear them to jump into the water. It was self-explanatory, but it also required another form of being curiously active and embodying the site through one's own tacit experiences. The physical act of lifting a watering can made us aware of how much water is used

to flush a toilet. On days where the Floating University site was inundated with heavy rain, we would monitor the rising water level until the site became untenable, or flooded completely, experiencing rain as a volume, as opposed to a length of time.

The fusing of the current climate crisis debate with the discourse of care ethics was the main shift that the “Climate Care” festival aimed to examine. While the climate crisis featured in almost every mainstream news outlet in 2019, theories of environmental justice or discussions connecting the climate crisis with other intersecting social, racial, and political struggles were notably absent. We felt strongly that focusing on constructive forms of making and sharing was crucial in order to address such an overwhelming topic, and that by diverting our attention to the bonds we form—with each other and with our environment—the current climate crisis could be infused with a sense of possibility. In this sense, we centered María Puig de la Bellacasa's notion of care, which provided us with an ethical and political framework for action.<sup>13</sup> This notion of care reframes the human as a “caretaker”; a custodial figure in the ongoing recuperation of the planet and its people. To care is to recognize the fragility of the bonds between both humans and nonhumans. The practice of caring asks us to cultivate a set of skills and sensibilities to maintain and sustain all kinds of life.

Within this context, the “Climate Care” program was curated to develop tools to work beyond crisis, using preexisting and readily available networks and systems. In this way, the program was conceived of as a curriculum for urban practice. A curriculum is conventionally associated with a course of study, a syllabus, or an educational program. Its etymological origin can be traced back to the Romans, who used it to refer to the tracks or course on which chariots ran, from the Latin *currere* (to run). Learning institutions use the curriculum to describe the agreed-upon body of information designated to be transmitted to their students. However, a curriculum need not only be content. Beyond the understanding of a curriculum as a body of knowledge, a curriculum can also be a process, a praxis, and situated in context. From compost-making, experimenting with organic materials, constructing urban

12 The Floating University was initiated by raumlaborberlin as an artistic-cultural project. The nonprofit association Floating e.V. was formed in December 2018, and today it consists of thirty-six members from different disciplines (architecture, art, design, ecology, beekeeping, choreography, pedagogy) and places, who manage, maintain, and take care of the site and use it to explore hybrid learning formats.

13 Bellacasa describes care as an ethical and political obligation for “thinking [in the] more than human worlds of technoscience and naturecultures.” María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 12.

hives, “weather writing” or other methods of “tuning in,” reading aloud, and looking at care on a planetary scale, the search for tools, methodologies, and processes was at the heart of “Climate Care.” The curriculum at the Floating University<sup>14</sup> has evolved organically to serve the site, the public, and the human collective behind the extitution.<sup>15</sup>

With “Climate Care,” artists and designers were invited to propose educational modules that could encourage embodied and tacit knowledge to emerge from experiences on site. We called for the reevaluation of aesthetic awareness and a revision of the ways in which we shape our lives through interaction, consumption, work, and rest. We called for an education that prioritizes embodied forms of knowledge production, and centers the politically charged experience of being in the world.



Fig. 17  
Serving the site, practicing climate care, 2019

14 Since 2018, four typologies of knowledge are explored and debated on the site of the Floating University Berlin: Applied knowledge follows the writing of Tim Ingold and is expressed through construction, gardening, and other forms of making. Site-specific knowledge follows the writing of Jane Rendell and is expressed through research and engagement with all populations in and around the site. Situated knowledge draws on Donna Haraway’s concept and is expressed through recontextualizations of practice on site. And embodied knowledge follows Maurice Merleau-Ponty and it lives in every mode of operation on site, from how we flush the toilets to how we recycle dishwashing water.

15 “It was Michael Serres who in 1955 coined the term extitution, and characterized it as a concept that has no ‘inside’ nor ‘outside,’ they are just the limit, elements that can be connected or not. An extitution is a surface that cannot possibly be geometrized. Instead it is an amalgam of changing connections and associations. Its subject matter can be the positions, neighborhoods, proximities, distances, adhesions, or accumulations of relations.” “The Urban Citizen’s Extitutional Processes in Madrid,” *Vivero de Iniciativas Ciudadanas*, August 29, 2016, endnote n.n., <http://viveroiniciativasciudadanas.net/2016/08/29/the-urban-citizens-extitutional-processes-in-madrid/>.

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# I KNOW I CARE— How Red Is Vienna Today? Curating a Radical *Waschsalon* in Vienna's Social Housing System

Jelena Micić

## Red Vienna's 100th Anniversary and the Project I KNOW I CARE

In the beginning of 2019, a poster campaign by the Social Democratic Party was launched in Vienna. Each of the posters was composed of two images with one showing a present-day public figure, and the other, a much older photograph, which, visibly photoshopped, showed a historical person in monochrome red. The captions on the posters read “Viel getan, viel zu tun” (Much achieved, still more to be done) and “Heute und in der Zukunft!” (Today and in the future!). The 2019 posters celebrated the 100-year anniversary of Red Vienna. As many scholars of Red Vienna, the period between 1919 and 1934, have pointed out, social housing ranks among its most important achievements. With the poster campaign claiming a continuity between Red Vienna then and Vienna today, this essay raises the question how “red” present-day Vienna actually is, with a particular focus on access to social housing. I will use my curatorial project “I KNOW I CARE,” which focused on the spatial dimension of reproductive labor in Red Vienna's historical social housing, and in particular on the infrastructure of the *Waschsalons*, large-scale collective laundry rooms, in order to highlight issues of gendered and racialized reproductive labor. The communal laundry rooms of Red Vienna were a radical proposal to improving and reorganizing reproductive labor. Yet even though this infrastructure was spatially and technically advanced, doing the laundry remained deeply gendered, unpaid labor. The *Waschsalon* is both the physical site and the metaphor that inspired “I KNOW I CARE: Notes on Female\* Reproductive Labor,” realized together with the I KNOW I CARE Open Working Group, which I initiated as part of the festival *Wienwoche*.<sup>1</sup> Followed by an open call for participation throughout April and May 2019, the I KNOW I CARE working group was established. Over a period of several weeks, we had regular meetings including lectures, site visits, and workshops, preparing together the final event at the historical laundry facilities in *George-Washington-Hof*, one of Red Vienna's social housing complexes.

Historically, Red Vienna's social housing was created for those who needed it the most. One hundred years ago, the most marginalized group was the working class. Today, marginalization has become much more complex with globalized flows of immigration. Immigrants and so-called third-country nationals (TCN) are not only excluded from political voting rights, but also have limited access to public goods, including housing. Alt-right fundamentalist, conservative, centrist, and nationalist leftist ideologies use politics of exclusion to heighten existing antagonisms and conflicts between citizens and noncitizens, nonimmigrants and immigrants. Class and ethnicity/race are not the

<sup>1</sup> “I KNOW I CARE” project page, *Wienwoche*, accessed May 20, 2020,

[http://www.wienwoche.org/de/1042/i\\_know\\_i\\_care](http://www.wienwoche.org/de/1042/i_know_i_care).



only two axes of injustice when it comes to rethinking the historical legacies of Red Vienna in today's political and ideological climate. It is equally important to think about today's working class and those marginalized because of their gender, race, and ethnicity. To do so, I turn to social reproduction theory in order to understand reproduction as a site of class conflict.<sup>2</sup> In her recent work, American Marxist-feminist theorist Tithi Bhattacharya develops the notion of the "global working class" in connection with a broad concept of social reproduction that includes all kinds of "unwaged work of forming and sustaining human beings."<sup>3</sup> Once the crucial role of care work in sustaining capitalist hierarchies and the relation between productive and reproductive labor are fully understood, we will be able to create innovative and sustainable self-organizational structures toward a more egalitarian society. Such political perspectives on care work emerged from the debates and discussions in the I KNOW I CARE Open Working Group, with its seventeen members discussing reproductive labor in historical Red Vienna as it offers useful insights for contemporary working-class struggles connected to housing and social reproduction.

## Female\* Reproductive Labor in Red Vienna

In an article on the role of women during the Red Vienna period, Austrian women and gender historian Gabriella Hauch remains ambivalent about the period's improvements concerning the gendered division of labor.<sup>4</sup> Public, communal, or social housing translates policies of "state care"<sup>5</sup> into "environments of care,"<sup>6</sup> with the housing units based on the heteropatriarchal model of the nuclear family<sup>7</sup> and women still seen as those who have to perform the necessary care work. The term Waschsalon is key to understanding the tensions between technological and infrastructural improvements for reproductive labor and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Red Vienna transformed the Waschküche into a Waschsalon, the shift in terminology is significant. A *Waschküche* (kitchen for laundry) refers to the proletarian kitchen where the laundry was literally cooked. The Waschsalon, with its name alluding to the salon of the nobility and the high bourgeoisie, signaled an improvement of the spaces for reproductive labor, in particular the hard work of washing. Social housing provided communal laundry infrastructures equipped with electrical washing machines that working-class people at the time could not afford, with a washing machine typically costing three months' salary.<sup>8</sup> In other words, doing laundry was heavy work. Jewish Austrian economist and women's rights activist Käthe Leichter, one of the leading radical feminists at the time,<sup>9</sup> conducted a survey for the Department for Women's Work in the Vienna Chamber of Labour. Her survey ranks among the most innovative studies for understanding the impact of the gendered dimension of reproductive labor on women's lives and their time spent at work. For these women, work

in the factory was "only one part of the working day. The second working day awaits *her at home!*"<sup>10</sup> An entire chapter in her survey is dedicated to housework, showing that 85 percent of the women participating in the study considered their work an economic necessity but would have preferred to be homemakers. Washing figures prominently in her survey, with women in favor of the communal laundry facilities, with their labor-saving technological advances.<sup>11</sup> In the Red Vienna period, neither small children nor persons identified as male were allowed to enter the central laundry facility. This renders obvious that doing the laundry was women's work, and women's work only.<sup>12</sup> While the American Red Vienna scholar Eve Blau has shown how political arguments were made that better housing and technological advances resulted in increased participation of the working class in public political and cultural life, Leichter's analysis clearly showed that access to participation in public life remained highly unevenly distributed, adding yet more hours to women's already existing double shift.<sup>13</sup> In some places, Leichter's analysis is akin to a feminist manifesto, especially in the conclusion, where she argues for economic equality and solidarity among the genders, and more generally among humans under attack by capitalism.<sup>14</sup> Such remarks still hold true today.

- 2 Tithi Bhattacharya, "How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 79.
- 3 Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2019), 17.
- 4 Helmut Konrad and Gabriella Hauch, *Hundert Jahre Rotes Wien: Die Zukunft einer Geschichte* (Vienna: Picus, 2019), 57, 77.
- 5 Public social services as a state support for social reproduction. See Arruzza et al., *Feminism for the 99%*, 76.
- 6 Elke Krasny, "Living Reproductive Labor: Environments of Care in Red Vienna Legacies," in *I KNOW I CARE: Notes on Female\* Reproductive Labor*, ed. Jelena Micić (Vienna: Samizdat, 2020).
- 7 Arruzza et al., *Feminism for the 99%*, 70–71.

- 8 Jelena Micić, "Kochhilfe Waschwunder: Life in Two Acts," in *UTERUS EFFECTS*, ed. Amalija Stojsavljević (Vienna: Kunstentropie, 2020), 33–39.
- 9 "Leichter, Käthe (geb. Pick)," lexicon entry, *dasrotewien.at: Weblexikon der Wiener Sozialdemokratie*, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://www.dasrotewien.at/seite/leichter-kaethe-geb-pick>.
- 10 Käthe Leichter, *So leben wir...: 1320 Industriearbeiterinnen berichten über ihr Leben; Eine Erhebung* (Vienna: Arbeit und Wirtschaft, 1932), 45.
- 11 Leichter, 54, 56.
- 12 Reinhard J. Seidler, "Wohnen und Haushalten im Gemeindebau: Politischer Diskurs, Repräsentation, Praxis, kulturelle Folgen," in *Das Rote Wien 1919–1934: Ideen, Debatten, Praxis*, ed. Werner Michael Schwarz et al. (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2019), 240.
- 13 Eve Blau, *Rotes Wien: Architektur 1919–1934, Stadt-Raum-Politik* (Vienna: Ambra, 2014), 273, 275, and 279–83.
- 14 Leichter, *So leben wir...*, 51.





Fig. 18  
Swantje Höft, *So leben wir (Zeitverwendungsstudie 2008/9 Statistik Austria)*, 2019

## Female\* Reproductive Labor in Not-So-Red Vienna Today

Today some of the communal laundry spaces still remain in active use, while others have become idle or even vacant. The working group planned to use a vacant laundry room for our final event as a space to discuss the politics of public housing, the conflicts around access, and the issue of reproductive labor with an interested public that included residents. As I found out over the course of "I KNOW I CARE," negotiating the temporary cultural use of such a space is no easy task. The laundry facility at George-Washington-Hof, which the city administration of Vienna ultimately granted us access to, had been vacant since the 1970s. The aim was to transform a former site of reproduction into a site for communal political consciousness raising and for cultural production and exchange. Immigrant and nonimmigrant women\* produced participatory installations that sparked discussion and reflection on the politics of reproductive labor today. While social reproduction is still gendered female, differences between women\*, in particular between nonimmigrant and immigrant women\*, loom large.

Fig. 19  
"I KNOW I CARE," Wienwoche, Vienna, 2019, exhibition view



Such differences attest to the common experience shared by TCN women\* from former Yugoslav territories. Women\* from the region have migrated to Vienna since the 1966 binational guest-worker agreement between Yugoslavia and Austria. Many of them, now second- or third-generation Austrian citizens, because of systemic discrimination, still work in the highly precarious and exploitative reproductive sector. "I KNOW I CARE" envisioned the Waschsalon as a public site to negotiate and bring to the fore existing gendered and racial inequalities in care labor and housing. In my personal experience and through my curatorial work on "I KNOW I CARE," I have observed that the politics of the city of Vienna, and Austrian politics at large, do not respond adequately to the challenges of our time. Vienna is not red anymore, when it comes to questions of immigration, integration, and political participation of the members of minority groups who pay their taxes and health insurance contributions. Ignoring their fundamental contribution to sustaining the population only increases fragmentation and conflicts within the working class. Broken up into smaller communities, the working class cannot concentrate on a common political struggle. The exclusionary marginalization of communities largely defined through identity politics leads to anti-solidarity actions, antagonisms, and conflicts. At the time of writing in 2020, the I KNOW I CARE working group continues to work collectively developing new projects to grant space to those women\* who are the invisible pillars of a society that refuses to recognize their citizenship rights, and even their fundamental human rights. The present time, more than ever before, has revealed an urgent need for the solidarity of those who want more with those who need most. The question is: Are we at the moment when the unbearable becomes persistent enough to generate change?

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# Queer Connectivity in Pandemic Times— A Personal Reflection with and from Uncertainty

Fabio Otti

When I entered the Zoom call on April 3, 2020, around 10:30 p.m., the first thing I heard was the song “All I Want for Christmas” by American pop star Mariah Carey. I went online to attend a party that I have been attending regularly for ten years now, and as soon as I heard the song, I knew I was at the right event—the only difference being that the party usually takes place in a club, not in the digital space. I switched the screen on my laptop to gallery view, which allows you to see thumbnail displays of participants in a grid pattern, where I could make out acquaintances, drag queens, and others in costume. The closer I looked at the individual participants, the clearer the theme of the evening’s event became. Many of them were dressed in animal print or costumed as tigers or big cats, and I could also make out one or two people who reminded me strongly of Joe Exotic, star of *Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness*. The party *Rhinoplasty*, which has been held in Vienna for over a decade, takes place every two weeks and always has a local or global sociopolitical or pop-cultural theme. The party is organized by drag performers, who portray different themes through their staging. The format of the party as well as many of its themes are steeped in US popular culture. As a queer scholar, I am aware of the fact that many of the topics addressed by the party’s themes require critical reflection, and it should be noted that they are appropriated in a way that verges on the absurd, grotesque, ridiculous, and sometimes even politically incorrect, which, owing to the length of this text, cannot be dealt with here. Often Anglophone culture is appropriated and transformed into a local idiom through German language puns on the English originals. The theme of this particular evening was “Rhinoplasty Tiger King—Stubentiger Special,” in reference to the much discussed recent Netflix series *Tiger King* and the pun *Stubentiger*, which in German is used as a synonym for cat—more specifically, a house cat. This allows us to draw conclusions as to why this party is taking place in the digital space, in our homes, and not, as usual, in the club. The reason is, of course, that we are living in pandemic times and our usual lives have changed abruptly.

As a self-proclaimed queer who researches and regularly participates in queer culture, parties are a main constant in my life. These parties serve as a meeting places for the queer community and also as a research focus for my academic work, which is limited or even nonexistent under the present circumstances. It fills me with uncertainty and anxiety to write about the current situation, as this uncertainty extends across so many levels. It is unclear how long it will take to get this pandemic under control. It is also uncertain what the effects will be and how long we will have to live with the consequences. The uncertainty is reflected in personal, health, economic, emotional, and many other areas that we cannot grasp at the moment. Owing to the actions taken to mitigate the pandemic, life as we knew it has changed a lot. Restrictions on personal freedom in relation to our usual daily routines, be it work, meeting friends, or going out in the evening and so on, have been significantly reduced.

The “social distancing” restrictions put into place to dispel uncertainty around the risks of social contact have above all meant physical distancing—which is why I use “Rhinoplasty Tiger King” as an example.

I wonder whether it is ethically justifiable to strive for an analysis about a party in a time of uncertainty and in a crisis that seems to have torn our everyday life out of its normality. The reason why I would like to make a connection between the pandemic and queerness here is because the concept of normality is repeatedly discussed in the media, ignoring that this “normal” assumes a Western heteronormative society, while queer and other “nonnormative” lifestyles that revolve around gender, class, race, and ability—as well as straight people who do not (want to) fit into the heteronormative construct of society—continue to fight for the right to constitute a so-called normality. Again, this could be one reason to write about uncertainty and insecurity in our everyday life, but also in academic work. I will try to express my opinion about this feeling of uncertainty in the following, keeping in mind that it is not my intention here to exploit the pandemic, queer belongings, or queerness, but rather I want to give my own thoughts on these issues the space to express my own ambiguous feelings about them.

I have been working with the concept of queer communities for quite some time now, and I have found German political sociologist Mike Laufenberg’s concept of the “community of care” very useful.<sup>1</sup> Although I will try to show parallels to Laufenberg’s concept in the following, it must be said that I do not want to suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic can be compared to the HIV/AIDS epidemic Laufenberg is oriented toward. In both cases, we are talking about a crisis that plunges the lifestyles we were accustomed to into uncertainty, but the HIV/AIDS epidemic was accompanied by a greater stigmatization of marginalized communities with regard to sexual politics.

My interest in a queer community, especially regarding the Rhinoplasty event, was related to the question of how Rhinoplasty has managed over the years to create a queer community constituted by similar interests, concerns, or the desire to celebrate. The reference to Laufenberg’s community of care seems more relevant today than ever. In one of his articles, Laufenberg defines the community of care as a network formed as a result of political and social reproductive concerns of individuals or society. Laufenberg speaks here mainly of queer political forms that emerged in the 1980s from questions and debates around reproduction in the context of the AIDS crisis. AIDS activists were forced to create their own care structures and forms of care, especially in countries where there was no state support for those affected or where they were denied support because of homophobic and transphobic resentment. The high-profile protests against state health policy and the education and fundraising were thus only one side of AIDS activism. The development of self-

help structures and social networks helped to ensure mutual support and care for the sick and the mourning. State and society should not be relieved of their responsibility to ensure reproduction. Rather, the collectivization of reproductive work in AIDS activism served as a starting point to politicize and socialize the reproduction of the individual and society as a whole. Ideas of a purely medical solution to the AIDS crisis were rejected, as was the individualization of care work. The emergence of a queer critique of identity politics in the 1980s resulted largely from the experiences of the AIDS crisis and was not an invention of academic discourse. The fact that a critical policy of reproduction could not be oriented toward identity politics—to some extent here, gay politics—became clear through various alliances. From the beginning, the queer politics rooted in AIDS activism was characterized by unequal alliances of heterogeneous people, formed in order to cooperate with each other and find a common political language. The experience that this is not always easy, sometimes seems impossible, and yet there is no alternative still shapes queer politics today. Currently, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has been spreading above all in the Global South, and is again accompanied by a reproductive crisis. In the countries of the Global North, queer ways of life are particularly affected by the heteronormative ordering of (sexual) reproduction as queers and trans people are seeking reproductive justice and access. Above all, the queers and trans people most affected are those to whom the commercial spaces of queer subculture remain largely closed because of racist and class-specific restrictions.<sup>2</sup>

But even if queer concerns in the Global North have changed over the decades since the HIV/AIDS epidemic, what we would call social normality is being shaken by the current COVID-19 pandemic. But to what extent can parallels of this community of care during the AIDS crisis be transferred to the COVID-19 crisis?

In Austria, but also in many other countries, governments have issued directives and regulations for behavioral measures ranging from restricting social contacts to sealing off local communities, quarantines, and partial curfews. While people in systemically important professions have to work countless hours of overtime, the rest of society is in self-isolation. This self-isolation includes all persons living in the same household. We are not yet aware of the effects of this isolation, but it is assumed that there has been an increase in conflicts and domestic violence in heteronormative family groups on the one hand, and social loneliness among people living alone on the other. Here I refer to queer theories about the different temporalities of heteronormative and queer

<sup>1</sup> Mike Laufenberg, “Communities of Care: Queere Politiken der Reproduktion,” *Luxemburg Heft 14*, no. 4, 2012: 96.

<sup>2</sup> Laufenberg, 96–101.

ways of living to illustrate why the format of the party is an important social constant for many people, especially queers.

Heteronormative temporality is assumed to be a linear sequence of events—i.e., birth, childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, marriage, reproduction, child-rearing, retirement, old age, death, and kinship inheritance—which are often marked with celebrations.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, queer temporalities usually do not follow this linear sequence. Queer lives often skip phases of this timeline and move out of this heteronormative perspective, increasingly in the progression to responsible maturity after early adulthood, often favoring activities such as going to parties and clubbing and participation within a queer social scene long after heteronormative culture would have it. Of course, this does not apply to all LGBTQIA+<sup>4</sup> persons, as some of them do not want to participate in scene-related activities or do not have access to them due to race, class, or age-related characteristics, and still others choose to pursue a heteronormative timeline.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, assuming queer lives tend to deviate from the norm would mean that queers increasingly live alone and consider attending parties in a queer community or scene to be part of their normality. However, as a result of the pandemic, the queer community or scene loses its stability completely. As mentioned at the beginning, I have personally experienced that queer life courses and temporalities are different, and yet the format of the party is an important constant in the lives of many queers, possibly even at an advanced age.

Holding the Rhinoplasty party on Zoom, and thus maintaining the familiar reality of life, ensures that in times of physical distancing, solidarity as a queer community is maintained—especially in this case, where the party crowd has generated itself as a community of regular attendees over the years. This community of care makes sure that the usual normality is maintained and that a sense of community is strengthened despite isolation. It could of course be argued that throwing a party in pandemic times is naive or inappropriate, but it should be made clear that this format of the party, and the caring thought put into it, is what it's all about.

Coming back to Mariah's "All I Want for Christmas," even though all we might want is a return to normality, I believe that this pandemic and its aftermath will keep us busy for even longer after it returns. As I wrote at the beginning, the COVID-19 crisis did not cause the end of Rhinoplasty; it adapted to a new format. The pandemic will not end overnight either, so we need to find new ways of feeling normal. As emotional as it may sound, the pandemic will lead to new communities of care being formed in different areas, existing communities will care for each other, and perhaps the connectivity of a small queer party in Vienna will show that even in times of isolation people care for each other, which is reason enough to celebrate. In the case of Rhinoplasty,

organizing and theming a party creates a community, using drag as a practice of caring for a theme, and also creates a collective form of caring.

The question I am asking myself, and which also brings uncertainty, is whether this community of care will still continue to exist in post-COVID times and what organizing a party can mean for queer or feminist curating.

3 Tom Boellstorff, "When Marriage Falls: Queer Coincidences in Straight Time," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, nos. 2-3 (2007): 234. See also Judith [Jack] Halberstam, "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies," in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, ed. Judith [Jack] Halberstam (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

4 The letters in this acronym are continuously being reworked to more fully represent the fluidity of gender and sexual identities:

Lesbian, Gay/Genderqueer/Genderfluid, Bisexual/Bigender, Trans/Trans\*/Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic/Agender/Abrosexual/Abromantic/Ally, and the "+" is meant to include other identities not described by the above categories.

5 Jodie Taylor, "Queer Temporalities and the Significance of 'Music Scene' Participation in the Social Identities of Middle-Aged Queers," *Sociology* 44, no. 5 (2010): 893-907, [www.jstor.org/stable/42857480](http://www.jstor.org/stable/42857480).

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# Accessibility at the Intersection of the Physical, the Digital, and the Financial

COVEN BERLIN



COVEN BERLIN is an artistic and curatorial collective and online magazine based in the queer-feminist community of Berlin. Our group moves through enacting emotional, playful, and political micro-practices of collectivity. We create at the intersection of our digital platform and physical formats like transdisciplinary exhibitions and events. The curatorial goals of our gallery exhibitions are therefore deeply intertwined with the editorial goals of our online magazine. An essential part of our feminism has to do with care and access, two concepts that are also essential parts of the relationship between the physical and the digital aspects of our work. We have chosen to describe here in some detail the strategies we've learned together toward care and access, not out of a theoretical interest in the topic nor from the position of "experts," but rather out of a deep-seated belief that care is practice-based, long-term, and often concrete. We share our experiences here to advocate for centering access in queer spaces, both online and in person.

To start out, we would like to acknowledge that perhaps the most impactful way COVEN BERLIN has come to learn about accessibility as a curatorial method is through our long-term relationship with the Berlin-based collective Sickness Affinity Group (SAG). SAG is a support and resource group of art workers and activists who work on the topics of sickness/disability and/or are affected by them. The goal is to share information and support, working against an art world designed to make individual artists atomized competitors. The essence of the practical considerations access-centered collectives can take can be found in SAG member transdisciplinary artist, researcher, and writer Romily Alice Walden's *A Primer on Working with Disabled Group Members for Feminist/Activist Groups and Organizations*,<sup>1</sup> where they make an utterly clear case that a space or organization cannot be feminist if it is not accessible to disabled people. The more effusive feeling of access intimacy, that "elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs,"<sup>2</sup> is something learned through feeling it, in a space where it has been created, and cannot be taught through theory.

How to define access is a tricky question. For our physical exhibitions, accessibility can show up in such basic practices as making access information available with our event information (e.g., is the space wheelchair accessible, are the toilets gender neutral, will there be a variety of seating options). For workshops, we gather access needs from participants before the event via email (e.g., do they need childcare, do they require a scent-reduced environment), and aim to set aside a small budget to address and facilitate these needs.

<sup>1</sup> Romily Alice Walden, *A Primer on Working with Disabled Group Members for Feminist/Activist Groups and Organizations* (London: Sick Time Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Mia Mingus, "Access Intimacy: The Missing Link," *Leaving Evidence* (blog), May 5, 2011, <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/access-intimacy-the-missing-link/>.

Fig. 20  
COVEN BERLIN logo



It can be as simple as asking a collaborator if they have any access needs we should know about, or if they have an “access doc” we should read (a document outlining someone’s disability or access needs, which may be presented when you start working with them on a project).<sup>3</sup> Creating arts spaces that are physically accessible is a critical topic, but one we would rather leave to experts such as Platz da! or Aktion Mensch in Berlin.<sup>4</sup>

When dealing with our online platform, however, questions of access can look quite different. Online spaces traffic in their own specific types of ableist norms and exclusions. One question we grapple with often as digital publishers is that of language. English can be exclusionary and imperialist while paradoxically serving as a lingua franca. Language and other media must be thought of more carefully when making an accessible website for people who have low vision, which often requires taking steps that constitute a large administrative and technical undertaking. At a minimum, all images used on the website should have written descriptions embedded, and the site should be designed to be compatible with screen readers (devices that read the text of a website aloud to the user). Many free website tools and layouts do not offer full screen-reader compatibility, or even consider accessibility as an aspect of the template designs they offer. While an accessibility consultation for our online platform has been on our wish list for some time, COVEN BERLIN simply has not had the capacity to create and maintain this infrastructure without funding.

The question of funding, financial security, and what it means to concretely support each other thus also comes into the topic of access. Not only to have access budgets for exhibitions, to create and maintain accessible online digital infrastructure, but also to be able to include artists in our work who cannot afford to work for free. This article will focus on aspects of accessibility at the intersection of the physical, the digital, and the financial, reflecting the complex factors that inform our thinking and practice on this topic in our daily practice. But first, a bit about us.

## What Is COVEN BERLIN, a.k.a. Our Curatorial Strategy

COVEN BERLIN was initially conceived of as a blog where queers in Berlin (geographically or psychologically) could connect and create content about art, the body, and feminism. Since the Craigslist ad that brought us together in 2013, we have focused our energy on engaging with art and activism in a playful, nondogmatic, approachable way that we call *critical messiness*. Critical messiness plays a tangible role in our collective both aesthetically and conceptually; it is a gallery that is too full, internal deadlines that are rarely respected, and decisions made without a protocol. Creatively, it is the

spatial and temporal expression of our understanding of collective work; internally, it is the effort exerted when and where possible, with whatever means available, to care for the many-headed hydra of this collective, the community it is situated in, and larger contexts. Our unstructured and forgiving approach to time is informed by the writing of other collective-minded cultural workers, such as Taraneh Fazeli’s “Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time: Against Capitalism’s Temporal Bullying,” in which she proposes the anti-capitalist potential of taking our time, listening to our bodies, and rejecting productivity norms.<sup>5</sup>

An inspiration for our approach to queer feminism is Chicana feminist lesbian writer and cultural theorist Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s concept of border consciousness—an awareness of diversity of voices and formats, the promotion of an emergence of pluralistic learning, and imagining the future.<sup>6</sup> Border consciousness arises from a subjectivity structured by several determinants (gender, class, sexuality, etc.) in varying cultures and identities, which creates an unclear, unclean, unneutral, un-minimalistic, inefficient body, unsuited for capitalist productivity, whose ambiguity, hybridity, and contradictions are welcomed. We cherish what can be learned from the infinite variations of this body. Strategies that have come out of this learning include alienation, appropriation, distortion, or exaggeration of the status quo—all of which translates to a celebration of queer ambivalence in our curatorial and artistic practices.

In a world that often insists on clarity, efficiency, and the neat tying up of loose ends, we advocate for ambivalence and uncertainty. Our work is about questioning normativity in society beyond ideas of gender, “womanhood,” or sexual orientation, into landscapes of migration and colonialism, the intersection of the body and the digital, gender and the pharmaceutical, and the deconstruction of linear, binary structures. To care for these concepts also entails addressing the working conditions of contemporary art production both online and off, insofar as they are barriers of access to the conversation itself.

3 “What Is an Access Doc,” *Access Docs for Artists*, 2018, accessed March 13, 2020, <https://www.accessdocsforartists.com/what-is-an-access-doc/>.

4 Platz da!, <https://platzda2017.wordpress.com>; Aktion Mensch, 2020, <https://www.aktion-mensch.de>.

5 Taraneh Fazeli, “Notes for ‘Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time: Against Capitalism’s Temporal Bullying’ in

*Conversation with the Canaries,” Temporary Art Review*, May 26, 2016, <http://temporaryartreview.com/notes-for-sick-time-sleepy-time-crip-time-against-capitalisms-temporal-bullying-in-conversation-with-the-canaries/>.

6 Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

## Translating Installed Artwork into Digital Spaces: An Accessibility Strategy

Virtual space can offer opportunities to transcend some of the access barriers present in physical space. We look to the work of chronically ill and disabled artists and writers such as Korean American writer, artist, and astrologer Johanna Hedva, who asks in their seminal work, “Sick Woman Theory”: “How do you throw a brick through the window of a bank if you can’t get out of bed?”<sup>7</sup> In response to this prompt, we aim to create online iterations of our work to engage with those who are not able to get out of bed, are not able to get away from work, are not able to leave the children alone. Engaging in artistic events, exhibitions, and activism in person requires energy, time, and access that many disabled, sick, poor, and otherwise marginalized queer artists simply do not have. Online contributions and digital collaborations are valid forms of making and engagement. By giving artwork a digital form, it can live outside the gallery and become accessible to wider audiences.

One such example is the artwork *An Inquiry into KSK* by German artist Inga Zimprich, which COVEN exhibited in 2018 as part of “LUCKY,” our group exhibition that looked into the social construction of luck at the neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (nGbK) in Berlin. Zimprich created an installation critiquing the exclusionary German health insurance system, offering practical advice for how to become affordably insured. In the gallery space, the visitor could sit down at a small lavender desk and read a zine about joining the Künstlersozialkasse (KSK), the social insurance scheme for artists in Germany. The KSK provides partial insurance support for professional artists, writers, performers, designers, actors, and musicians (though interestingly, curators are not included).

The zine begins by discussing the barriers and potential shame inherent in even discussing a topic so intimately related to income and health, especially for women and other marginalized people who often face additional difficulties in dealing with both government bureaucracy and employment. It includes a detailed description of the documents required, and a line-by-line explanation of the application form itself. Zimprich therefore offers strategies for dealing with the KSK and bureaucratic inaccessibility on an emotional as well as a practical level. The zine is published as a PDF available for download in our online magazine, in an article titled “Joining the KSK: A Radical Guide on Getting Your Shit Together.”<sup>8</sup>

Translating this work to a digital format facilitated easy access to and distribution of this resource. We wanted the zine to reach uninsured artists and cultural workers who felt isolated or intimidated by bureaucratic barriers to access, beyond the physical walls of the gallery. The quiet and ongoing struggles with insurance,

housing, and appropriate and prompt compensation for our work as creative practitioners should be a topic of conversation, and an opportunity for loved ones and communities to offer solidarity and support, rather than living with loneliness, shame, and fear. By publishing *Joining the KSK*, we both made the conversation public and made the resource more accessible. It is one of the most visited pages on our website.

## Accessible Language in Digital Publishing

COVEN BERLIN’s online platform holds space for queer bodies and voices in a multimedia, community-centered digital setting. We publish in English because we are Berlin-based, and English is a common additional language here and in the collective. However, one criterion that has never informed how we select contributors is comfort with, proficiency in, or mother-tongue-level English. We have preferred to learn about English from what our contributors bring to English grammar, syntax, and spelling. The imperialist history of English and its resulting predominance in the contemporary cultural sphere is something to push against, rather than gain legitimacy from. Choosing to not “correct” language is our strategy to avoid gatekeeping and prioritizing university-level English proficiency over other forms of spoken and written English. We are therefore lodged inside a paradox: we need a connective language, but we also grapple with the implications of this language’s position as a colonizing tool.

In practice, certain grammatical norms must be released in favor of prioritizing the author’s voice, with all its marks of personal background. Working on a case-by-case basis entails an intuitive, deeply felt approach to what each work calls for. A good example is the touching, intimate poem by Asaf Aharonson, a choreographer from Tel Aviv who has dyslexia. Asaf writes phonetically, and therefore encourages readers to imagine them speaking the words as written on the page. In a poem written to their lover at an STD clinic, they write “Heving a glimps et u Lying with the infujen conected to ur vein / (cos I woos relist first) mide me think / if il gat to see u es an old porsen.”<sup>9</sup>

Our goal is to highlight the strengths of our writers and artists inside a language that connects us to one another. This does not mean wholly excluding academic writing, nor does it entail a fetishization of other writing styles. We want to call

7 Johanna Hedva, “Sick Woman Theory,” *Mask Magazine*, January 2016, <http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory>.

8 Harley Aussoleil, “Joining the KSK: A Radical Guide on Getting Your Shit Together,” COVEN BERLIN, July 19, 2018,

<http://www.covenberlin.com/joining-the-ksk/>.

9 Asaf Aharonson, excerpt from *CLINIC: Dates, Doctors, Drag*, June 19, 2018, <http://www.covenberlin.com/clinic-dates-doctors-drag/>.

attention to the fact that academic English is never neutral or non-stylized, and to problematize the idea that only that which is expressed “correctly” has value.

In the future, we would like to prioritize submissions in simple language, which is more accessible for “people with different needs, such as students, children, adults with learning difficulties, and people who are trying to learn English.”<sup>10</sup> The idea is to nurture an online universe that more of us can participate in. Another important conversation in pursuit of this goal is financing, and how the ability to work “for free” affects access as well. Although it is obvious that money cannot be equated with a plurality of voices, financial precarity certainly affects marginalized contributors more than others.

## Financial Sustainability as Accessibility

Being able to offer payment, even if it is relatively small, is a requisite for how we care for and value our collaborators. COVEN BERLIN began as a nonmonetary collective of friends, relying on one another for opportunities but not expecting these opportunities to pay our bills. This proved unsustainable and exhausting for us and for our collaborators. We heed the calls of cultural workers organizing for fair pay such as the Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.), which works to end unpaid artistic labor and the dubious practice of “payment through exposure.”<sup>11</sup>

In a conscious attempt to move away from precarity and toward accessible infrastructures, COVEN BERLIN has been funded by various state art grants since 2018. Paying collaborators is absolutely tied to accessibility, as not all artists can afford to work for free, especially those who are already systemically marginalized. Expecting others to do so only exacerbates inequalities in creative spaces. Although we ourselves do work for free on occasion, we consider this at its core an exploitative practice, as this means we are essentially paying to work.

Receiving funding has also caused us to redefine ourselves as a collective, and to question and evaluate our working structures. In the beginning, we identified as a “living room–based collective” and worked primarily with artists, project spaces, and audiences from our immediate queer communities in Berlin. Without losing this connection, we have grown out of operating solely with spaces and people in our immediate vicinity. As our structure continues to change, we guide our activities and decisions according to a reflexive curatorial process, asking ourselves: What do we want to achieve, collectively and individually? What are our criteria for selecting works? What are our biases? How can we problematize the power of the curator and remain catalyzers, facilitators, and collaborators?

Working with funding and paying ourselves has also created opportunities to question how we value the caring labor within our collective, where we are not only curators, but researchers, facilitators, writers, editors, communicators, artists/creators, website administrators, and parts of a whole. How we apportion that payment and based on which kinds of work is a continuous conversation, encompassing our individual and collective needs and values, as well as the resources and institutional support available to us. Taking time to discuss issues on practical and emotional levels, checking in regularly, and basic communication and care strategies are not separate from how we handle institutions or funding.

Even though COVEN BERLIN is not a coven of practicing witches, we do believe in the spiritual power of community. Very often, when people think about being a queer-feminist art collective, they think about transmitting big ideals and theory through artwork, writing, or exhibitions. However, a feminist ethos also must guide the structure of our work. How we care affects the form of the collective and is enacted in everyday, mundane, organizational decisions. Practices like writing an image description, helping each other apply for health insurance, or even taking the time to write this article are every bit as important as our exhibitions—a translation of our feminist goals into our collective care structures.

<sup>10</sup> “Simple English Wikipedia,” Wikipedia, accessed May 20, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simple\\_English\\_Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simple_English_Wikipedia).

<sup>11</sup> W.A.G.E., “About,” accessed March 13, 2020, <https://wageforwork.com/about>.

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# Curating Hacking—Caring for Access, Caring for Trouble

Patricia J. Reis and Stefanie Wuschitz

The authors Patricia J. Reis and Stefanie Wuschitz are both part of the Austria-based art collective Mz\* Baltazar's Laboratory, which runs a feminist hackerspace in Vienna. The collective organizes workshops and solo shows for women\*, trans, and nonbinary artists. In this reflective piece, they introduce their practice of curating hacking as caring for access and for trouble. Access means access to resources, childcare, time, a room of one's own, public life, technologies, data, tools, and privacy. Trouble means reacting in an unclear situation in order to cultivate "ongoingness."<sup>1</sup> Curating hacking radically cares for access, taking into account intersectional forms of exclusion through a technofeminist lens. To curate hacking entails diffracting trouble in gender and technology.<sup>2</sup>

## Hackerspaces

Hackerspaces and hacklabs are an international phenomenon: they are a network of public technology labs with the ambition to spread tech literacy in civic society. Most participants in these labs are convinced that the use of open-source technology is essential if we want to understand and co-create the tools that govern our society.<sup>3</sup> The set of values driving the developers of open-source technologies imply that closed-source tools, such as the artificial-intelligence algorithms used in public services, are a threat to the idea of privacy, to an individual's freedom, and to democracy. As an example, just consider face-recognition apps that use any photo off the internet, or surveillance cameras used by law enforcement.<sup>4</sup> How can we learn about technology quickly enough to understand how it impacts us today, and ultimately, to have a say in how it shapes our future? Hackerspace members believe that citizens need to teach each other about technology, transfer their knowledge, and share their skills with all sectors of society. Rather than consuming licensed and proprietary technology, they strive for open and transparent technology to fight bias, improve and democratize tech, and—most significantly—decentralize control.

<sup>1</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), 54; Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 90; and Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 38.

<sup>2</sup> Barad, 102.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Maxigas, "Hacklabs and Hackerspaces: Tracing Two Genealogies," *Journal of Peer Production*, no. 2 (2012): 3.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), 20.

## Feminist Hackerspaces

Typically, hackerspaces are male-dominated. The community around a hackerspace provides volunteer labor that keeps the organization going.<sup>5</sup> Volunteers give workshops where members can acquire or build new devices. One will find expensive, cutting-edge machines in these spaces, but also DIY and rapid prototyping tools, platforms for knowledge transfer, and corners for informal conversations—all maintained in a shared apartment or basement, resembling more a large living room than a technology laboratory. In this scene, the term “open” is understood as a technical quality: access is possible if a user desires to access it. Feminist hackers critique that “open” does not mean that everyone is in the position to access it. Through their exposure to binary gender culture—for example, color-biased toys or biased school education—many cis women felt as if technology was just not something for them.<sup>6</sup> The majority of women\* are consuming technology in exactly the way it is handed over to them by overwhelmingly male, white, middle- and upper-class tech developers. It is a performance of masculinity<sup>7</sup> to program, write an app, solder, weld, administer a system, or set up a server. Many people assigned female at birth feel excluded in a hackerspace, as if instantly feeling incapable of ever belonging. One can only unlearn toxic gender norms—such as keeping your little fingers away from hacking computer hardware—if one understands that this intimate feeling of “not belonging” comes from a systemic and culturally induced exclusion. When lab founders are not aware of their privilege and plan for a target group similar to their own peers, it inherently replicates the gender script of tech as masculine—and in addition, it will tend to attract white, academic, higher-income sections of society.<sup>8</sup>

## Queering Hacking

Gender theorist Judith Butler emphasizes that although it seems daunting we all can overcome our discomfort and gain agency in our gender performance.<sup>9</sup> In the case of hacking, we might first have to reject the link between tech culture and white (male) supremacy.<sup>10</sup> The first step would be to express our wish to keep control over our data and our voice online and offline, to create our own tools, media, and instruments, asking questions like: Who can collect and profit from my data, draw conclusions from the data set, or sell predictions based on it?<sup>11</sup> The next step would be to build a group or a “gang”—a collective of like-minded people who will encourage each other to break with gender norms. This includes the global gendered division of labor. If women were paid minimum wage for their reproductive work, it would constitute a bigger economic sector than the entire tech business worldwide.<sup>12</sup> Care work prevents feminist hackers from access to carefree, aimless, and inspiring tech explorations. A feminist hackerspace addresses these issues through workshops, lectures, projects, and community work.

## Curating Hacking—Hacking Curating

What we want to hack is not code, but norms, tools, language, structures, patriarchy, gender regimes, our own privilege, ways of knowing, frames, narrations, figurations, and static subject positions. But not all feminist hackerspaces are the same—in fact, feminist hackerspaces gravitate toward different directions. Heart of Code, a feminist hackerspace located in Berlin, focuses their program around issues in net politics such as encrypted communication.<sup>13</sup> In their workshops, participants can learn how to protect their phone or PC from data misuse. Even within the collective, there again exists a variety of different approaches to any particular topic. Heart of Code members software developer and sociologist Marie Kochsiek and designer and researcher Marie Dietze, for example, specialize in making DIY gadgets and safer apps for sexual health and gynecology. Again, other feminist hacker collectives, like the Montreal-based feminist hacker collective femhack, care for Indigenous rights.<sup>14</sup> One of their members, the transdisciplinary artist, dancer, and researcher Anne Goldenberg (also known as Goldjian), works specifically on sustainable, decolonial approaches to hacking.

Our feminist hackerspace in Vienna gravitates heavily towards contemporary art. All chair members of the organization identify themselves as female\* media artists, who also struggle to have a prominent position in a context led by white cis men. Part of the strategy of caring for access is the focus on curating solo art exhibitions and providing artist residencies.

5 Sophie Toupin, “Feminist Hackerspaces: The Synthesis of Feminist and Hacker Cultures,” *Journal of Peer Production* no. 5 (2014): 6.

6 Knut H. Sorensen et al., *Technologies of Inclusion: Gender in the Information Society* (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2011), 137.

7 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 73.

8 Judy Wajcman, “TechnoCapitalism Meets TechnoFeminism: Women and Technology in a Wireless World,” *Labour & Industry*, no. 16 (2006): 7.

9 See Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

10 Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 4; and Wajcman, “TechnoCapitalism,” 8.

11 Cathy O’Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction* (New York: Crown Books, 2016), 174; Eubanks, *Automating Inequality*, 9; and Natasha Dow Schüll, “From Big Brother to Little Mother: Self-Regulation in Sensor Society,” *Data & Society Databite* No. 75, April 11, 2016, YouTube video, 1:03:33, posted <https://datasociety.net/library/self-regulation-in-sensor-society/>.

12 Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, *Counter-planning from the Kitchen: Wages for Housework; A Perspective on Capital and the Left*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York Wages for Housework, 1976), 8; and Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (London: Penguin Books, 2019).

13 Heart of Code, <http://heartofcode.org/>.

14 femhack, <https://femhack.noblogs.org/>.

Since 2013, Mz\* Baltazar's Lab has exhibited fifty female\* artists, invited by more than twenty female\* curators, most of them in the form of solo shows. The artists come from different mindsets, backgrounds, nationalities, and fields of practice; what they have in common is that they identify as feminists and work at the intersections of art, science, and technology. Truthful to our roots in hacker culture, the process of creating and mastering your tool, opening up the sociopolitical context of the production, and critiquing unequal standards is an important factor when it comes to the selection of artists. Truthful to a new materialist approach, the collective tries to keep in mind all the entangled forces, forms of governance, and changing material conditions that shape our subject position and perception of it.<sup>15</sup> As the local feminist hackerspace tries to offer a safer space for sensitive and provocative projects, the exhibitions are also meant to inspire artists to push their concepts out of their comfort zone. This requires giving support and also extra resources to the artist. The curator in charge helps to formulate the concept, renegotiate limits, assist with blocks and doubts, and support the artist with childcare during exhibition setup, with extra encouragement in times of frustration, in particular, whenever young artists underestimate their skills. We understand

Fig. 21  
Mz\* Baltazar's collective, *Massage*, 2017



hacking as a practice and creative strategy employed by post-internet artists in general. By subverting the system, they reverse engineer, hack creative processes, and defend access and openness.

Over the years, Mz\* Baltazar's Lab has turned from an infrastructure offering workshops and knowledge transfer into an artist-run space at the intersection of technology, art, and (queer) feminism. Today, a lot of young people concerned about political issues, hierarchies emerging through digitalization, capitalization of the internet, hate speech online, postcolonialism, or the growing right-wing populism as well as the rise of the extreme Right in Europe, migration, environmental exploitation, and climate crisis mingle at the feminist hackerspace's evening events. Many agree that intersectional feminism can offer a useful lens to not only analyze but work artistically on solving, connecting, and healing. "New materialism" is the umbrella term that these young artists and many community members have embraced and use to situate themselves and claim the world and internet as their own again.<sup>16</sup> Curating their ideas therefore means to nurture a vibrant pool of agents, eager to reclaim the lost premises of cyberfeminism.<sup>17</sup>

One such example is Chinese American artist and biohacker Mary Maggic's exhibition "GENITAL( \* )PANIC" (2019), which focused on genital aesthetics in the context of gender diversity, fluidity, and transitoriness. Taking as her starting point biometric measurements such as anogenital distance (AGD), the artist questions governmental actions that police otherness and the gender binary, in particular through genital aesthetics. The interactive installation displays a hacked gynecology chair, equipped with a digital system that is able to measure the AGD of visitors. Participants are invited to use it and contribute to an anonymous digital database of 3-D genital scans. The act of participating symbolizes for the artist an act of statistical defiance, reimagining parameters for the "new normal," the "new natural," and the "new breeder."<sup>18</sup> By using technology and redesigning the system, one can emancipate oneself from norms and stereotypes.

<sup>15</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 54.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Bolt and Estelle Barrett, eds., *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a "New Materialism" through the Arts* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Rosi Braidotti, "Cyberfeminism with a Difference," *New Formations*, no. 29 (1996), 9–25.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Maggic, *Genital( \* )Panic*, zine (Vienna, 2019), 2.



## Caring for Access, Caring for Trouble

At the moment, Mz\* Baltazar's Lab is located in a small storefront in the 20th district, a multicultural neighborhood of Vienna. For the collective, the shop-window is a very important space for display and a prominent interface for mediation and enablement in public. The transparency of our storefront windows allows us to give visibility to the artworks, twenty-four hours a day. Every exhibition is quite distinct from the other, depending on the particular combination of artist and curator, as is their approach to the particularities of the space and to our own agenda.

During the implementation of previous programs, it was exciting to observe the different ways in which the artists acknowledged the challenge of reflecting upon the shopwindow as a display—an interface between Mz\* Baltazar's Lab and a diverse multicultural neighborhood. We've observed that their projects become more radical in their presentation format as a consequence of the peculiarities of our agenda, which prompted them to reflect on their own position as identifying themselves as female\* artists. We believe that this exercise of situating oneself, plus the support of our collective, encouraged them to incorporate a more critical approach to their work that perhaps they had never explored before.

A positive and provocative interaction with the public was the exhibition "Glitoris, Vulvarines, and Others" by Amina L., in June 2017. By exploring activism in the form of what they call "cunt art," Amina brought to life large-scale sculptures in the form of vulvas, such as the 3-D printed, glow-in-the-dark realistic clitoris, either framed on the wall or in the form of a chandelier. The curator Anna T. describes, "Amina used humour, hyperbole, and medical knowledge, to continue or initiate the conversation on which types of bodies are allowed to be seen or talked about." The discussion initiated by the artist was extended to the public as a sex-education action—"cliteracy"—in which art is a powerful vehicle to inform, engage, and involve.

Yet this curatorial approach has not always been well received by the public. Some conservative residents of the neighborhood were annoyed and angered, for example, about multimedia artist Ela Aloisia Sattler's exhibition "Fuck Yeah," critical of Amina L.'s activist approach as a "cunt artist," or even shocked by artist Signe Rose's collage blending female and male representations. Not all critical reactions were taken as an opportunity for dialogue, but they triggered a lot of activism, and as a result new artworks were created that tried to explore the influence of right-wing populism as well as the rise of the extreme right perspectives in Austria.

Overall, we considered this "trouble" very constructive. As many feminists have argued, trouble is symptomatic of an unclear situation, a reaction toward



Fig. 22  
Zosia Hołubowska, "Spell Recognition," Mz\* Baltazar's Laboratory, Vienna, 2018

"disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times."<sup>19</sup> Overcoming trouble, in this context, is a process in motion—it demands, as Butler states, an improvised performance within its process of self-reflection and gender identification. We believe that this type of trouble underlines the urgency of bringing forward feminist discussions and suggests that art can be a powerful tool in that regard.

As a reaction to the trouble, we join forces to boost our presence by increasing the number of artists and curators in our yearly program. Our future programming will keep focusing on body, language, and technology as mediums of emancipation, to think and question our position as intersectional-feminist artists. We ask along with feminist philosopher Donna Haraway: "How should one be positioned in order to see, in this situation of tensions, resonances, transformations, resistances, and complicities?"<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 38.

<sup>20</sup> Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in

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Curating-as-  
Caring: Activist  
Doings

# The “Year of the Women\*” at the Schwules Museum Berlin Activism, Museum, and LGBTQIA+ Memory—Notes on Queer-Feminist Curating

Birgit Bosold and Vera Hofmann

## Snap!

Founded in 1985 by progressive gay activists, in the midst of the HIV/AIDS crisis, the Schwules Museum (SMU) in Berlin is today the world’s most important institution for the preservation, research, and presentation of LGBTQIA+ history and culture. In 2008, the museum reoriented itself, deciding to evolve from being an exclusively gay cis male space, to focus instead on the diverse and sometimes contradictory range of perspectives and positions within queer communities. An evaluation of that reorientation ten years later was somewhat disheartening. Of the almost eighty exhibitions presented between 2008 and 2017, nearly 50 percent were devoted to gay cis male artists, protagonists or subjects. Thirty-one percent sought to operate within a more diverse, multi-perspective “queer” cosmos; just 12 percent presented specifically lesbian perspectives and a mere 8 percent featured trans subjects or artists. Only 2 percent of the shows centered the perspectives of perspectives of QTBIPOC (queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of color). These results are consistent with data from the Senate of Berlin demonstrating that between 2008 and 2018, a majority of funds available for queer projects were distributed to organizations controlled by gay men.<sup>1</sup> Presumably, this is also the status quo in other German states. Indeed, as the trans activist, writer, and teacher Dean Spade’s “Queer Dreams and Nonprofit Blues” project documents, such funding bias is well-entrenched worldwide.<sup>2</sup> And the art world is no exception. Major exhibitions of “queer art” continue the prevailing practice of performing “queer culture” simply by adding gay cis male and homonormative perspectives alongside dominant white, straight, cis, male, and heteronormative ones.<sup>3</sup> The much invoked “queer family” is revealed to be a place where privilege, authority, resources, right to speak, and “visibility” are distributed according to the same sexist, racist, and classist patterns that shape broader society.

The feminist scholar Sara Ahmed invokes “snapping” as a key concept in feminist lives and histories, writing: “We could think of feminist history as a history of snappy women.”<sup>4</sup> Ahmed describes snapping as “a sudden quick movement,”<sup>5</sup> and elsewhere, “the intensity of a situation; when you can no longer do something you have done before. In the end, it can be something little that ends

1 The Senate of Berlin has a grant database that makes public the allocation of funding to legal persons over the period of the last five years: <https://www.berlin.de/sen/finanzen/service/zwendungsdatenbank/>.  
2 Dean Spade, “Queer Dreams and Nonprofit Blues: Understanding the Nonprofit Industrial Complex,” 2016, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://www.deanspade.net/projects/queer-dreams-and-nonprofit-blues/>.

3 For example, the major survey exhibition “Queer British Art 1861–1967” at Tate Britain, London, in 2017.  
4 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 191.  
5 Ahmed, 188.

up being too much."<sup>6</sup> Though it seems a sudden action, she stresses, it is but "one moment of a longer history of being affected by what you come up against."<sup>7</sup> In summer 2017, we snapped: we had simply had enough of being impeded by blatant sexism in our daily work. Spurred by the recent global wave of women's uprisings, we decided to designate 2018 the "Year of the Women\*" at the Schwules Museum. For this year the entire program would explore the positions of women, lesbians, and people of inter, nonbinary, and trans experience (WLINT\*). With the title referring, in a tongue-in-cheek way, to the United Nations declaration of 1975 as the "International Year of the Woman" (an important but inherently limited step toward changing global gender power dynamics), our "Year of the Women\*" was set up as a long-term intervention into the entire exhibition and event program, as well as the collection strategy, of SMU. We intended both to openly challenge the hegemonies within the SMU and the LGBTQIA+ community and to celebrate the important cultural heritage and history alongside contemporary work and discourses of WLINT\* as crucial components of the queer "canon."

## An Inside Job

SMU is a member-based nonprofit association. Although it is a leading institution in its field, the museum is still a community owned, controlled, and run project—legally and politically autonomous. For most of its history, the museum was financially independent of public and private sponsors, operating entirely on volunteer labor. Since 2010, regular funding from the Senate of Berlin has covered fixed charges such as rent, salaries for ten part-time employees in such fields as administration, PR, archiving, and collections, and a small budget for material expenses. Programs and exhibitions depend primarily on fundraising through public and foundation funding proposals or donations. About sixty volunteers run the daily operations of the galleries and library and support the cataloguing of archive holdings. Being on the board of directors is also a voluntary position. Its current eight members function as the collective executive board of the SMU and are a core part of the decision-making committees that administer and oversee programming. Much of the curation at SMU is done by activists without the formal education, academic attainment, or curatorial CV usually needed for institutional work. A certain DIY, anarchist attitude is deeply ingrained in the museum's DNA.

We cannot talk about this project without mentioning our situatedness. We, the two curators of the program, are both white, German, assigned female at birth, and more or less able bodied. Birgit Bosold, fifty-six years old in 2017, learned her politics within lesbian-feminist circles in Berlin in the 1980s, and Vera Hofmann, thirty-eight in 2017, has been active within Europe's queer scene for twenty years. Bosold holds a PhD in literature and is a self-employed

financial consultant. In 2006, she became the first woman to join the SMU board of directors. She has curated major shows such as "Homosexuality\_ies" in 2015/16 and is responsible for the finances of SMU. In 2016, Hofmann was elected to the board as well, adding another female voice. She studied business management, graphic design, and fine arts. After a career in strategic planning and consulting in the creative industry, she turned to the cultural sector, where she has been working internationally as an artist-curator over the last decade. Hofmann has a lifelong record of queering, resistance, and interventionist work in organizations and institutions. She is presently helping to rejuvenate SMU with new communications strategies and contemporary formats of curating and care work that attract a diverse queer and feminist crowd.

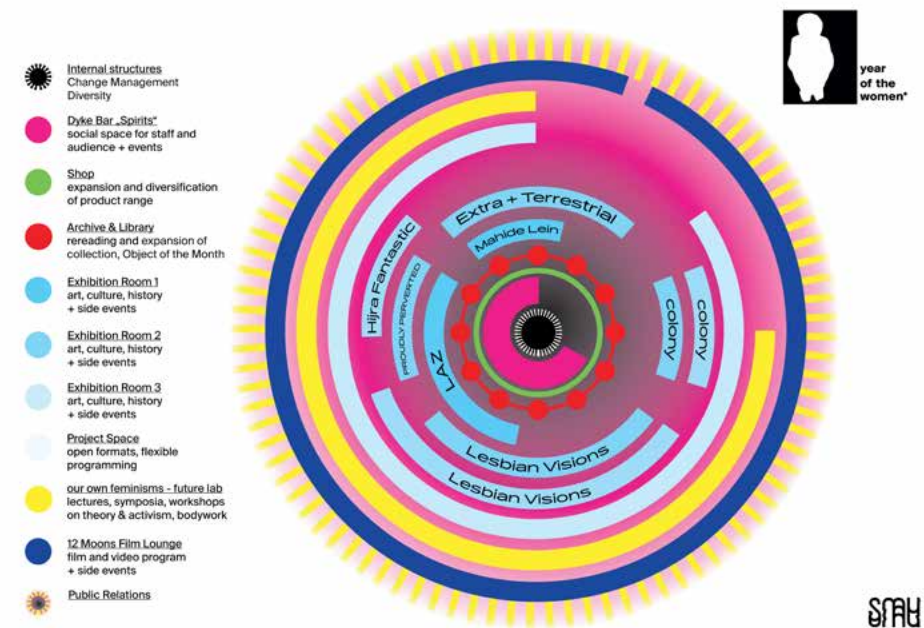


Fig. 23  
The curatorial framework of the "Year of the Women\*" at the Schwules Museum Berlin, 2018

6 Sara Ahmed, "Snap! Feminist Moments, Feminist Movements," *Feminist Killjoys* (blog), May 21, 2017, <https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/05/21/snap/>.

7 Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 190.



## Moons and Dykes

The museum's four exhibition rooms, café, shop, archive, library, PR tools, and the administrative level were our "medium" for this deep dive into change management and diversity work. We orchestrated a complex curatorial architecture that challenged common operational modes. Within the exhibition area, we started redistributing the curatorial and definitional sovereignty away from the auctorial position of the (predominantly male) curator toward a broader spectrum of expressions. We invited collectives and individuals from WLINT\* subcultures and communities as curators or cocurators. We formed new, more diverse teams among our staff. Our intent was to afford agency to people usually overlooked in terms of institutional recognition. We cared about promoting topics that have been historically omitted. We did not care about stacking our teams with big names for the sake of art-world merit. At this time, the SMU did not yet have a community of WLINT\* regularly visiting, engaging with, or supporting its activities. On the contrary, it had gained a reputation for being exclusionary and inaccessible to more marginalized

Fig. 24  
Opening night of the dyke bar SPIRITS, 2018



queer communities, especially those of color. A significant amount of labor was required from us as curators to reach a point of mutual respect and safety where individuals felt able to participate in a program situated in a gay-cis-male-dominated space. Consequently, almost all components of the projects were newly commissioned. We aimed at curating an overall program as multifaceted as feminism itself, with different aspects complementing, confusing, and complicating each other. The publicly accessible part of the project consisted of classic exhibition formats around the history, culture, and art of WLINT\* with side events to further enrich the exhibitions. Year-long formats included a film lounge, the conversion of the museum's cafe into a dyke bar, and an empowerment series around feminisms with discussions, symposia, lectures, and somatics workshops. In total, we managed nine exhibitions, over seventy events, and forty guided tours. To give examples of some of the formats, and to speak with direct knowledge about them, we present here a few that we curated ourselves.

Modifying the museum café, traditionally a space dominated by gay cis male cultural signifiers, into a lesbian bar was one of the most demanding projects. While a traditional exhibit about dyke bars in historical and cultural contexts might have been easier to realize, we sought to approach this iconic safer space from lesbian history in a relational way. A whole team's efforts were necessary to convince the agitated old-established gay volunteers to accept the reconfiguration of "their" social space. Artist-curator Hofmann commissioned the international queer-feminist collective Ernest Ah, T Blank, and C Detrow, who contributed research knowledge of the worldwide disappearance of lesbian bars as well as their practical expertise in running a queer-feminist space in Berlin. Even though the tiny budget did not allow for an overall renovation, the atmosphere of the clean, black-and-white café was transformed. Conceptualized as a contemporary version of the lesbian bar, the installation referenced concepts in dyke history of the past decades, such as dating culture, collective resistance, cyberfeminism, and spirituality. The space's layout invited people to linger: between the meandering climbing plants on the walls, one could lounge on the sofa, drink a cup of freshly brewed witch's tea, and browse through the queer-feminist zines from hanging bookshelves protected by carnivorous plants. At the bar's galaxy-themed counter, flirty visitors sipped drinks named after feminist heroines. Tabletops were branded with slogans, signs, and codes from WLINT\* subcultures, and visitors were invited to continue writing herstory. The opening night of SPIRITS, "a dyke bar for queers, gender chameleons and other everydeities," was one of the best-attended events in the history of the SMU, attracting a very diverse audience. SPIRITS's double function as cultural-historical display and relational artwork, a space that provided information and created a platform, was not understood by everyone. While many audiences praised the project, all aspects of the installation—including its name, its politics, and its design—faced harsh, continuous criticism by others. The bar

became, in a way an exhibition could have never delivered, an enactment registering the cacophonous, messy herstory of the dyke bar, full of conflicts, vulnerabilities, and evolutionary steps.

Despite taking up the smallest space and working with one of the most easily accessible mediums, the 12 Moons Film Lounge served a very specific purpose: providing an ever-present feminist voice for every minute of the museum's opening hours. Attention went into the spatial installation, which was designed to encourage bodily interaction. Seating areas were arranged to provoke intimacy and proximity, in tension and harmony with the film programs presented. Artist-curator Hofmann and the designers Theo Démans and Caro Gießner came up with a queered spa-like cruising fantasy that housed a dense yearlong program of eighty-eight international queer-feminist films and video works organized into twelve themes, changing with every new moon. Extra care went into addressing and countering the gaps and exclusions within the "Year of the Women\*" programming, especially the inadequate representation of BIPOC and trans positions. The film programs broadened the perspectives and provided diversified contexts for the simultaneously running exhibitions. Toward this end, some programs were cocurated or taken over by guests: the TransFormations Trans\* Film Festival Berlin, with its BIPOC team, curated one Moon and established contacts with the Aks International Minorities Festival from Pakistan, who organized both the following program, with three films, and an additional exhibition that gave insight into the specific circumstances around their festival. That program and show ran alongside the exhibition "Hijra Fantastic" by artist Claudia Reiche, which she developed in cooperation with a *khwaja sara* community in Bangalore, India. Aspects of postcolonial critique became more tangible, and by engaging with the complexities of gender in South Asia, ruptures within the Western concept of transgender began to emerge.

One of the major shows of the "Year of the Women\*" was the exhibition "Lesbian Visions" curated by Birgit Bosold and the curator and social scientist Carina Klugbauer. It brought into view positions from WLINT\* artists across 100 years and displayed works by more than thirty artists across six generations. This presentation of a "hidden museum" of queer art from a nonhegemonic perspective was a milestone, and not only for the gay museum (*schwul* being a German word for gay). "Lesbian Visions" referenced legendary exhibition projects by feminist cultural activists, for instance, 1977's "Künstlerinnen International 1877-1977" (Female artists international 1877-1977) in West Berlin, and the *Verborgene Museum* (Hidden museum) which since 1986 has documented women's art in Berlin's state art collections. The show was also inspired by the groundbreaking "Great American Lesbian Art Show" in the Woman's Building, Los Angeles, in 1980. The exhibition not only protested male domination in the art world in general, and in the queer art world in particular, but also objected to common

Fig. 25  
Social media  
advertisement for the  
12 Moons Film  
Lounge, 2018



feminist art historiographies in which the crucial role of lesbian protagonists is largely ignored. The exhibition's utopian and melancholic affect followed lesbian forms of pleasure and experience as well as lesbian identities and lifestyles, recognizing the term "lesbian" in its broadest and most fluid sense. It presented well-known artists such as the Dadaist artist Hannah Höch or the sculptor and medallist Renée Sintenis, or recently rediscovered ones like painter Lotte Laserstein, and also dug up little-known artists such as the artist Gerda Rotermund and artists from the vibrant feminist art scene of 1970s and 1980s Berlin. By connecting them with contemporary positions, the show created and celebrated a queer-feminist family tree and was both a historical and a social project: young queer-feminist artists could encounter those who preceded them, and vice versa.



## Enduring in the Cracks

The program hit a nerve. From the very beginning, we were confronted with unexpectedly strong reactions of indignation and rejection. Attacks proliferated both online and off throughout the year. The rhetoric snowballed into absurd fantasies about the annihilation of gays in the museum by man-hating lesbians. We underestimated the broad acceptance of rampant sexism in the gay scene. What seems to have made this project so powerful and intimidating for some was the sharpness of the institutional critique we had raised from within. Had we not been in "second gender" positions of power, there would not have been such an angry attempt to discredit our identities and our competence.

What happened to us and our project is essentially the same dynamic found in resistance work against any form of supremacy. But being confronted with mysogynistic, transphobic, anti-queer, racist, and anti-postcolonial polemics from within our own community was especially shocking. The novelist and historian Sarah Schulman explains the dynamics of the LGBTQIA+ community's own version of supremacy as follows: "The transition of 'gay' from a severely oppressed, once broad category of people, to the more recent phenomenon of select sexual minority sectors getting access to the state's punishment apparatus, [is] often based in whiteness, citizenship, normalizing family roles, and HIV negativity. [...] Just as unresolved, formerly subordinated or traumatized individuals can collude with or identify with bullies, so can unresolved, formerly subordinated or traumatized groups of people identify with the supremacy of the state."<sup>8</sup> Research in social psychology reveals that (cis) men are more effective at calling out sexist behavior by other cis men than any other gender.<sup>9</sup> The lack of solidarity and public support from cis male protagonists was one of the biggest weaknesses of "Year of the Women\*." The project was originally meant to be a collective effort by the entire board and team, but very soon the situation changed. We were consistently pushed to the foreground with the argument: "You're the women, you're supposed to do that work." More and more men left the project as it dawned on them that doing diversity work is not the same as simply cheering it on. We lost not only important advocacy within the SMU but also a much-needed workforce that we were counting on, in order to be able to focus much more ourselves on processes, team building, and relational work, rather than operational fire extinguishing. This added enormously to our workload, meaning that we were unable to invest further time into the more delicate work of care and the implementation of broader structural diversity—for example, holding space for vulnerabilities around class, race, age, educational background, etc., which are quite disparate among our staff and audience and in the queer scenes. Queer theory and intersectional feminism can appear elusive and exclusionary to people without access to a mostly academicized, English-language-dominated discourse.

Doing diversity work means fighting supremacy within our communities and within ourselves. Alongside political analysis and direct action, we would suggest that organizations and communities attempting these projects focus much more on intentional care work. Finding resources and making space for discourses around mental health and how we are affected by each other would help to disassemble the underlying intra- and interpersonal dynamics of conflict. Undermining one's inferiors, for example, can become an individual coping mechanism to micromanage the lack of control over one's life; as activist organization Plan C sketch out, we have arrived in the capitalist phase of excessive anxiety paired with hopelessness, resulting in a "constant bodily excitation without release."<sup>10</sup> We need to gain knowledge of how our bodies cope, and of how we can de-escalate conflicts.

One of the most overlooked aspects of feminist and activist work is the allocation of resources: care expressed in economic means. Under capitalism, this is one of the primary leverages of achieving substantial structural change. The "Year of the Women\*" was the museum's first-ever fully funded yearlong program. To the best of our own and the museum's capacities and ethics, we raised funds and distributed them strategically and proportionally to the participants; additionally, we hired part-time support for project management and PR assistance. Of course, there is a lot of room for improvement, especially regarding income. We raised 125,000€, the maximum possible under the given circumstances, but only a quarter of the appropriate budget for a project of this scope. This led to us and some others donating their curatorial work, which is problematic: such work should be compensated and not left for those who have other sources of income. Alongside political demands for sufficient funding for the arts and culture, we need to fight for paid positions for care workers like diversity managers, social workers, or conflict managers in institutions. Otherwise, diversity work is not sustainably manageable, which means it inevitably becomes extra unpaid labor for women and other marginalized groups.

One year on, there has been significant change at the SMU. 2018 was the most successful year in the history of the museum in terms of attendances, income, and inclusion of new audiences, colleagues, and collaborators. The working atmosphere has changed significantly, and in September 2018 the members of the association voted by significant margins for an all queer-feminist board of directors. We gained a lot of respect for our endurance and professionalism.

8 Sara Schulman, *Conflict Is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016), 13.  
9 Benjamin J. Drury and Cheryl R. Kaiser, "Allies against Sexism: The Role of Men in

Confronting Sexism," *Journal of Social Issues* 70, no. 4 (2014), 637–52.  
10 Institute for Precarious Consciousness, "We Are All Very Anxious," Plan C, April 4, 2014, <https://www.weareplanc.org/blog/we-are-all-very-anxious/#f1>.



Now, in 2020, we have finally reached a point where we can openly talk about racism and introduce measures within all levels of the organization that are still too white and too male. We cannot yet say whether the “Year of the Women\*” was merely another tokenistic project or whether its politics can or will be sustained at the SMU. This is a collective responsibility, not solely the work of women and marginalized groups. Fundamental change requires the *co-labor-ation* of allies.

People ask us if we would do it again. Put succinctly, this is what we have learned: Build a good team of fierce and competent feminists. Find cis male allies. Fundraise enough and distribute wisely. Learn nonviolent communication and self-regulation. Negotiate and commit. Get ready to snap. Dare it, do it! Learn to rest, not to quit. Be accountable. Lift each other up and cross the finish line together. Don’t forget aftercare.

Fig. 26  
The opening ritual, Sadie Lune setting up her tools in the exhibition on gay male cruising, 2018

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# From “Women See Women” to “Witch Courses”—Caring Archivism

Chantal Küng

In 2016, I met the art educator, feminist, and witch Doris Stauffer (1934–2017) in Zurich. This encounter marked the beginning of a short but intense friendship that consisted mostly of me visiting her for coffee or dinner, and us talking till late at night; I was very interested in her activities in art education and the feminist “Hexenkurse” (Witch Courses) she organized in the 1970s. Unfortunately, our exchange ended with Stauffer’s sudden death in 2017. From that moment on, I started working with Stauffer’s archive as a theorist, researcher, artist, and art educator. This contribution discusses two case studies of feminist art education and curating that she was involved in forty years before we met: the group show “Frauen sehen Frauen” (Women See Women) and the “Witch Courses.”

These two examples will lead to investigations into different aspects of care and caring that took place in her practice and shape the ways that I relate to them in my research. One aspect is the care for feminist pasts that takes place by attending to archives and (hi)stories. I do not think of taking care as “maintaining” or “being gentle” to feminist pasts, but rather critically revisiting them, or as the American feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad puts it, “to respond, to be responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit (from the past and the future).”<sup>1</sup> This approach is traceable in the ways I attend to Stauffer’s archive and in the research that took place within the “Witch Courses” on witches and witch hunts. Another aspect is care as a healing practice, for which the “wise women” and midwives were persecuted during the witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,<sup>2</sup> one of the reasons being that their practices deviated from standardized Western medicinal knowledge. The self-proclaimed witches of Stauffer’s “Witch Courses,” on the other hand, saw witchcraft as a form of healing from patriarchal oppression and exploitation. A further aspect is care as domestic work or reproductive labor, referred to artistically in the exhibition “Women See Women” in Zurich; this collective exhibition-making also brings into play curating as a practice of care. One more aspect refers to the way in which feminist-activist educational and curatorial practices may aim to provide care to collectives and individuals, communities, endangered species, bodies, stories, and knowledges by building spaces for collective care and learning from the past through activating the archives.

<sup>1</sup> Karen Barad, “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come,” *Derrida Today*, no. 32 (2010): 264.

<sup>2</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2014), 184.



## "Women See Women," or Collective Curating as Caring

The group show "Women See Women" was a multilayered project that took place in 1975 in the Zurich municipal gallery Strauhof.<sup>3</sup> It can be seen as influenced by the "Womanhouse" project initiated by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro.<sup>4</sup> With regular get-togethers taking place for almost a year, the thirty-four all-female participants established key themes for the exhibition and formed working groups around specific topics. The themes they were interested in were social roles and stereotypes, care work, occupation, and eroticism. In the participants' own words: "To explore these themes, different media were used artistically: film, photography, sound and slide shows, images, objects and environments. All contributions were created specifically for this exhibition."<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 27  
Group picture of "Women See Women" participants,  
with Doris Stauffer on the far right, 1975

The aim of the organizers of "Women See Women" to gather and work collectively and exclusively amongst women is deeply connected to the political struggles of that time. Working collectively meant questioning the author as a patriarchal figure of the genius. The German art historian and curator Dorothee Richter sees the need "to see the revolutionary movements of the '60s like Fluxus, Happenings, *Womanhouse*, and other feminist group works embedded in a struggle for new forms of communities, new forms of working together, new forms of meaning production/organization that would be later called curating."<sup>6</sup> The cultural theorist and curator Elke Krasny, too, points out that the term "curating" arose later on and wasn't used at the time: "Most of the organizers of these early feminist group exhibitions were artists who acted as what we have come to call curators. At the time, the initiators referred to their exhibition-making activities as organizing, compiling or putting together."<sup>7</sup> If we decide to, in hindsight, call the activities of the "Women See Women" participants curating, then the connection between curating and caring becomes important. This link has often been emphasized, especially the etymological root of "curating" in the Latin word *curare*, to care, as Krasny points out.<sup>8</sup> The collective work of "Women See Women" can therefore be understood as a way of caring for the topics that were usually not cared about within the exhibitional frames of that time—one of them being the societal distribution and attribution of care work. What is striking about the "Women See Women" project, too, is that not only were the works created and curated, or "cared for," collectively, but that no individual authorship was revealed: the participants' names were only listed in the *Einmaliger Katalog* (an exhibition catalogue in an edition of one, with the title also translating as "one-of-a-kind catalogue").

- 3 As I write this in 2020, there is an exhibition at Strauhof, curated by Bice Curiger and Stefan Zweifel that takes up the legacy of "Women See Women," showing archival material and oral-history interviews as well as original works from the 1975 exhibition. See the catalogue, Bice Curiger and Stefan Zweifel, eds., *Ausbruch und Rausch: Frauen Kunst Punk 1975–1980* (Zurich: Edition Patrick Frey, 2020).
- 4 "Womanhouse" took place in 1972 and was organized by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro as part of the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts. Together with students, they transformed an empty house into a site-specific exhibition about women's roles.
- 5 Self-portrayal of the Strauhof collective, in *Focus*, no. 61 (March 1975): 42, in *Doris*

*Stauffer: A Monograph*, ed. Simone Koller and Mara Züst (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2015), 107.

- 6 Dorothee Richter, "Feminist Perspectives on Curating," *OnCurating*, no. 29 (May 2016): 64–76.
- 7 Elke Krasny, "Redrawing the Lines Between Art, History, Movements and Politics: Toward a Feminist Historiography of Exhibition-Making and Curating," in *No One Belongs Here More than You. The Living Archive: Curating Feminist Knowledge*, ed. Jelena Petrović et al. (Belgrade: Cultural Centre of Belgrade, 2014), 175.
- 8 Elke Krasny, "Caring Activism: Assembly, Collection, and the Museum," in *Collecting in Time* (Leipzig: GfzK – Galerie für zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig, 2017), <http://collecting-in-time.gfzk.de/en>.

The "Women See Women" exhibition therefore wasn't only extraordinary by combining activist and feminist topics with artistic strategies; it explicitly questioned the dominant male gaze on and upon women not only in its title but also in the works themselves. The visualization and communication of the "female everyday"—be it domestic labor and care work or social stereotypes and abortions—was collectively planned and realized. This collective exhibition brought forth two aspects of care: gendered and invisibilized care work and collective curating-as-caring.

### The "Witch Courses": Experimental Tasks and Feminist Research on Witch Hunts

In 1977, following her involvement in "Women See Women," Doris Stauffer started conducting so-called "Witch Courses" at the F+F School for Experimental Design in Zurich.<sup>9</sup> The "Witch Courses" addressed women from diverse professional fields; no previous artistic education was needed: "We will investigate feminism and creativity, the male-oriented concept of culture, sexist tendencies in art. We will discover and realize our concepts of language, our concerns, and what we as women have to communicate."<sup>10</sup> The first "Witch Course" was booked out in no time, and Stauffer had to offer more. Starting in 1978, she opened her own space, the Frauenwerkstatt (Women's Workshop), where she continued organizing "Witch Courses" externally.<sup>11</sup> The courses consisted of tasks such as "role playing," "slide projected onto body," "appropriate ads," or "I can," through which the women reflected upon their social roles and their bodies with artistic and activist practices. "It was a revelation," says one of the former students about the "Witch Courses" she attended. "I also saw it as a kind of research, [...] personal research but as well on the situation of women, on society as a whole, historical research."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the courses also consisted of researching the historical and political aspects of the figure of the witch. It is no coincidence that the women identified with this figure when it came to understanding the ways in which their labor power and their bodies had been subjugated to capitalism. The Italian and American scholar, teacher, and activist Silvia Federici explains that the witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had targeted the female control over reproduction and the female body, as many of the persecuted were "wise women," midwives, and healers: "Just as the Enclosures expropriated the peasantry from the communal land, so the witch-hunt expropriated women from their bodies."<sup>13</sup> Claiming that reproductive work is equal to productive work, as the Wages for Housework campaign did in the 1970s,<sup>14</sup> and that women need to reclaim their bodies, as they did in the "Witch Courses," can be understood in line with the expropriation of women from their knowledge, their bodies, and control over reproduction that began with the witch hunts and the rise of capitalism.



Fig. 28  
View into one of the peep boxes of *Patriarchal Panopticon*, Doris Stauffer's contribution to "Women See Women," Strauhof, Zurich, 1975

- 9 Stauffer was a cofounder of the self-organized art school F+F School for Experimental Design, initiated in 1971.
- 10 "3 ferienkurse der f+f" (3 holiday courses at the F+F) announcement, 1977, in Koller and Züst, *Doris Stauffer: A Monograph*, 105.
- 11 For almost a year, Suzanne Dietler, a former participant, co-organized the courses.

- 12 Tilly Bütler, during the witness seminar for *doris, how does a witch learn?* (dir. Chantal Küng, 2019, 48 min.), Rote Fabrik, Zurich, January 26, 2019.
- 13 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 184.
- 14 See Silvia Federici and Arlen Austin, eds., *Wages for Housework: The New York Committee 1972-1977: History, Theory, Documents* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2017).





Fig. 29  
Women from the Women's Workshop, ca. 1978

Doris Stauffer and the “Witch Courses” participants weren’t alone in these investigations; they were part of a larger feminist movement in the 1970s that was reclaiming and theorizing the term “witch” and researching and reevaluating the witch hunts. In her course notes, Stauffer refers to the women in the streets of Rome who first chanted the slogan “Tremate, tremate, le streghe son tornate” (Tremble, tremble, the witches have returned) on March 8, 1976,<sup>15</sup> and to the book *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses*, written by the American author and political activist Barbara Ehrenreich and the former editor of *Mother Jones* and journalist Deirdre English.<sup>16</sup> These two references are also mentioned by Federici, who, “directly inspired by the debates and the politics of the feminist movement,” started studying the witch hunts “as part of a broader project of trying to understand the historical roots of gender-based discrimination,” as she states in an interview with the curator and critic Anna Colin in the book *Witches: Hunted, Appropriated, Empowered, Queered*.<sup>17</sup> There has been a resurgence of the topic in queer-feminist theory, politics, and culture in the past few years,<sup>18</sup> showing a discourse around witches that has considerably changed since the 1970s, and observing new witch hunts taking place in the postcolonial world.<sup>19</sup>

## Past and Future Spaces of Collective (Self-)Care

The “Witch Courses” can be understood not only as a place for collective political and artistic research on the role of the women in society or the historical importance of the witch hunts, but also as an educational practice emphasizing self-care—though self-care thought of as a form of caring that expands toward the self and others, not in a neoliberal sense, but in a way that may relate to the American author, professor, feminist, and social activist bell hooks’s “engaged pedagogy.” hooks explains the need for teachers to “be committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students.”<sup>20</sup> If we choose to look at self-care from this perspective, where it is seen as an effort of self-actualization that is needed for the empowerment of others, it can become a political force.<sup>21</sup> In this vein, care ethicist and professor of political science Fiona Robinson writes: “As an antidote to the values of neoliberalism, care must be recognized as a social responsibility, an attribute of citizenship, and a basis of feminist solidarity.”<sup>22</sup> If we think of the “Witch Courses” from such a politicized perspective of care, they can be interpreted as a place where women were able to practice collective self-care that served their empowerment.

But how can we relate to these practices today? Together with students in curatorial studies, fine arts, and art education programs, I have been activating Stauffer’s archive in workshops and seminars,<sup>23</sup> trying to approach the archival material and historical practices from a contemporary, queer-feminist, and inter-

15 Bia Sarasini, “Tremate. Tremate le streghe son tornate: Storia di uno slogan,” *Respect—Il diritto delle donne* (blog), April 4, 2016, <https://ildirittodelledonnerespect.blogspot.com/2016/03/tremate-tremate-le-streghe-son-tornate.html>.

16 Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Woman Healers* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1973).

17 Silvia Federici, “Primitive Accumulation and Witch-Hunts: Past and Present,” interview by Anna Colin, in *Witches: Hunted, Appropriated, Empowered, Queered*, ed. Anna Colin (Paris: Ed. B42, 2014), 41.

18 One recent attempt to gather contemporary artistic positions surrounding the figure of the witch has been the exhibition “Magic Circle” (curated by Katharina Brandl and Daniela Brugger, Kunstraum Niederösterreich, Vienna, March–May 2018), where Mara Züst and I organized the performance workshop “Le streghe

son tornate or Activating the Archive,” which aimed at fostering an intergenerational exchange surrounding the topic by inviting women of different generations to choose a book from Stauffer’s archive and tell their own story related to it.

19 Federici, interview by Colin, 45.  
20 bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 16.

21 Or as Audre Lorde famously stated, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

22 Fiona Robinson, “Care Ethics, Political Theory and the Future of Feminism,” in *Care Ethics and Political Theory*, ed. Daniel Engster and Maurice Hamington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 308.

23 The seminar “Activating the Archive—Teamwork,” F+F School for Art and Design, Zurich, 2019.



sectional point of view. The need to critically examine the viability of Stauffer's approaches regarding race, class, and gender in the current cultural context led us, for example, to develop a "contemporary" witch workshop.<sup>24</sup>

Thinking of the practices of the "Women See Women" participants, we should be inspired to abandon curatorial and artistic authorship for collective, non-hierarchical modes of organization and production. Furthermore, "Women See Women" inspires us to focus on combining activist, educational, and artistic work that addresses a broader public than the usual visitors of museums and galleries and provides spaces and tools for taking care of threatened and vulnerable communities. In this respect, the feminist and political theorist Joan Tronto writes: "Care is a central concern of human life. It is time that we began to change our political and social institutions to reflect this truth."<sup>25</sup> If we relate this to Doris Stauffer's "Witch Courses," we come to think of spaces that are something in between exhibition, safe space,<sup>26</sup> studio, workshop, and school, places where self-care can be collectively practiced and become a strategy of resistance and empowerment. These should be spaces where research on queer-feminist and activist pasts and (hi)stories is possible, and where subjugated or suppressed knowledges can be gathered and shared by the affected communities themselves, in "institutions" they create themselves.<sup>27</sup> And finally, we need to create spaces where collective imaginary journeys can take place and futures can be, with care, imagined otherwise.

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25 Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 180.

26 Tilly Bütler, in hindsight, describes the "Witch Courses" in the Women's Workshop as a "safe space."

27 Which makes me think of the symposium at the Schwules Museum Berlin, for which I first developed this contribution.

# Bold Characters Motherhood and Censorship in Chinese Art and Curating

Julia Hartmann

Care and motherhood are complexly entangled in many parts of the world. This essay mobilizes artworks with a relation to mainland China to look at the charged territory of motherhood as it is related to care by political doctrines, heteronormative social conventions, and long-held Confucian gender roles. For women who were born in and after the 1970s, their mothers had experienced two different socialist histories: first, the imposed gender assimilation during the Mao era (1949–76), and along with it, the triple burden of being a wife, a mother, and a revolutionary; and following this, starting with the Open Door Policy in the 1980s, the capitalist politics that reinforced traditional gender roles. Since then, Chinese women have been scrutinized under the one-child policy—and since 2015, the two-child policy—while also facing the reemergence of Confucian gender roles. Motherhood as a state affair has thus precipitated phenomena such as the “tiger mom,” the highly educated stay-at-home mom, or the “leftover woman,” as well as a major change from forced abortions to strict anti-abortion laws. This article explores the various roles and expectations of mothers in contemporary China, as the political, social, and cultural shifts since the Mao era have been influential on a generation of artists and curators that started to practice art in the 1990s. In China, the public representation and discourse on womanhood and motherhood have been vastly regulated, surveilled, and eventually (self-)censored, as exemplified by the Tiananmen Mothers. In addressing not only the circumvention of state-enforced restrictions but also the unprecedented agency and empowerment among women, I hope to demonstrate how artists tackle the nexus of motherhood and care in China, using the self-proclaimed feminist art collective Bald Girls<sup>1</sup> and their eponymous exhibition project as a case study in this article. Finally, highlighting two artworks included in the exhibition should bring to light what challenges contemporary curating and art-making face when dealing with topics that defy traditional gender roles, state-led norms of care, and public expectations of mothers. Ultimately, it is a bold stance these artists are taking.

## Tiananmen Mothers

To start with, any critical voice against the government is regarded as a threat to national stability in China, and thus dissidents, feminists, activists, or outspoken citizens are routinely controlled or censored. One case in point is a group of mothers formed after the Tiananmen Square crackdown in Beijing on June 4, 1989, in order to hold the Chinese state accountable for their actions and to mourn their losses publicly. The so-called Tiananmen Mothers is comprised of over 100 mothers of protestors who lost their lives during the violent crackdown.

<sup>1</sup> I use the terms “feminist art” and “feminist artist” solely in context of the Bald Girls, as many artists in China distance

themselves from Western ideas of feminism and reject the categorization of their work as feminist art.

Even thirty years later, those still mourning their losses and demanding the truth about the “incident” face police surveillance, receive threats, and constantly fear imprisonment.<sup>2</sup> Thus, I would argue that although empathy, solidarity, and care allegedly endanger social stability in the eyes of the Chinese authorities, the unwavering quest for justice and their “call to care” demonstrate an uncommon agency and a rarely demonstrated public empowerment among women.

## Wives, Mothers, Revolutionaries

In retrospect, however, this kind of collective agency has remained rather unprecedented in Chinese history. Until the end of the nineteenth century, motherhood was irrefutably linked to nationhood. The maternal role was not highlighted in the classical canon of the five human relationships that regulated social life,<sup>3</sup> which had been the foundation of Confucian society for the previous centuries, and even female didactic texts solely highlighted the status of women as the bearers and rearers of children, without taking the relationship between child and mother into account. According to the Canadian historian Joan Judge, they were regarded as “mothers-of-citizens”: Chinese women were called upon to raise not only patriotic offspring but the nation itself.<sup>4</sup> It was not until 1911, when the Qing era and imperialism ended, that China experienced its most profound shifts in gender politics, as from that time onward, traditional roles of men and women were challenged by intellectuals and self-proclaimed feminists. Proponents of the New Culture Movement (1915–25) were convinced that traditional Confucian values had to be discarded in order to create a modern China and connect to the rest of the world. Furthermore, an increasing public awareness of women’s issues caused an unprecedented wave of activism and resulted in women stepping out into the public sphere to receive education and enter the workforce. “With more women entering the workforce, the issues of household responsibilities, mothering, and motherhood would be considered as potential sites where early Chinese feminism could challenge and work toward,” as the Australian art historian and writer Phyllis Teo pointed out.<sup>5</sup> From 1949 onward, China transformed into a communist country and socialist society, which challenged the situation of women, as entirely new institutions and policies were instigated that supposedly made women equal to men.<sup>6</sup> The Communist Party installed a kind of state feminism that reinstated the construct of *funü*, a term referring to a collective subject that represented “all politically normative or decent women.”<sup>7</sup> Chinese state feminism diminished the boundary between gendered domestic and public spheres, erased stereotypical representations of women as the sexualized “other,” and enabled women to participate equally in political work. Eventually, these ramifications manifested themselves as a “triple burden” for women, who were expected to be wife, mother, and revolutionary.<sup>8</sup>

## Leftover Women vs. Tiger Moms

Ever since the Mao era ended, the ideological belief that women are born to be wives and mothers has been perpetuated, even though their status in society eventually changed after the Open Door Policy was instigated by the Chinese politician Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s. Women could be represented “as the busy professional mother, the financially comfortable domestic manager, the pretty and endlessly available companion to a busy husband, or the diligent educator of a growing child.”<sup>9</sup> The new ideal woman was gentle and soft, obedient to her husband, considerate of his needs—the image of the caring wife and mother had popular appeal once again. She was nevertheless scrutinized further under the one-child policy, which regulated population growth by ordering parents to have one child only, or face financial, social, or violent repercussions. Since 2015, on the contrary, the two-child policy gives incentives to families to reproduce, as the population is majority male and getting increasingly older because of the one-child policy. All in all, it is the mother who is responsible for the child(ren)’s welfare and maternal care, which is regarded as the foundation of their success. This can be observed in the discourse on and visual representation of womanhood and motherhood in the media, throughout which stereotypical images of the stay-at-home mom, the tiger mom, and the leftover woman are publicly distributed. As the American journalist, writer, and sociologist Leta Hong Fincher described in her eponymous book, leftover women—educated, unmarried women over the age of twenty-seven—“do not exist. They are a category of women concocted by the government to achieve its demographic goals of promoting marriage, planning population, and maintaining social stability.”<sup>10</sup> In contrast, the concept of the tiger mom can be traced back to ancient Confucian teachings of mothering that demand high levels of academic achievement, respect, and discipline from their child(ren),

- 2 Ludovic Ehret and Eva Xiao, “‘Unimaginable’: 30 Years on, Families of Tiananmen Dead Demand Truth,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, June 2, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/06/02/unimaginable-30-years-families-tiananmen-dead-demand-truth/>.
- 3 These relationships were between ruler and subjects, father and son, husband and wife, among brothers, and among friends.
- 4 Joan Judge, *The Precious Raft of History: The Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 115.
- 5 Phyllis Teo, “Maternal Ambivalence in Pan Yuliang’s Paintings,” *Yishu—Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 9, no. 3 (2010): 46.

- 6 Mao Zedong popularly announced that “women hold up half the sky” and that “what men can do, women can do.”
- 7 Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 38.
- 8 Harriet Evans, “Past, Perfect and Imperfect: Changing Images of the Ideal Wife,” in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 339.
- 9 Evans, 440.
- 10 Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2016), 6.

and has become highly popularized images of mothering once again.<sup>11</sup> Another state-manufactured trope is the dedicated stay-at-home mom, who, even though she is academically educated, nevertheless devotes her life to her family instead of her career.<sup>12</sup> What I want to demonstrate is that up until the beginning of the twenty-first century, motherhood in China had been defined within a tight state-led, conservative, and controlled framework and its stereotypical representations distributed via state media. Consequently, whether a woman is childless, is a single parent, practices alternatives to Confucian mothering, is a working mom, bears less than two children, becomes a mother in her later years, or unites with other mothers, any challenges to a woman's state-defined role is deemed too radical—and thus, I argue, bold.



Fig. 30  
"Bald Girls," Iberia Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2012, exhibition view

## Bald Girls

If we take a closer look at the contemporary Chinese art scene, female artists and curators have been facing similar restrictive frameworks. Since the 1990s, women's art was commonly associated with issues that "are primarily those of housing, living quarters, marriage, children, and the harmonious cohabitation of couples—issues that arose in the face of the emergence of the urban middle class and the stresses triggered by this social transition."<sup>13</sup> Women's art is generally perceived from an essentializing and patronizing view, which numerous artists and curators—such as the Bald Girls, China's self-proclaimed first feminist art collective—are working to counteract. It consists of the three artists Li Xinmo, Xiao Lu, and Jiny Lan, and the curator Juan Xu, and in 2012, they organized their first exhibition, "Bald Girls," at the Iberia Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing,<sup>14</sup> in which they addressed feminism and gender identity.

In order to demonstrate the "boldness" of these four protagonists, I want to start with Juan Xu's viewpoint on the feasibility of feminist curating in China: "Bald Girls is more than an exhibition, it represents a fight against sexism. Let us hope that the people who see this exhibition retain some of its meaning. Iberia has taken a bold stance."<sup>15</sup> This "boldness" was eventually challenged when police officers rushed into the exhibition space shortly before the opening and confiscated paintings that were deemed too radical (because of nudity or profanity). The show was kept open, but this reaction exemplifies how art is perpetually censored when it deviates from the normative expectations of women. "The political situation is getting worse. Today, I wouldn't be able to organize this show in China, which also signifies that feminism as a political movement is taken very seriously," Xu told me in a 2019 conversation. In her preface to the exhibition catalogue, she declared that the collective wanted to challenge conventional and time-honored gender roles in China.<sup>16</sup>

- 11 The notion of the tiger mom has been widespread in China since Amy Chua's book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* was published in 2011. See Ranjoo Seodu Herr, "Confucian Mothering: The Origin of Tiger Mothering?," in *Feminist Encounters with Confucius*, ed. Mathew A. Foust and Sor-hoon Tan (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 40–68.
- 12 "Stay-at-Home or Working Mom?," *China Daily*, last updated August 14, 2015, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2015-08/14/content\\_21588439.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2015-08/14/content_21588439.htm).
- 13 Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 24.

- 14 The exhibition was restaged at the Women's Museum in Bonn and at the Fundación Lia in Bogotá, both in 2014, where the curator and the artists presented feminist issues from a Chinese perspective in a European and a Latin American environment.
- 15 Juan Xu, "Bald Girls," accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.juanxucurator.com/bald-girls-iberia-center-2012.html>.
- 16 Juan Xu, preface to *Bald Girls—Exhibition of Xiao Lu, Li Xinmo and Lan Jiny*, ed. Juan Xu (Beijing: Iberia Center for Contemporary Art, 2012), 4.

In the following, I will highlight works by two of the artists, Li Xinmo and Xiao Lu, who have tackled the topics of motherhood and care in unprecedented ways.

## Bold Characters

Li Xinmo's contribution to "Bald Girls" was titled *Woman* and, in my view, epitomized radicalness not only within a feminist art tradition but moreover within the history of Chinese art. Li incorporates her personal experience as a single mother living in China in such a frank way that she is hardly able to publicly exhibit her works in her home country. They draw on aspects of motherhood and get at the root causes of discrimination against single mothers found in long-standing cultural and societal traditions. She told me in a personal conversation: "The issue of being a single mother in China has always been neglected. Chinese people think that motherhood and raising a child on one's own is not a social problem but a personal one. They believe that women are in this situation because of their own wrong-doing and bad personality." In her painting series *Woman* (2009–11), Li criticizes this public opinion by using menstrual blood: "As the vast majority cannot accept blood paintings, even many artists cannot understand. They think that such artworks are too extreme."

Being a single mother herself has thus changed not only her own status within Chinese society but also her approach toward making art. Li further commented: "After being a mother, especially a single mother, I feel more deeply about the situation of women in this society. I now really understand what gender inequality is. Single mothers are neither supported nor understood in China. They have to bear the multiple pressures of society, work, and childcare. I understand feminism as the experience of life, therefore, I'm constantly myself, strong, and [do] not live in the eyes of others."<sup>17</sup>

Li unabashedly and honestly exemplifies how maternity is heavily policed and censored in China and moreover how the maternal body is thought to be obscene, monstrous, or extreme, and therefore too radical to be showcased publicly. In my opinion, she has become a beacon in Chinese feminist art, as she not only exemplifies maternity as a radical act of caring but also empowers herself and others, using motherhood as a source of power and subversiveness. Xuan Ju commented: "In China, the rights of women are still 'medieval.' Li, for instance, had to enter a scam marriage with a man so her newborn son would have fundamental rights in his home country."<sup>18</sup>

Another beacon is Xiao Lu,<sup>19</sup> who is one of the few self-proclaimed feminist artists in China. In the "Bald Girls" exhibition, she presented the video and installation work *Sperm* (2006), in which she documents her search for a sperm donor and her quest for in-vitro fertilization treatment as a single woman.



Fig. 31  
Li Xinmo,  
*Woman*,  
2009–11

<sup>17</sup> Li Xinmo, conversation with the author on WeChat, September 29, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Xuan Ju, conversation with the author on WeChat, September 29, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Xiao Lu became well-known in 1989, when she fired a gun at her installation *Dialogue* at the "China/Avant-Garde Exhibition" in Beijing.



Fig. 32  
Xiao Lu, *Sperm*, 2006

The work addresses her strong desire to become a mother without a father and thus to counteract heteronormative family constellations. “Standing for the source of life and esteem of the body, sperm, according to the public ethics, should not be given away carelessly and it has to be related to private promise and family bond.”<sup>20</sup> In the video, we see her consulting a Western doctor—in China only married women are entitled to undergo fertility treatment—and her open call for sperm at an art event, which also manifests in the various pieces included in the installation, like a temperature-control machine and liquid nitrogen jars. Even though Xiao failed to get pregnant, she raised awareness about state legislature that prevents single women from becoming parents—leaving them to the fate of the leftover woman.

All in all, the exhibition “Bald Girls” called for a general rethinking of the idealized family archetype as well as a reimagining of stereotypical assumptions of mothering, or of being “leftover”—if one does not fit into conventional tropes like the competitive tiger mom or the happy stay-at-home mom. Particularly, Li Xinmo’s and Xiao Lu’s works take a bold stance against the restrictions on a woman’s individual right to define her role as a woman and a (single) mother. In this article, I tried to demonstrate how challenging societal expectations, political doctrines, and heteronormativity might be deemed too radical and hence face censorship in China. As a scholar based in the West, I am aware that I might be putting these purportedly “radical” curators and artists in the spotlight of censors once again. I am therefore ever more grateful that Xiao Lu, Juan Xu, Jiny Lan, and Li Xinmo—and many other artists in China and abroad—are continuing to discuss issues of motherhood and other sensitive topics concerning women’s rights. Ultimately, their boldness is a definitive quality of feminist artists and curators in China.

<sup>20</sup> Hao Qingsong, “Commitment and Practice in Female Performance Art: Political Perspective in Bald Girls,” in Xu, *Bald Girls*, 123.



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# “Gender, Genitor, Genitalia” — Rokudenashiko Tribute Exhibition in Hong Kong

Hitomi Hasegawa

In July 2014, the Japanese artist Megumi Igarashi, also known as Rokudenashiko, was arrested in Tokyo for distributing 3-D images of her vagina and accused of violating Japanese obscenity laws. She was released a few days later, then arrested again in December for exhibiting her “Decoman” (Decorated vagina) series (2014). Minori Kitahara, the Japanese radical feminist and shop owner who had exhibited Rokudenashiko’s works, was arrested at the same time, but she agreed to a summary indictment from the prosecutors and to pay a fine; she was released immediately. This is a normal practice when accused of violating the obscenity law—it is faster and easier to accept the charge and pay. In contrast, Rokudenashiko never admitted guilt. She argued that the vagina was at the center of her artistic expression and that the works were not obscene. Her art was not a prank, but represented a sincere desire to contribute to society. Rokudenashiko believes the vagina is kept hidden compared to the penis, and she began working with this theme to liberate women from the impression that their vaginas are somehow “dirty.” In April 2015, Rokudenashiko’s trial began, where she and her group of attorneys denied the obscenity charges and argued against the censorship of artistic expression. They pointed



Fig. 33  
“Gender, Genitor, Genitalia,” 2015, exhibition view

out the Japanese law's double standard allowing the proliferation of pornographic cartoons while singling out her works of art.<sup>1</sup> If found guilty, she could have been fined up to ¥2,500,000 (21,500€).

When I heard about this, I decided that I, a woman working in the art world, had to do something to help Rokudenashiko. I had a rough idea that the project should focus on the vagina itself and digital obscenity. As we cannot show works of art depicting the vagina in Japan, I planned an exhibition in Hong Kong, where I live.<sup>2</sup> However, although planning such a project was possible in Hong Kong, it was still difficult to receive funding and gain the support of public art centers. I decided to arrange a crowdfunding campaign for the project,<sup>3</sup> and located an independent exhibition space. The campaign didn't raise the full amount needed, but it was enough. We sold Rokudenashiko's little vagina toys at the exhibition to raise money in support of her trial. All earnings went to the artist. For the exhibition, I focused on three categories of artworks: works that directly refer to vaginas; works from Hong Kong and Japan that deal with feminism; and works related to the subject of digital obscenity, dealing with Internet culture, sexual desire, and the male gaze. In relation to the Rokudenashiko incident, this exhibition examined feminism and digital obscenity within both the Hong Kong and Japanese contexts. Together with these pieces and extra information provided about the case, it might be interesting to rethink the relationship between feminism and genitalia, both culturally and politically, in Japan and Hong Kong. More generally, it is significant to hold a feminist exhibition with comparatively young artists in Asia, as few shows have been held on this topic in Asian countries.

In April 2017, Rokudenashiko visited the Tokyo High Court. The court upheld the lower court's decision that found her guilty of obscenity for transmitting the 3-D data and ordered her to pay a fine. The high court also agreed with the lower court that the "Decoman" sculptures were not obscene because they did not sexually stimulate viewers. Some think this is a historical victory, albeit a partial one. The guilty verdict for digital obscenity might have been a measure to prevent future crimes using digital distribution. The judges involved in the case may have been reluctant to render a not-guilty verdict in order to avoid creating a judicial precedent.

Such reasoning would be understandable, but I think there are two things we must consider: First, what is an obscene digital object? Second, there is a very wide gap between the Japanese authorities' treatment of artists and their reactions to the porn industry. Japan's adult video industry is twice as large as that of the United States, and worth more than \$20 billion. The films are obviously obscene objects, although they use blurring effects on genitalia. Technically, they are in violation of the obscenity law, but in practice it is impossible for the police to arrest all of the people involved in the production and online



Fig. 34  
Phoebe  
Man, *Rati*,  
2000–2001

Fig. 35  
Chan Mei  
Tung, *Make  
Me Bigger*,  
2014



- 1 Justin McCurry, "Japanese Artist Goes on Trial over 'Vagina Selfies,'" *Guardian*, April 15, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/15/japanese-artist-trial-vagina-selfies>.
- 2 Some sexually explicit works of art can be shown in Hong Kong in accordance with

- zoning regulations. If I were to curate such an exhibition in Japan, I would be arrested, as would the artists.
- 3 Crowdfunding campaign trailer for "Gender, Genitor, Genitalia," accessed May 20, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/132184413>.

distribution of those videos. According to a Japanese legal handbook for practitioners, it is "difficult to choose certain videos from mass porn producers that are more obscene than others, we should be very careful."<sup>4</sup> Thus, the police arrest artists but leave the pornography industry alone.

The issue is not merely whether digital objects are obscene—it is much more serious. According to the Organization for Pornography and Sexual Exploitation Survivors (PAPS),<sup>5</sup> some—possibly many—adult video production companies deceive young girls and make them sign illegal contracts. Once the girls have signed a contract, the company forces them to work in the industry. They are sometimes violently raped during filming. If a girl refuses, she is often blackmailed for large sums of money, using the threat that she has breached her contract.<sup>6</sup> These girls are exploited and suffer from the production, distribution, and consumption of these films throughout their lives, even if they are lucky to stop working after a few films. The digital movie data remains on the internet for a long time, and it can be easily copied and redistributed.

My question is, therefore, why do the police never care about the crimes that create such agony in the lives of so many young women, but instead waste their efforts on artists such as Rokudenashiko? I wonder why she was found partially guilty, if the authorities indeed wanted to avoid setting a precedent for future crimes of digital transmission, when such crimes already exist in Japan. This is the main reason why I organized this project.

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4 Hiroshi Kawamura, *Concept of the Criminal Law for Practitioners*, P535 (Modern Police Publisher, 2018).

5 PAPS, accessed on May 20, 2020, <https://www.paps.jp/distribution?lang=en>.

6 In the interview of Shufu no Tomo company, a famous adult video actress recalled what happened to her; see the PAPS website, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.paps.jp/production>.

# Caring for Decolonial Futures Listening to the Voices of Decolonial Activism in the Museum

Lena Fritsch

**Who can speak? What happens when we speak? And what can we speak about?**

—Grada Kilomba

**Can the subaltern speak?**

—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Activism aims to transform society. As decolonial activism operates at the margins of society and is often ignored by the hegemonic discourse, listening to the voices of decolonial activists can be considered a step toward the radical transformation of society. The Dutch artist Mathilde ter Heijne presented her curatorial project “Woman to Go—Presentation and Representation of the Personal and Impersonal” at the Grassi Museum of Ethnography in Leipzig in 2019. In this exhibition, the artist combined two of her artistic projects *Woman to Go* (2005–ongoing), a collection of postcards, and *Assembling Past and Future* (2019), an archive of videos with activists, artists, and curators concerned with decolonizing ethnological museums from an intersectional perspective.

## In Search of Legacies

The ongoing project *Woman to Go*, which ter Heijne has already shown in many different museums and galleries, including the Berlinische Galerie (2006), Kunsthalle Krems (2009), and the Jack Hanley Gallery in New York (2014), is a collection of postcards. Each of the postcards shows a photograph of a historical yet nameless and therefore anonymous woman on the front. On the backside of each postcard, one finds a biography. The biographies on the back of the postcards are of historical women whose biographies have been recorded in history. Of course, these biographies do not correspond with the photographs of the anonymous women, about whose lives nothing is known. This ongoing long-term project grows with each edition, with new postcards being added by the artist. *Woman to Go* centrally addresses the historical absence of women from history and draws attention to the practice of ethnographic photography that has turned women into nameless and anonymous objects, exposing the violence of the patriarchal-colonial gaze. Making such gaps visible and challenging hegemonic history is a central concern in feminist practice. Visitors are encouraged to take postcards and create their own unique archive.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Mathilde ter Heijne, *Woman to Go*, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://www.terheijne.net/works/woman-to-go/>.



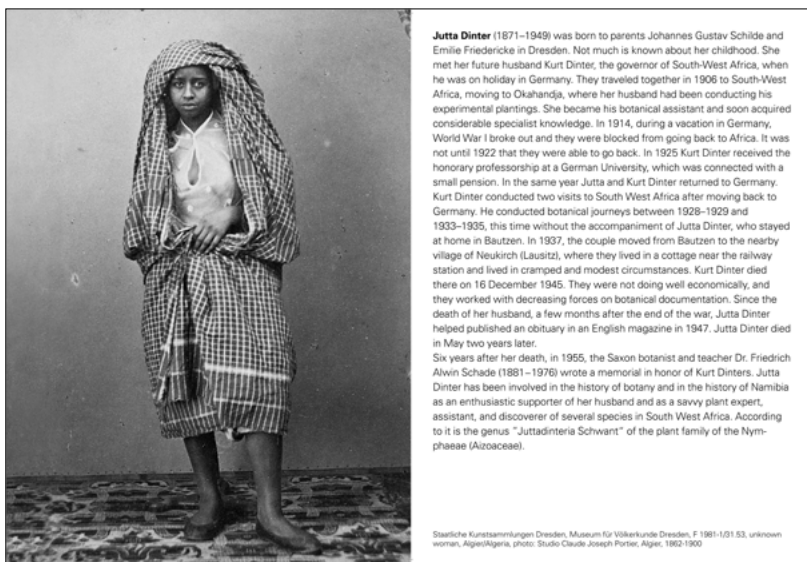


Fig. 36  
Malthilde ter Heijne, "Woman to Go—  
Presentation and Representation of the  
Personal and Impersonal," Grassi Museum of  
Ethnography, Leipzig, 2019, exhibition view

Fig. 37  
Malthilde ter Heijne, *Woman to Go*, 2019

*Woman to Go* presents women who were made un-known. However, this cannot undo the colonial violence of taking away their names and their voices, which is an omnipresent and irrevocable fact in ethnological collections. The Grassi Museum, founded in 1869, houses the second-largest collection of ethnological artifacts and art treasures in Germany and was shaped by the aggressive collection policy of German colonialism until 1918. The exhibition "Die Weltensammler: 150 Jahre Leipziger Völkerkundemuseum" (The collectors of the world: 150 years of the Leipzig Museum of Ethnology, 2019) addressed the discourse on German colonial heritage. The analysis and criticism of Germany's colonial heritage was also initiated by many activist groups. The Grassi Museum acknowledges German colonial heritage as a field of conflict.<sup>2</sup> Discursive events on colonialism in museums and decolonial perspectives are taking place in exhibition spaces.<sup>3</sup> The first application for restitution of human remains from Hawaii was granted in 2017; others, including applications from New Zealand, Australia, and Namibia, are still pending, with the remains still in the Grassi Museum collection. The collection is marked by its toxic ethnological past.

In this field of unresolved violence and conflict, museums are actively searching for new curatorial care practices for working with the past. This essay claims that the curatorial dimension of the exhibition "Woman to Go," as a caring practice that makes decolonial activist voices heard, reveals possibilities of how concrete propositions for decolonial practice can be generated for future implementation. This is part of the continuous effort to transform exhibition spaces into spaces of decolonial futures.

## Unfolding Decolonial Narratives

*Assembling Past and Future* is a continuation of Malthilde ter Heijne's practice of interviewing activists. Together with Grassi Museum curator Stefanie Bach, she researched activists, curators, and artists working toward decolonizing ethnological museums and approached them with a request for participation. Since 2016, I have worked as ter Heijne's artistic research assistant and was involved in the interviewing process for this project. Therefore, my perspective as a writer not only reflects on the outcome of this project, but also includes insights from the artistic research process.

<sup>2</sup> The Grassi Museum is a signatory institution of the Heidelberg Statement, May 6, 2019, [https://grassi-voelkerkunde.skd.museum/fileadmin/userfiles/GRASSI\\_Museum\\_fuer\\_Voelkerkunde\\_zu\\_Leipzig/Bilder/Allgemein/Veranstaltungen/Heidelberg\\_Stellungnahme/20190505\\_Heidelberg\\_Statement.pdf](https://grassi-voelkerkunde.skd.museum/fileadmin/userfiles/GRASSI_Museum_fuer_Voelkerkunde_zu_Leipzig/Bilder/Allgemein/Veranstaltungen/Heidelberg_Stellungnahme/20190505_Heidelberg_Statement.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in 2017, the Heinrich Böll Foundation organized a series of events titled "(UN)SICHTBAR!?" ([In]Visible?), which addressed the legacy of colonialism in museums and society, and brought in decolonial perspectives.



A central question we had concerning the exhibition concept was how to situate this exhibition and how to invite decolonial activists into an ethnological museum whose existence is owed to the violence and crimes of colonial power. To understand oneself as an “implicated subject”<sup>4</sup> in the aftermath of colonialism and its present-day consequences includes the understanding that decolonization is labor that must be shared by implicated subjects; the labor of decolonization is not to be performed only by members of marginalized groups.

The focus of this text is on the artistic-curatorial approach of Mathilde ter Heijne, who, as a white person, seeks to work with this conflictual situation and propose practices of healing and repairing. These practices are understood as care for decolonial futures. *Assembling Past and Future* shows activists’ speeches recorded on video in 2016–19 on four video screens, on which the activists appear life-sized. The videos were displayed on the walls in one of the exhibition rooms of Grassi Museum. Each video is superimposed with a portrait of a historical woman who worked as an activist transforming society. Ter Heijne invited activists, artists, and curators to give statements on their work in particular and explain why they work in their specific contexts.

The work of ter Heijne follows an intersectional approach. Working in anti-racist and queer activist contexts, all of the interview partners describe their intersectional practices as work that aims to heal and repair broken relations in the aftermath of colonialism, although they are not museum professionals. In their publication *Feminist Freedom Warriors*,<sup>5</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, the Indian-born American postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist, and Linda E. Carty, the Black Canadian feminist scholar-activist and educator, give a theoretical framework to the digital archive of the Feminist Freedom Warriors.<sup>6</sup> The authors describe the links between different political struggles against the intersecting oppressions of gender, race, and class from a feminist perspective: “Many of these [current] struggles have feminist and woman organizers at the forefront. Feminism matters—a feminism that is anchored in decolonizing, antiracist, anticapitalist, transnational commitments keep us alive and gives us hope. [...] It is the creation of alliances and solidarities across gender, race, class, sexual, and national divides that point the way forward.”<sup>7</sup>

The curatorial dimension of the project was to invite activists to take part in the exhibition, to actively listen to the demands of interview partners, and to assemble the various statements in the exhibition space in order to make a decolonial narrative visible. The artist as a curator opens up the exhibition space with its toxic ethnological past in a caring way, following an intersectional approach. Unfolding this decolonial narrative in her project, ter Heijne describes her approach to collaborating with others: “I like to open up and share the institutional space offered to me with others. [...] It becomes clear that I am not only author, that I am the one who mainly structures the space, which is then



Fig. 38  
Mathilde ter Heijne,  
*Assembling Past and Future*,  
2019

4 See Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

5 Linda E. Carty and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Introduction: An Archive of Feminist Activism,” in *Feminist Freedom Warriors: Genealogies, Justice, Politics, and Hope*, ed. Linda E. Carty and Chandra

Talpade Mohanty (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), 6.

6 On the Feminist Freedom Warriors website, <http://feministfreedomwarriors.org/>, one can watch statements by activists concerned with decolonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-racist struggles.

7 Carty and Mohanty, 6.

used by others to co-create in their own way, with their abilities, their own needs and to become visible.”<sup>8</sup>

Her approach in this project was to step aside as an artist and make space for a multi-voiced articulation, moving the activists’ voices to the forefront, “caring about”<sup>9</sup> what they are dealing with. The following focuses on postcolonial analysis of, strategies for, and demands on politics, which, to varying degrees, are addressed by the six activists working in the German-speaking context: Emilia Roig (Center for Intersectional Justice), Hamado Dipama (AK Panafrikanismus München), Katharina Oguntoye (co-writer of *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*, 2012), Kave Bulambo (Women Across Borders), Pêdra Costa (performance artist, and visual and urban anthropologist), and Talita Uinuses (Nama activist). All these activists migrated from different parts of the world and are currently based in Germany—some already for many years, others for only a short period of time. The decolonial knowledge gathered in the interviews presented in the exhibition space derives from their everyday lived experience as well as their empirical knowledge gained through activism. This knowledge has not evolved within a museum context or from a curatorial background. Listening to the activists’ voices, demands, and pleas, it becomes clear that their arguments come from experience as it informs a lived intersectional theory. The activists live and embody intersectionality with all its interconnected struggles.

In the exhibition space, there was a total of four hundred minutes of recorded interviews for the audience to listen to. Following an intersectional feminist perspective, I am searching for a way to make the activists’ voices present again in this text by way of writing. Making space for the activist voices in the text here, reassembling these voices, I have deliberately chosen not to add my interpretation of their statements. To make space for listening is understood here as an academic care practice, as I invite the readers of this text to listen to the voices of activists in order to learn about alternatives and approaches for decolonizing a museum. The activists’ statements are responses to the urgent question of the future of ethnological museums and their colonial legacies.

Talita Uinuses became involved in activism after a friend encouraged her with the following words: “You cannot keep quiet.” Bearing in mind the etymology of “activism,” the question of how one becomes an activist is very much tied to urgency and thus expressing the inability to keep quiet. Hamado Dipama describes this as follows:

I was living in a camp in a condemned nothing-to-do-situation, everyday, with people who have had the same experience as you and who are sitting there with the nothing-to-do-situation just like you. What can you do? Sleeping and watching TV. And when we watched television, we often saw how

many of our sisters and brothers remain in the sea in masses. Then—at this time—there were so many open questions in my head and many sleepless nights. Then I asked myself the question: Why do we have to experience such a situation? We actually come from a continent that has everything. A continent that could enable us people of African origin to be wealthy people. With a thousand unanswered questions, which led to sleepless nights, I decided to found the Pan-Africanism Working Group.<sup>10</sup>

Emilia Roig explains the field of conflict that accompanies activist work:

There are several words with very negative connotations. These are words like “radical,” “resistance,” “activism.” And why? Because these terms come from people who question things. Questioning the status quo. And they have to defend themselves, they have to do so much, and that seems aggressive from the outside. I would say resistance is liberation. It is about liberation, liberation from a system and from the soul as well. And for me it is very positive, because everything is connected [...]. But freedom is hard. Getting free is the hardest task I’ve ever had to do. Liberation costs strength and that is painful.

In the following I assemble the activists’ statements to give the possibility for a broader audience, who haven’t seen this exhibition, to listen, and, to re-listen to this plethora of voices.

Talita Uinuses on the restitution of Nama human remains held in German museums:

Being a political activist and a community activist, I could not keep quiet while I see what happened and what transpired in the years of 1904–8. Actually, the war of the Germans did not start with 1904, it all started at my captain’s house in Hornkranz in 1893, that’s where the Germans fired the first shot at my people and killed over eighty-eight women who have been disabled, who have been waiting, who have been breastfeeding. I mean, they started there, so for me as a Nama woman, I can’t keep quiet, I have to also put my voice to be heard what happened to us. [...]

8 Mathilde ter Heijne, *Performing Change* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 21.

9 Joan C. Tronto, *Who Cares? How to Reshape a Democratic Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 5.

10 Hamado Dipama, recorded in the framework of Mathilde ter Heijne’s *Assembling Past and Present*, for the exhibition “Woman to

Go,” Grassi Museum, Leipzig, 2019. The transcripts of the recorded interviews with Hamado Dipama, Emilia Roig, Talita Uinuses, and Pêdra Costa formed the basis of the video installation and are minimally edited. The interviews with Emilia Roig and Hamado Dipama are translated from German into English.

Those scalps which the historians, the researchers, the scientific researchers, are referring to scalps—in my own view, and in the view of my people at home in Namibia, they are our ancestors. They are still our ancestors who got brought in very hygienic situations. Cutting off their heads, even to go that far, that for instance a mother has to clean the head of her son or the mother has to clean the head of her father, so that the scalps, as they refer to them, can be packed and be brought to Germany. That's why they are still here. For us, they are our human beings, they are our ancestors. They don't get any rest. That's why it's so much imperative, important for us that we are asking and requesting the German government, the museums, the private institutions, and the private people out there to bring back our skulls. Bring back our ancestors, [so] that we can give them a dignified burial. They are still here, they used them for scientific reasons only to put numbers on them—our ancestors, who have got names, today in Berlin they only has got numbers. No, we want—and that is a huge plea that I am doing to the German government—bring back our ancestors, so that they can have eternal rest in their country, in Namibia.

Another central concern of Uinuses's is historiography:

The schools in Namibia as much as the schools in Germany should make [the colonial war] part of their curriculum, so that the history of Namibia and Germany should be known by the generations to come—as much as the present generation. That is my plea. Because that is history that we can never, never forget. [...] Therefore, it is important that the two governments should include the literature of the histories in their curriculum.

Hamado Dipama again:

It is wrong to do and speak and do for the other person as an unaffected person, as a *white* person, so to speak. [...] We, people of African origin, are used to this and are fed up with it. We're sick of it. They have written about us; they have written our history. They did not let us write our own history. They speak for us. Where are we? Let us talk for ourselves, then we can tackle the problems together.

Given past experiences, Roig explains the complexity of intersectional suppression patterns of patriarchal and colonial structures:

There were all these hierarchies, and I also saw that there were many patterns of dominance, and as a child I observed this. It was very clear, it's not fair, it hurt me, and I showed a lot of solidarity with my mother, because there was also definitely abuse at home and the realization that

there are inequalities and injustice. It is very difficult because we first have to understand how the system works. It's like a puzzle, and we see that people are living in a puzzle, and they don't understand that it's actually a puzzle, and we [Center of Intersectional Justice] want to show that.

Pêdra Costa on decolonial knowledge and how practicing religion helped to *develop strategies of resilience*:

I went to the Weltmuseum in Vienna and there is a room with Brazilian stuff, and there is an altar from my religion, Ouamba. I saw it and it's so funny, because it is like souvenirs for tourists. My religion is not only about objects; my religion is about invisibility, it's about being invisible, it's about not being recognized. It was a way that we survived under the colonial period of Brazil, or how we survived the Inquisition from the Catholic Church, for example. We are invisible. It was a kind of strategy in the countries that served, like, the violence from the colonial project. We survived in not expressing ourselves but hiding our knowledge and passing it through generations in a kind of oral history. Not only because our knowledge comes from the drums and the songs and the dance and the nature in many ways to have knowledge. But the colonial project understands or sees or recognizes one kind of knowledge—the knowledge from the books or the knowledge of the university or the academic discourse or so on. So, it was easy that we pass through generations our knowledge, because it was not recognized as a knowledge.

## Caring, Healing, Repairing

Troubled by the toxic ethnological past, Mathilde ter Heijne's curatorial work was "caring for"<sup>11</sup> opening up the exhibition space to the voices of decolonial activists. Arranged and staged as an assembly, a nuanced many-voiced chorus of activists concerned with decolonizing ethnological museums was brought to the surface, referring to restitution, hegemonic historiography, Othering,<sup>12</sup> structural racism, and/or sexism. Listening to the interviews, it becomes clear that all these concerns are very much bound to the activists themselves. One can feel their sorrow, pain, love, resilience, anger, and above all, strength in their activist work toward transforming society.

<sup>11</sup> Tronto, *Who Cares?*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> See Grada Kilomba, *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism* (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2010), 23.

In this chorus of voices, concrete propositions for repairing and healing are being made: implementing intersectional awareness in legislation and in institutional structures, challenging European historiography by including narratives of the suppressed, restitution, substituting European ethics with global ethics, and considering migration as an impact on, and not a cause of, a situation.

But where do we, as implicated subjects, go from here? The actual voices that could be listened to during the exhibition fell silent again, as the project “Woman to Go” is—for now—temporary and bound to a specific location. It remains to be seen whether there will be any lasting change in the complex and painful relationship between the museum as an institution, long-standing museum activism, and a large number of diverse groups engaged in anti-racist struggles as well as many different individuals affected by the legacies of colonialism and today’s persistent structural and systemic racism. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” the New York-based Indian scholar, literary theorist, and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak differentiates between being listened to and actually being heard.<sup>13</sup> For the formally “voiceless,”<sup>14</sup> this differentiation is a crucial step toward decolonizing museums. Listening to the voices of activists and following their generative and propositional suggestions, one can find possible instructions for a decolonizing practice that points to possible futures, considering how cultural memory of the present is included within museums with an ethnological past.

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# Radically Invisible Decolonial Approaches to Embodied Learning and Listening Activism

Claudia Lomoschitz

Fig. 39  
Louise Vind Nielsen, *Radikal Unsichtbar*, 2020

How do words effect your vocal cords?  
Maybe you feel like reading this text out loud.  
Let your inner voices become a murmur, fluster, song or scream.

Beginning this text with a score resonates with my practice as a performance artist and writer, and is due to my research on embodied knowledge and my interest in the potential of embodied learning. Throughout this text, I will take a closer look at phenomena that often go unnoticed because they are ephemeral and rendered invisible. In particular, I am interested in listening activism and embodied learning in performance art and curating as care practices. Specifically, my focus is on the curatorial project *Radikal Unsichtbar* (Radically invisible), which works toward decolonial processes through collective learning and radical listening. In shedding light on the invisible curatorial work of *Radikal Unsichtbar*, a decolonial care practice comes to the fore, one that shifts from the handling of artworks toward caring for social practice, gathering multiple voices, and facilitating collective knowledge production.<sup>1</sup> Through decolonial approaches, the role of the curator transforms into that of a caretaker of social spheres and local communities, which I elaborate on in the following case study. How can embodied art practice and sound open up alternative epistemologies and make audible something that is otherwise invisible?



<sup>1</sup> See Natalie Bayer and Mark Terkessidis, "Über das Reparieren hinaus: Eine antirassistische Praxeologie des Kuratierens," in *Kuratieren als antirassistische Praxis*,

ed. Natalie Bayer, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, and Nora Sternfeld (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 53–72.

Radikal Unsichtbar – Centre for Collective Learning and Radical Listening is organized as series of “ACTS” that consist of public workshops, lectures, writings, and collective exhibitions, with a focus on contemporary sound art and listening in relation to community. The project Radikal Unsichtbar was initiated in 2015, and is curated by the Danish sound, radio, and performance artist and activist Louise Vind Nielsen. Important to her curatorial concept is to engage artists from various fields, like musicians, music theorists, or radio activists. Central to each ACT is a workshop, which Nielsen collaboratively develops with the invited artist. Each workshop is held in different locations throughout the city of Hamburg, according to the required modes of collaboration. As Nielsen understands it, the Centre for Collective Learning and Radical Listening is neither an institute nor an institution. Rather, it is a platform that is defined by its discourse and temporary community. The project is deeply linked to her artistic and activist practice, which is rooted in the self-organized structures of the Gängeviertel, where she works and lives. Historically Hamburg’s poorest area, the Gängeviertel has transformed into an important urban site in the last ten years, following the successful occupation of the twelve remaining historical buildings in 2009. Artists and activists protested against the investment-oriented destruction of the area and the erosion of its history, with the claim that the city is neither a business nor a brand but a community. Since then, the association Verein Gängeviertel, founded by the protesting artists and activists, administrates the area. In 2019, after ten years of negotiations with the city, the association was able to sign a leasehold agreement that ultimately will secure the future of the self-organized area and its independent cultural production. Nielsen, who has been an active member of the community since 2012, explains:

My curatorial understanding derives from my activist practice and is deeply embedded in community work and collaboration. I started to organize concerts and exhibitions at Gängeviertel years ago and got more and more involved in the structures and decided to move there. Communication skills constitute my curatorial practice, as working within self-organized structures demands lots of negotiating and diplomacy. The public general assembly of Gängeviertel, which is held every second week, can be seen as structure to learn these skills collectively. An important part of my curatorial process is dedicated to fostering nonhierarchical relations between all participants.<sup>2</sup>

Louise Vind Nielsen is personally and artistically involved in the project Radikal Unsichtbar. Her role extends to that of a curator, as she collaborates with the invited artists and provides a caring field of exchange and support. Nielsen works and reflects on the overall structure of each Radikal Unsichtbar ACT with the invited artist, accompanying their artistic process closely, in order to introduce them to process-based modes of collective work. As Nielsen has experienced the demanding working conditions of the art field herself, she

structures her curatorial practice around modes of caretaking. To be able to care for the artist throughout their process, she makes use of her private resources and networks. The artist residency is provided at her home, and she is in close contact with collectives in the Gängeviertel, who provide workshop and exhibition spaces or lend equipment. Radikal Unsichtbar doesn’t have the means or predetermination of big institutions, which influences the curatorial process and brings different modes of collaboration and improvisation to the fore. Owing to the project’s funding regulations from the Nordic Culture Fund, the Danish Art Council, and Hamburg’s Ministry of Culture and Media, Nielsen can invite only artists who reside in the Nordic countries and Hamburg. When referring to her curatorial labor, Nielsen speaks of “hacking” these country-bound policies to shift power structures by inviting artists from international backgrounds who currently reside in Scandinavia or Hamburg. Above all, questions of representation remain central to a decolonial curating practice: Who, how, and what knowledge is produced, and to whom is this knowledge conveyed? In regard to how to archive a group process and series of workshops, exhibitions, talks, concerts, and performances, she continuously experiments with archival formats. She published DIY booklets for the first five ACTS, which are accessible as open-source documents on the project’s website. Nielsen explains:

The booklets are a format that can resonate into the future, offer background information, and go deep on a theoretical level. Though neither format is capable of transmitting the processes of Radikal Unsichtbar and its multifaceted dimensions, I realized that sound archives are more and more interesting to me. The sound performance itself can be seen as one part of a workshop process, but the actual process is stored in the nervous systems of the participants.

## Radikal Unsichtbar ACT 5: Nomenclature

In the following I will take a close look at *Radikal Unsichtbar ACT 5: Nomenclature*,<sup>3</sup> and describe how curatorial practices can take care of history and incorporate activist encounters toward embodied experience and decolonial conditions. ACT 5 took place January 9–15, 2017. It hosted a five-day long workshop by the Norway-based French/Algerian artist Hanan Benammar, a radio performance developed and transmitted by Benammar in collaboration with the workshop participants, and a performance installation and artist talk that I facilitated. My contribution consisted of a performance installation that displayed plants

2 Louise Vind Nielsen, interview with the author, Zoom, April 26, 2020. The following quote is also from this interview.

3 For each ACT, the curator and invited artists develop neologisms as titles, to find a shared language to express

complexity of sound. The title *Nomenclature* consists of the words *nomen* (Latin for name), referring to nomenclature (system of names), and the French *rature* (crossing out words with a horizontal line).



superimposed with the Latin alphabet and referred to the cruelty of taxonomy. The exhibition opening was scheduled for the last workshop day, and it was accompanied by a collective performative reading that aimed to investigate communication modes that exceed language—such as fragrances, electrical impulses, and movements—to enable attentive modes of bodily listening. As ACT 5 lasted for seven days, it is impossible to provide a full report, therefore I will focus on Benammar’s workshop method involving decolonial approaches to embodied knowledge and listening activism. The insights provided here derive from my own experience as a participant in the sound research.



Fig. 40  
*Radikal Unsichtbar ACT 5:  
Nomenrature, 2017*

Very early in the communication process, Hanan Benammar and Louise Vind Nielsen decided to investigate the archive of Hamburg’s Museum of Ethnology (now MARKK) and arrange the workshop and exhibition at Raum Linksrechts, a gallery space in the Gängeviertel. On the first workshop day, Benammar introduced her artistic work, which engages with deserts as political places of projection and myth, and encouraged participants to focus their sound research on the lost voices of the ethnic groups Herero and Nama, who were killed in the genocide committed by German colonizers from 1904 to 1908 in Namibia. In preparation for the investigative sound research at the museum, participants digitally researched the history of the genocide and exchanged on the material they found. They looked into methods of sound research and decided which materials—sound devices, tape recorders, megaphones, or instruments—to bring to the second day. On the next workshop day, the research took place at the Museum of Ethnology, which offered a guided tour through their exhibition

and provided a lecture by the music ethnologist Dr. Norbert Beyer. The lecture was recorded, and later distorted and rearranged artistically by some of the workshop participants. Even though objects from Namibia were exhibited at the museum, there was nothing on display related to German colonialism or the genocide. This void triggered a group discussion on how to shift the historiographic focus from artifacts toward decolonial practices of sound performance, and how to use the materials of the museum to decolonize one’s own nervous system. The discussion led the research group to the museum’s archive and library, where they were confronted with numerous records showing the colonial brutality of the genocide against the Herero and Nama, including documents of the colonial administration, field notes from colonizers, anthropological records, scientific descriptions of the Bantu language spoken by the Herero, and photographs of enslaved Herero and Nama people. To collectively deal with these findings, the sound research in the museum was accompanied by exchange and collaboration throughout the recording. This covered questions on how to deal with visual findings, lost records, stolen objects, publishing houses with colonial ties, the colonial history of the museum, and one’s own discomfort, on an auditory level. Benammar encouraged the participants to engage with the material through methods she calls “legitimate offense techniques,” such as “invasive scanning, furtive sound recordings” at the museum, text cut-ups, or “badly-behaved interviews” with books, colleagues, museum staff, or fictive characters.<sup>4</sup> The group gathered and generated audio material with a focus on the colonial history of Hamburg. The reflection of colonial research methods and their brutality unfolded, informing and transforming the group’s research toward sensual and reflective practices focused on the performativity of words, voice, sounds, movements, actions, feelings, and sense perception.

“Record *click*, stop *click*, rewind *click*, fast-forward *click*, play *click*, bilabial *click*, dental *click*, palatal *click*, lateral *click*.”<sup>5</sup>

On the third workshop day, at Raum Linksrechts, the collected materials were shared, discussed, processed, and edited. Quotes and sound recordings from the guided tour were acoustically distorted, voice-overs were generated, instrument sounds were modified, collective soundscapes dealing with the voids of history and of deserts were sung. One person recorded the shattering of glass and arranged it with violent excerpts from a colonial officer’s memoirs. Another person imitated clicking sounds and read a section from a colonial linguistics book about the systematization of sound. Some participants edited notes from the museum, others engaged with rhymes, diphthongs, symbols, poetry, error, or lost sound waves. On the fourth workshop day, sound contributions

4 See Hanan Benammar, *Radikal Unsichtbar ACT 5: Nomenrature* (Hamburg: Louise Vind Nielsen, 2017).

5 An excerpt from the radio performance, recorded in 2017, <http://unsichtbar.net/wordpress/act-5/>.

emerged and were collectively arranged to a two-hour-long radio performance. Practically, the sound pieces were composed into a sequence using Post-its, determining as well where to set volume levels, fades, or overlaps. The experimental collective radio play was performed live by all participants and transmitted through the pirate radio station FSK.<sup>6</sup> A recording of the radio play can be found on the website of Radikal Unsichtbar.<sup>7</sup> The performative research into Hamburg's colonial history led to individual embodied practices as well as moments of collective sounding and listening.

## Reflections on Embodied Knowledge and Decolonizing History through Sound

Hannan Benammar's artistic methods enabled embodied knowledge to come to the fore, allowing engagement with decolonial matters in a performative way. Within the sound research, the dimensions of kinesthetic perception, speech, timbre, modulation, and rhythm played a crucial role in the transmission of knowledge. The sound research activated sensory perception and raised questions surrounding how to move through a museum, how to listen to a city, and how to speak out about unjust histories. It enabled sound explorations and changed deserted voids into spaces that contain unheard sounds and untold stories. Conscious and critical voicing, sounding, and listening can be seen as tools to act on repressed and silenced histories. The American artist, writer, and theorist Brandon LaBelle speaks of "listening activism" as a form of kinesthetic knowledge that evokes an epistemic shift toward embodied learning practices, which instill a sensitivity to the yet unheard.<sup>8</sup> Temporal, fleeting, and invisible qualities of sound and voice underline fragile and unstable qualities of knowledge that exceed rational perception. To the Argentine semiotician and professor Walter D. Mignolo, decoloniality blurs the boundaries between theory and practice, scholarship and activism, and reinforces relations between knowing, doing, and sensing through activating the whole body.<sup>9</sup> As Chandra Frank argues, in regard to curating this means that "curatorial policies should therefore guide towards the dismantling of normative paradigms that privilege certain ways of knowing, seeing and curating over others."<sup>10</sup>

The participants of *Radikal Unsichtbar ACT 5* practiced a decolonial rereading of existing historical narratives and contributed to the sensibilization of knowledge. Decolonial body politics enable plural ways of thinking and acting toward embodied knowledge.<sup>11</sup> The involvement of all actors through their physical co-presence in the research process opened up an embodied mode of historiography that operated simultaneously individually and collectively. Ivan Muñoz-Reed explains: "Although all of these instances are crucial steps towards healing the colonial wound, decoloniality is not limited to academics

and curators. Decoloniality is a cultural call for arms, an invitation to rearticulate our collective past experience, questioning its weight and biases, in the hope that with every step forward, we might make increasing sense of our condition and contribute to the possibility of a world without coloniality: the world otherwise."<sup>12</sup>

Decolonial care opens up a historiography of actions, movements, and sounds, of gestures, voices, stories, rituals, and individual practices. Artistic acts like the sound research and performance of *Nomenrature* can be understood as modes of decolonial historiography, in which participants reflectively, physically, and sensuously engage with history.

Curating as decolonial care is radical in the way that it broadens what can be seen/heard/perceived and understood as knowledge.

6 FSK is a free, self-organized, noncommercial radio station, which broadcasts private individuals and exists since 1998. The livestream is accessible worldwide on their website, [www.fsk-hh.org/livestream](http://www.fsk-hh.org/livestream).

7 See <http://unsichtbar.net/wordpress/act-5/>.

8 See Brandon LaBelle, *Sonic Agency: Sounds and Emergent Forms of Resistance* (London: Goldsmiths Press, 2018), 24.

9 See Walter D. Mignolo, "Interview—Walter Mignolo/Part 1: Activism and Trajectory," interview by Alvina Hoffman, *E-International Relations*, January 17, 2017, <http://www.e-ir.info/2017/01/17/interview-walter-mignolopart-1-activism-and-trajectory/>.

10 Chandra Frank, "Policy Briefing: Towards a Decolonial Curatorial Practice," *Discover Society*, June 3, 2015, <http://archive.discoveringsociety.org/2015/06/03/policy-briefing-towards-a-decolonial-curatorial-practice/>.

11 See Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-colonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture & Society*, no. 26 (2009): 179.

12 Ivan Muñoz-Reed, "Thoughts on Curatorial Practices in the Decolonial Turn," *OnCurating*, no. 35 (December 2017): 103, [https://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/issue-34/PDF\\_to\\_Download/Oncurating\\_Decolonizing\\_Issue35.pdf](https://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/issue-34/PDF_to_Download/Oncurating_Decolonizing_Issue35.pdf).

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# The Southern Butthole Manifesto

Pêdra Costa

The butthole's investigations are theoretical and practical, always. The theory is on the skin and the practice comes from life. Theory only exists if there is experience. It only transforms itself if it goes through the body. The Southern Butthole is movement. The constraints and rigid systems of the body do not flow in these studies. We do not fight against anything. Our fights were always defeated. We already learned about this in the history of the world. We are Sorceresses and Healers. Our dance and our *ginga* is our fight, our way of loving, playing, being in connection with our community. We are always collective, never individuals. The artfulness is the basis of our whole life against the colonizer's project. Artfulness is not learned and taught.

Our knowledge would never be recognized if it were not appropriated by white and/or Europeanized knowledge and bodies. Our voices are not audible. Thus, we have all the autonomy and authority to found such studies. Try as we might, we will never be authorized as a field of knowledge by whiteness. We do not need its approval!

We move forward criticizing the "colonial fantasies" about our bodies, and specifically, butts. Our fierce criticism comes from our buttholes. Our butthole is our power. So many interdictions, religious and colonial fantasies about our butts. Anthropophagy does not unite us anymore. We already ate them as a condition violently imposed by the colonial civilizing education. Now we vomit them and we shit them. To the South of the world, to the butthole of the body.

# On a Museum of Care (in Rojava)

Elif Sarican, Nika Dubrovsky, and Elizaveta Mhaili

Fig. 41  
Nika Dubrovsky, *Hiwa K "Chicago Boys: While We Were Singing, They Were Dreaming," 2010, 2020*



**We produce a cup only once, but we wash and dry it a thousand times.**  
—David Graeber

This is an essay about a museum that does not yet exist.

The idea of the Museum of Care is to provide a space where people, artists and non-artists, cooperate with each other to change, restore, and repair the social fabric of society, as opposed to a traditional museum, which most of the time is designed to create the space to exhibit, appreciate, and archive certain sorts of objects or to document certain sorts of situations, with the purpose of presenting them as one or another form of the sublime. A large number of new museums are built every year around the world. No one is quite sure where the phrase “museum-industrial complex” originally came from, but the art critic, media theorist, and philosopher Boris Groys has been referring to this phenomenon for many years now, emphasizing the scale of museum expansion bringing together family entertainment, touristic development, investment, and sacred space in service of the production and reproduction of what are considered society’s highest values.<sup>1</sup> Why, then, do we need to add another project to what already seems like a neurotically long queue of infinitely expanding spaces of representation? We believe that our museum represents a genuine departure: it is a museum that does not need buildings or sponsors, guards or archives, one that does not need cashiers, accountants, and lawyers.

Our museum relies on the interest of like-minded people in radicalizing the practices of contemporary art by changing the very essence of what contemporary art could be.

The authors of this text are a collective in the process of becoming, joined only by an idea. We are artists, Kurdish activists, and contemporary-art theorists who have gathered around this idea as a way to think together about what can be changed, not so much in contemporary art as in the society around us. And how exactly could contemporary art play a part in this? It might seem surprising to focus on Rojava or the Kurdish liberation movement in this context—and of course, we don’t want to make it our exclusive focus—simply because the situation there might seem, to the outside eye, so desperate. These are people literally battling patriarchy, faced with the possibility of outright genocide. One might imagine the role of art and society is far from their immediate concerns, that it would be a bit narcissistic or exploitative of even the most well-meaning Western artists to treat it as if it should be. In fact, these matters are topics of lively and active debate in Rojava itself. There is a broad recognition that part

<sup>1</sup> Boris Groys, conversation with the authors, New York, February 12, 2020; Hal Foster, *The Art-Architecture Complex* (London: Verso,

2013); Gerald Bast, Elias G. Carayannis, and David F. J. Campbell, *The Future of Museums* (Vienna: Springer, 2018).



of creating a society without bosses or subordinates, where authority exists only as long as it can immediately justify itself and not because it is imposed by people with guns, where knowledge is to be disseminated as broadly as possible, that the relation of ethics, aesthetics, and the social good must necessarily be reimaged.<sup>2</sup> We are calling it the Museum of Care in Rojava. Rojava means west in Kurdish and refers specifically to a largely (but by no means exclusively) Kurdish region of northern Syria, also known to Kurds as “the west” of the larger region, which also includes the parts of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran where Kurdish people have historically been located. For the last eight years, it has taken its place on the world stage, thanks to Rojava’s women. Despite the war and destruction that surrounds it, despite the hostility of all its neighbors and the determined attacks of the Islamic State—and now the Syrian and Turkish governments—the people of Rojava, for almost a decade now, have been building a society founded on direct-democratic assemblies, ecology, anti-capitalist cooperation, and alliances across genders, ethnicities, religions, and beliefs.

For many reasons, the primary economic system of production in Rojava is based on cooperatives. Decision-making is based on principles of democratic confederalism, which means that the ultimate power is bottom-up, resting in a system of neighborhood assemblies, which send delegates, not representatives, to larger municipal or regional ones. The representation of women in all committees of all levels is determined by quotas: not only must there be at least 40 percent women present to hold any meeting, but all official positions are co-chaired, shared by one female and one male. This is not just for gender balance, but for the general principle that no one should make decisions alone. Most of the women involved in these assemblies are active caregivers.

## Cultural Genocide

Raphael Lemkin, a legal theorist of Polish Jewish descent, who first coined the term “genocide” defined it as “the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group.” In 1944, he added to this the notion of cultural genocide or cultural cleansing as a component of genocide as a whole. More recently, Robert Bevan’s book *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* and Tim Slade’s 2016 documentary based on it argue that war is never only about killing people and conquering territories; it is also about the destruction of memory and cultural heritage.<sup>3</sup> Any attempt at genocide against an ethnic group is invariably integrated with the destruction of cultural artifacts—which becomes a necessary part of the destruction as a whole. Since the formation of UNESCO in the aftermath of WWII there has been a call for an additional international treaty that would handle the prosecutions of the nations or groups involved in the destruction of architectural monuments.



Fig. 42

BP or not BP?, *Performance 59, Act III*: “We refuse to leave the British Museum after our mass action, and 40 performers stay overnight to create a durational artwork called ‘Monument,’ made from plaster casts of the bodies of participants. We succeed in occupying the museum all night, and then our artwork remains in the museum for all of the following day, for museum visitors to view. 8th–9th February 2020.”

<sup>2</sup> We first presented and tested this concept of a Museum of Care at the Chaos Community Congress in Leipzig in 2019, in which Lena Fritsch, one of the editors of this volume, also took part. She invited us to contribute to this book.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).



All of this is entirely true and appropriate, but the concern for cultural monuments has sometimes had the perverse effect of overshadowing the destruction of human beings. Reading media reports about the conflict in Syria, particularly from mainstream Western media, one might be forgiven for being left with the impression that the most horrifyingly violent events performed by ISIS were not even their mass killing and torture of civilians, but their destruction of art and historical artifacts: objects that were—unlike the relatively unremarkable pain and suffering of the people of that region—considered to be a matter of concern for humanity as a whole.

No one in their right mind supports the blowing up of ancient Greek temples, but it's hard to refrain from pointing out here that iconoclasm has a literal meaning—the Protestant Reformation, for example, involved the conscious destruction of many old and aesthetically valuable objects, in much the same way as did the 1936 anarchist revolution in Spain. Not just genocide—revolutions, too, invariably involve a challenge to the sacred, which often takes physical form. Russian avant-garde artist and art theorist Kazimir Malevich called for the destruction of museums,<sup>4</sup> and the French Revolution, above all, changed the criteria for assessing what was considered valuable cultural heritage and what was not. In a sense, the whole idea of cultural heritage, the necessity of protection, collection, and archiving of cultural artifacts that define us as humans, as well as the very concept of museums as we know it, emerged from the French Revolution—just as we might say the iconoclastic spirit of contemporary art was born out of the Protestant Reformation.

## On the Role of the Artist

If moments of social upheaval always involve a reevaluation of what art is, and of the role of the artist, then surely we are in such a moment now. Today, we face changes that literally threaten to destroy humanity. We are no longer facing just a financial crisis or even a crisis of capitalism but the real prospect of the end of civilization as we know it. If our definitions of art and the role of the artist are about to change in a correspondingly dramatic way, might it now finally be possible to reconsider the fundamentally gendered way that the art world is constructed, and even do something about it? One reason art has remained a competitive game, despite all its past revolutions, has been that it is conceived as a form of production. What if it were conceived as a form of care? What if we conceived of all forms of value in such terms: to see the transformation of art as part of a more general process of replacing patriarchal society with a society of caregivers, in a world tilting toward total disaster? This would create art with what it deserves, not just as product and production but as a method to create and re-create life, society, and culture that serves meaningful freedom.

Rojava might seem a surprising choice to some as a place to create a museum according to these principles, since most people in the West would perceive it as a very traditional Middle Eastern society in this respect. It's true that there is a very high birth rate, so most women on local councils are likely to be mothers and grandmothers—that is, women who practice care on a daily basis. Since Kurdish society (like many societies in which capitalist individualism has not taken foot) is historically based on sharing, particularly day-to-day tasks with extended family and neighbors, even those without children of their own are likely to be involved in caregiving of some kind, and to see care as a value. Therefore, the quota for women in Rojava's councils ensures a change in perspective—from what had become traditional and very patriarchal forms of organization to one oriented toward what had been traditionally the concerns of women. Perhaps the fact that Rojava is at war and surrounded by enemies on all sides, set to annihilate them and everything they stand for, creates a certain unity. Competition of all sorts, between men, between women, between religious and ethnic groups, has been mostly set aside, and this has been used as an opportunity to cement and institutionalize cooperation, direct democracy, and women's liberation. What is often perceived as a unique, even spontaneous uprising is in fact the product of decades of organizing, most of which had to be carried out underground—organizing based on the assumption that people had to be educated in preparation for a moment like 2011, when the Syrian regime, facing uprisings everywhere, could be effectively forced out of the region. Since the early 1980s, the architect of the Kurdish liberation movement, Abdullah Ocalan made sure that every household their movement was able to organize in Northern Syria was in turn treated as a revolutionary academy, with particular emphasis on the development of women's solidarity and mutual care to create the foundations of a moral-political society. As a result, Mesopotamia, the very birthplace of patriarchy, became for decades the center of a largely covert movement in which Kurdish women and their comrades worked to understand what women's liberation would mean, and at the same time, put those understandings into practice. And then, after 2011, they began to do the same openly, on a broader societal level, setting out to provide an example, inspiration, and hope for the world.

Rojava's societal changes come together with radical changes in the mechanisms of cultural reproduction. Participants in the Rojava Film Commune<sup>5</sup> say that when they first visited the West, they were constantly asked questions they found completely irrelevant. Western artists wanted to know how they financed the production and organized the distribution of their films. At first, they did not even understand these questions, thinking that they were so rooted in specific

<sup>4</sup> Kazimir Malevich, "О музеи," *Искусство коммуны*, no. 13 (1919), accessed May 20, 2020, <http://www.k-malevich.ru/works/tom1/index31.html>.

<sup>5</sup> For films of the Rojava Film Commune see: <https://www.visibleproject.org/blog/project/rojava-film-academy-derbesy-rojava-syria/>

Western conditions that they could be applied to the rest of the world. “In Rojava, we are simply doing what we think is right, and the people around us are helping in the same way as we help anyone else with their work,” the Syrian filmmaker Sevinaz Evdike told us.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the very ideas of what an artist is and how art is organized necessarily change under revolutionary social conditions.

## On the Concept of Care

The Italian artist and polymath Leonardo da Vinci painted the *Mona Lisa* once; and then, in the centuries after, people have written about it, argued about it, researched it, made jokes about it and jigsaw puzzles out of it, used it in their own artworks, loved it, and taken care of it. All this involved an enormous amount of work. Without that work, the *Mona Lisa* would never have been so important to humanity, and might have shared the same fate as innumerable other works of art—many perhaps just as potentially enchanting—that were either lost or physically destroyed, and never heard of again. As a painting, the *Mona Lisa* does not itself contain any inherent magical powers; what we call “the *Mona Lisa*” is not simply a work by Leonardo, but a combination of efforts of innumerable people in every part of the world and many different historical epochs. There are many ways to conceptualize this labor, but it seems to us it is best seen as a form of caring labor. Like most forms of caring labor, it is performed disproportionately by women. We know that the overwhelming majority of those recognized as artists in the world today are male, but the overwhelming majority of those who take care of art—the teachers, guides, art researchers, art historians, museum workers, artist’s wives, and muses (whatever shape or form that takes)—not to mention exhibition visitors—are women.

If art is so crucial for humanity, can we create a space for new art that would be very radically different? So, a revolutionary act would be the following: we would like to call it the space of care. By this we don’t mean just a new style of art, or artworks whose recognized producers have different names or identities, but an art that would be able to reorganize existing power structures by prioritizing the values of care and maintenance over production, extraction, and patriarchal order. Indeed, it would be an art focusing on being the expressions of a moral-political society, recognizing that such a society is not possible without radical democracy and women’s liberation.

To return to Rojava: outsiders are often startled by the compassionate attitude of YPG (People’s Protection Units) and YPJ (Women’s Protection Units) members toward wives of ISIS members and their children. YPG/YPJ soldiers often gave them food and blankets, despite receiving only insults and threats in return. Why do the soldiers spend their resources on these women? One of Rojava’s

famous slogans is “Women, Life, Freedom.” This means more than how to treat all women, but how to treat life itself: the values that form the foundation of the treatment of the very women who assisted the very people who tried to destroy you. Freedom, liberty, is not something that you can take and keep for yourself. Freedom exists between people in human relations. You free yourself by freeing others, taking care of them, giving them life, for as long as possible and as best you are able to, and this reflects a general approach to life that is much more important than the identity or moral status of any particular object toward which that care is directed. The idea of soldiers as caregivers might seem extraordinary to begin with, but it makes perfect sense in terms of the philosophy underlying the YPG and YPJ as organizations. They are protection units and believe it is fundamentally wrong to undertake offensive operations. (This orientation has in fact caused them trouble in the past with other rebel groups, who accuse them of not going on the offensive against the Syrian government.) This stems from a general philosophy of defense: any living thing, any social arrangement, must necessarily, as part of its conditions of existence, have some means of self-defense in the same way as a rose has thorns. Defense, unlike aggressive warfare, is ultimately a form of self-care. It only makes sense, then, that the women who have left home to join the YPJ, when asked what they’d like to do if the war ends, almost invariably speak of becoming teachers or doctors, or otherwise join one of the caring professions, as they see such work as a continuation of, rather than a break from, what they are doing while bearing arms.

## On Practicalities

We wouldn’t want to be doctrinaire; there is no one model for such a museum. But let us take a few of the principles we have in mind and explore what their ramifications might be. Can we create a Museum of Care in war-torn Rojava? In some ways it would be easier than creating a more traditional sort of museum, which would require a great deal of money, expertise, and security. First of all, we do not need to move material objects around. Most contemporary art is about producing impressions and experiences rather than existing as an object itself. Second, it would involve moving away from branding—since in so much contemporary art, the actual value of an artwork is seen as lying neither in the material object nor in one’s impressions or experience of it, but in the name of the specific artist or collective that created it. For many years, contemporary art has actively aimed to shape the social life of its audience by employing video, projections, instructions, or almost any other means imaginable, and constantly

6 Alla Mitrofanova, Sevinaz Evdike, and Nika Dubrovsky, “Искусство как Забота” [Art as Care], *Крапива*, April 13, 2020, <https://>

[vtoraya.krapiva.org/iskusstvo-kak-zabota-13-04-2020](https://vtoraya.krapiva.org/iskusstvo-kak-zabota-13-04-2020) (our translation).

trying to imagine new ones that were previously unimaginable. In the process, it has become ever more immaterial. This immateriality makes it far easier to create such a museum, or hold international exhibitions, and generally reduces the cost of sharing art to something approaching zero (if the branding is also eliminated). In the Museum of Care, any objects, material or otherwise, would have significance primarily insofar as they can be used in organizing or preserving valuable life experiences that for whatever reason can influence public life now or in the future or initiate some sort of social codes that might rewrite it.<sup>7</sup>

The arts in Rojava today are as young and new as the transformation of Rojava itself. Most of it is practiced collectively, including dancing, singing, and theater (followed by a session of friendly criticism after each show, which tends to lead to vivid discussions). It favors genres that are not just accessible to all but easily replicable, in which anyone could find some way to participate. Rojava's graffiti, on the one hand, maintains a strictly recognizable iconography—it

Fig. 43  
David Graeber and Nika Dubrovsky, *Future City: A Visual Assembly*, 2020



tends to employ three colors (red, yellow, and green)—and on the other hand, acting on the principle of near anonymity, it has been taken up by autonomous artists and activists all over the world and can be easily used by whoever is creating it. Graffiti in support of the Rojava revolution can be found on the streets of Bratislava and Berlin, on the walls of university campuses in Bologna, under busy bridges in London, and so on.

Can we make a cooperative museum of contemporary art, where there will be no physical objects, whose exhibits will consist of the ideas and care of the people interested in them, for whom they are important? And then, of course, the main question arises: What kind of art do people need? What will happen if artists and their works are evaluated not by curators and administrators of art institutions, but by people who can or cannot use it? To imagine what an exhibition in a Museum of Care might look like, consider a recent action in the British Museum involving almost 1,500 people. The organizers were demanding the museum break its financial ties with BP, an oil company responsible for countless ecological tragedies, which was effectively art-washing itself by placing its logo on the facade of what is considered to be one of the most prominent cathedrals of human culture, protector of the very kinds of eternal treasures that would be pillaged or destroyed by a group like ISIS. The action contained many elements, from occupation of the museum to the use of elaborate props (i.e., a Trojan horse), but we would like to point out one particular moment, when fifty occupiers made white plaster casts from their own body parts—arms, feet, and so on—in the museum, and then left them in the middle of the grand foyer surrounded by barriers as if they were an officially approved installation. Since BP was at the time sponsoring an exhibition about ancient Troy, the pieces could easily have been either ancient artifacts or the work of any number of contemporary artists. (We could name names, but this is precisely what we are trying not to do here.) In fact, they were actual casts of the actual bodies of human beings declaring that they may well, in a few years, be dead as a result of BP's activities. In other words, it was itself an act of art, of self-defense, and of care, all at once.

Earlier, we cited the example of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* precisely because the *Mona Lisa* to some extent is no longer a work of art, but a kind of cultural meme, a reference, actively and repeatedly used not only within the art world but by advertising, media, and popular culture more generally. While any mention of the names of contemporary artists or their artworks will unavoidably bring us back to the bad infinity of reproducing hierarchies of names and

<sup>7</sup> The idea of a museum with no objects, or one that itself does not exist as a physical object has important precedents: Françoise Vergès envisioned a museum without objects, the *Maison des civilisations et de l'unité*

*réunionnais* (MCUR) in the French postcolony of Réunion Island. Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri envisioned the Communist Museum of Palestine as a museum without objects.

objects, which in itself is a problem rather than a solution. The museum, that invention of the French Revolution, arose as a form of self-representation for newborn nation-states. The first museums assigned a specific role to the artist as an individual creator, embodying the freedom of creativity inaccessible to workers, whose lives are supposed to be anonymous and lacking creativity.

Our Museum of Care is in this sense a self-conscious post-national and post-productionist project—another reason why Rojava seems such an appropriate place for it. This is actually something widely misunderstood about the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, of which Rojava is now a part, as well as the Kurdish liberation movement more generally, including the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) in Turkey. The democratic-confederalist project they've embraced is not separatist; they are not trying to create a new nation-state and national identity at all, but rather see themselves as trying to overcome the logics of the nation-state and of capitalism, simultaneously.

Nowadays, in the time of pandemic and mass quarantine, new, experimental ways of connecting people through cultural production are emerging throughout the world: networks for mutual aid and online activism, as well as collective literary initiatives and online knowledge-sharing meetings, are developing across countries and languages.

We are looking for forms of production and distribution of art that could meet the following criteria: First, they must be collective. By this we mean that the major task of the organizers is to provide a stage not for some author's self-expression or personal commentary, but a collective participatory space. This is why we highlight the action in the British Museum, because it made possible the inclusion of thousands of people in a collective effort to reorganize a public space. Secondly, a focus on care necessarily means overcoming the division between creator and assistants—that is, between the act of creation and the process of maintaining the work of art. Again, this is a key quality of the BP/British Museum action, as its purpose was to break the relationship between oil companies and state museums. In other words, the action must continue in one form or another until its goal is achieved. Thirdly, art is only a form of care if it is radically politicized and embedded in society, which can also be seen in this example.

Acts like this are easily replicable anywhere in the world. By writing this, we realize that our text is trying to jump out of the traditional and safe space of the theoretical to become a road map for practical actions that we—or any reader of this text—could try to implement. It's understood that these are just initial ideas, only one direction to be considered. We invite everyone to participate and share their thoughts, or merely start implementing something similar, in their own way.

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**Caring Curatorial Practice in Digital Times**  
**Sophie Lingg**

Fig. 1  
 Sophia Süßmilch's 2019 Facebook post that caused a shitstorm. Screenshot, 2020. Courtesy of Sophia Süßmilch.

**Caretaking as (Is) Curating**  
**Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez**

Fig. 2  
 Saddle Choua, *Lamb Chops Should Not Be Overcooked*, 2019, installation view, Waning Moon Crescent Phase, "Contour Biennale 9: Coltan as Cotton," Mechelen. Photo: Lavinia Wouters.

Fig. 3  
 Bookclub run by Laura Nsengiyumva with Mireille Tsheusi Robert and Eline Mestdagh, 2019. Waning Moon Crescent Phase, "Contour Biennale 9: Coltan as Cotton," Mechelen. Photo: Lavinia Wouters.

**Excavating Care in Print Culture, Biometric Scanning, and Counter-archives**  
**Edna Bonhomme, Vanessa Gravenor, and Nina Prader**

Fig. 4  
 "Scan the Difference: Gender, Surveillance, Bodies," 2019, VBKÖ, exhibition view. Photo: Julia Gaisbacher. Courtesy of VBKÖ and Scan the Difference.

**Crippling the Curatorial**  
**Hana Janečková**

Fig. 5  
 Feminist Health Care Research Group and Jess Ward (F\*oRT), "Would You Support Me? Introduction to Radical Feminist Therapy," workshop during "Multilogues on the Now: On Health, Work and Emotions," Display, Prague, 2018.

**Curating Is One of the Master's Tools: An Open Letter to the Gatekeepers of Space**  
**Ven Paldano**

Fig. 6  
 A zoning image of *SimCity*, 1993, Screenshots. Image: Courtesy of Wiki.

Fig. 7  
 Ven's aunt (Jen) and mother (Stella) working as nurses, Epsom, 1979. Family album photo, courtesy of Ven Paldano.

Fig. 8  
*QTIPoC Narratives Collective Zine*, 2018, cover. Courtesy of Ven Paldano.

Fig. 9  
 Anti-deportations by British Airways, community grassroots fly posting, 2018, Photo courtesy of Ven Paldano.

Fig. 10  
 The collective participating at Brighton Community Democracy Protest, 2019. Photo taken by a community member, courtesy of Ven Paldano.

**Wahkootowin, Beading, and Métis Kitchen Table Talks: Indigenous Knowledge and Strategies for Curating Care**

**Cathy Mattes**

Fig. 11  
 Beading as cultural continuance, 2019. Courtesy of the University of Winnipeg.

Fig. 12  
 Beading as cultural continuance, 2019. Courtesy of the University of Winnipeg.

Fig. 13  
 Métis Kitchen Table Talk, 2020, University of Winnipeg. Courtesy of the University of Winnipeg.

**Moving Plants, Finding Fissures: On Feminist Latencies in Curating Public Art**

**Carlota Mir**

Fig. 14  
 Maider López, *Moving Plants*, 2019, Hammarkullen, Gothenburg. 105 live plants in pots mounted on rails. Photo: Ricard Estay. Courtesy of Public Art Agency Sweden.

Fig. 15  
 Maider López, *Moving Plants*, 2019, Hammarkullen, Gothenburg. 105 live plants in pots mounted on rails. Photo: Ricard Estay. Courtesy of Public Art Agency Sweden.

**Climate Care: A Curriculum for Urban Practice**  
**Gilly Karjevsky and Rosario Talevi (Soft Agency)**

Fig. 16  
 The site of Floating, 2019. Photo: Lena Giovanazzi.

Fig. 17  
 Serving the site, practicing climate care, 2019. Photo: Lena Giovanazzi.

**I KNOW I CARE—How Red Is Vienna Today?  
Curating a Radical *Waschsalon* in Vienna's  
Social Housing System**  
Jelena Micić

Fig. 18  
Swantje Höft, *So leben wir*  
(*Zeitverwendungsstudie 2008/9 Statistik*  
*Austria*), 2019. Drawing. Courtesy of  
Swantje Höft and I KNOW I CARE.  
Fig. 19  
I KNOW I CARE Open Working Group,  
“I KNOW I CARE,” *Waschhalle Wienerberg*,  
Wienwoche, Vienna, 2019, exhibition view.  
Photo: Žarko Aleksić and Jelena Micić.  
Courtesy of WIENWOCHE and I KNOW  
I CARE.

**Accessibility at the Intersection of the  
Physical, the Digital, and the Financial**  
**COVEN BERLIN**

Fig. 20  
Logo. Courtesy of COVEN BERLIN.

**Curating Hacking—Caring for Access, Caring  
for Trouble**

**Patricia J. Reis and Stefanie Wuschitz**

Fig. 21  
Mz\* Baltazar's collective, *Massage*,  
exhibition/performance/workshop at  
Forum Alpbach, August 2017. Photo:  
Lale Rodgarkia-Dara.

Fig. 22  
Zosia Hołubowska, “Spell Recognition,”  
Mz\* Baltazar's Laboratory, Vienna, 2018,  
exhibition view. Photo: Sophie Thun.

**The “Year of the Women\*” at the Schwules  
Museum Berlin: Activism, Museum, and  
LGBTQIA+ Memory—Notes on Queer-Feminist  
Curating**

**Birgit Bosold and Vera Hofmann**

Fig. 23  
The curatorial framework of the “Year of  
the Women\*,” 2018. Image: Vera Hofmann.

Fig. 24  
Opening night of the dyke bar SPIRITS,  
2018. Photo: Vera Hofmann.

Fig. 25  
Social media advertisement for the 12  
Moons Film Lounge, 2018. Courtesy of  
SMU.

Fig. 26  
The opening ritual, Sadie Lune setting up  
her tools in the exhibition on gay male  
cruising, 2018. Photo: André Wunstorf.

**From “Women See Women” to “Witch  
Courses”—Caring Archivism**  
**Chantal Küng**

Fig. 27  
Group picture of “Frauen sehen Frauen”  
participants, with Doris Stauffer on the far  
right, 1975. Photo: Walter Pfeiffer. Courtesy  
of Bice Curiger.

Fig. 28  
View into one of the peep boxes of  
*Patriarchal Panopticon*, Doris Stauffer's  
contribution to “Women See Women,”  
1975. Photo: Doris Stauffer. Courtesy of  
Prints and Drawings Department of the  
Swiss National Library (SNB), Serge and  
Doris Stauffer Archive.

Fig. 29  
Women from the Frauenwerkstatt (Women's  
Workshop), ca. 1978. Courtesy of Prints  
and Drawings Department of the Swiss  
National Library (SNB), Serge and Doris  
Stauffer Archive.

**Bold Characters: Motherhood and Censorship  
in Chinese Art and Curating**

**Julia Hartmann**

Fig. 30  
Exhibition view, *Bald Girls*, Iberia Art  
Center Beijing, 2012. Photo: Juan Xu.  
Courtesy of Juan Xu.

Fig. 31  
Li Xinmo, *Woman*, 2009–11. Menstrual  
blood and ink on paper. Courtesy of Li  
Xinmo.

Fig. 32  
Xiao Lu, *Sperm*, 2006. Archival photograph  
of performance. Photo: Luan Yang.  
Courtesy of the artist and 10 Chancery  
Lane Gallery, Hong Kong, and Richard  
Saltoun Gallery, London.

**“Gender, Genitor, Genitalia”—Rokudenashiko  
Tribute Exhibition in Hong Kong**

**Hitomi Hasegawa**

Fig. 33  
“Gender, Genitor, Genitalia,” 2015, installation  
view. Photo: David Boyce.

Fig. 34  
Phoebe Man, *Rati*, 2000–2001. Video, 8 min.  
Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 35  
Chan Mei Tung, *Make Me Bigger*, 2014.  
Video documentation of the performance,  
9 min.

**Caring for Decolonial Futures: Listening to  
the Voices of Decolonial Activism in the  
Museum**

**Lena Fritsch**

Fig. 36  
Mathilde ter Heijne, “Woman to Go—  
Presentation and Representation of the  
Personal and Impersonal,” Grassi Museum,  
Leipzig, 2019, exhibition view. Photo:  
Tom Dachs. Courtesy of Staatliche  
Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

Fig. 37  
Mathilde ter Heijne, *Woman to Go*, 2019.  
Postcard from the edition of the exhibition  
“Woman to Go—Presentation and  
Representation of the Personal and  
Impersonal.” Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 38  
Mathilde ter Heijne, *Assembling Past and  
Future*, 2019. Video still. Courtesy of the  
artist.

**Radically Invisible: Decolonial Approaches to  
Embodied Learning and Listening Activism**  
**Claudia Lomoschitz**

Fig. 39  
Louise Vind Nielsen, *Radikal Unsichtbar*,  
2020. Image: Louise Vind Nielsen.

Fig. 40  
Louise Vind Nielsen, *Radikal Unsichtbar*,  
*ACT 5: Nomenrature*, 2017. Sound research  
at the library of Hamburg's Anthropological  
Museum. Photo: Louise Vind Nielsen. Courtesy  
of the artist.

**On a Museum of Care (in Rojava)**  
**Elif Sarican, Nika Dubrovsky, and Elizaveta  
Mhaili**

Fig. 41  
Nika Dubrovsky, *Hiwa K “Chicago Boys:  
While We Were Singing, They Were  
Dreaming,” 2010*, 2020. Photo collage.

Fig. 42  
BP or not BP?, *Performance 59, Act III*,  
2020: “We refuse to leave the British  
Museum after our mass action, and 40  
performers stay overnight to create a  
durational artwork called ‘Monument,’  
made from plaster casts of the bodies of  
participants. We succeed in occupying the  
museum all night, and then our artwork  
remains in the museum for all of the  
following day, for museum visitors to view.  
8th–9th February 2020.” Photo: Ron  
Fassbender.

Fig. 43  
David Graeber and Nika Dubrovsky, *Future  
City: A Visual Assembly*, London, 2020.



Edna Bonhomme is an art worker, historian, and writer whose work interrogates the archaeologies of colonial science, embodiment, and surveillance. Her work is guided by diasporic futurisms, herbal healing, and bionic beings.

Birgit Bosold has been a member of the board of the Schwules Museum Berlin since 2006. In this capacity, she is responsible for the museum finances and was instrumental in the strategic reorientation of the museum. She directed prominent projects such as the major exhibition "Homosexuality\_ies (2015)." Together with Vera Hofmann, she was project director for the "Year of the Women\*."

Imayna Caceres, born in Callao, Peru, is an artist, writer, and curator whose work focuses on the making of meaning in community, Andean/Amazonian and Mestiza heritages and practices of regeneration, joy and kinship toward social justice. Graduated in sociology and media communication in Lima, and in fine arts and cultural studies from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. She is cofounder of the TRENZA collective, a group of women\* with ties to Latin America.

Pêdra Costa is a ground-breaking Brazilian urban anthropologist and performer based in Berlin. They use intimacy to connect with collectivity. They work with their body to create fragmented epistemologies of queer communities within ongoing colonial legacies. Their work aims to decode violence and transform failure whilst tapping into the powers of resilient knowledge from a plethora of subversive ancestralities that have been integral to anti-colonial and necropolitical survival. Exhibitions include "Manifestos for Queer Futures," Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin; Hessel Museum of Art, New York; Matadero Madrid; Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende, Santiago de Chile; and frei-raum Q21, Vienna.

COVEN BERLIN is a queer-feminist curatorial collective and online magazine who creates transdisciplinary exhibitions and events. COVEN's overlapping virtual and local network of artists and curators focuses on digital media and social transformation. The aim of our six-person

collective is to create an open sphere in which to deconstruct assimilated social structures on sexuality and gender, to transmit a positive message on sex, to defy body politics, and to resist xenophobia, racism, and ableism in our communities. COVEN bridges academia, activism, visual art, performance, and pornography to create playful and non-dogmatic exchange.

Nika Dubrovsky, born 1967 in Leningrad, is an artist, author, and activist who grew up in the unofficial cultural scenes of squats and samizdat of the late USSR. She has written for *e-flux*, *Artnet*, *Colta.ru*, *XX*, and others, and exhibited at, among others, the Tel Aviv Museum; Saint Petersburg Manege; Galerija nova, Zagreb; The Showroom, London; and Media Udar, Moscow. Her A4kids.org project has been published in Finnish, English, Russian, German, and Polish. In a series of articles, #artcommunism, written in collaboration with David Graeber, she reflects on the possibility of a world in which the very idea of having a CV becomes meaningless: a world where everyone could become an artist. Nika lives in London.

Lena Fritsch is a curator, artist, carpenter, and art educator. She works at the Institute for Education in the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, where she is writing her PhD, supervised by Elke Krasny. In her current work, she researches on peace and decolonial activism. Part of feminist and urban activism, she contributed to the 3rd Fact-Finding Committee at the Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik (Berlin) and *Chaos Ballett* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin).

Vanessa Gravenor is an artist, writer, and editor whose works and critical texts question how present-day emergences of violence are embedded within histories and demonstrate how retellings can be a place for power reversals, complicating what is recognized as official truth.

Julia Hartmann is art historian and independent curator based in Vienna. She previously worked as Assistant Curator at the Secession and Belvedere 21 and is currently writing her PhD at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, exploring the history of all-female exhibitions as well as of women's art in

China. She is the cofounder of SALOON Wien, an international network for women in the arts, and curator of exhibitions that link feminism, digitization, and activism.

Hitomi Hasegawa is a curator and founding director of Moving Image Archive of Contemporary Art (MIACA). She lives and works in Hong Kong. Hasegawa has curated numerous exhibitions at venues such as Dallas Contemporary; Crow Museum of Asian Art, Dallas; Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; and Mistetskiy Arsenal, Kiev. Her screening programs have been shown at the Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore, and the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul. She is a member of the Arts in Society Forum of Tokyo University and the Education of Gender and Sexuality for Arts Japan. Hasegawa is a PhD student at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

Vera Hofmann works at the intersection of art and design, self-organisation and organisational restructuring, healing and activism. Vera has been developing long-term research and artistic practice on crises and queer/ing resistance, with a current focus on commoning. From 2016–2020 they were a member of the board of directors of the Schwules Museum Berlin and co-curated the year-long (queer-)feminist intervention *Year of the Women\** at/into the museum in 2018. Larger bodies of work include founding the artist duo BENTEN CLAY: “a global corporation”, on nuclear waste disposal, extractivism and power (2011–2016), as well as the *Contemporary Cure Compendium* on health, ecologies and care (2014–2016).

Hana Janečková is a curator, theorist, and artist based in Prague. She graduated from Chelsea College of Art and Design (2011) and is a curator at Display – Association for Research and Collective Practice (display.cz) and a senior lecturer in contemporary art and theory at the Center for Audiovisual Studies, FAMU, Prague. Her research investigates the politics of the body from perspectives of feminist and queer art and curating. Selected activities include Restless Image

(ETC. 2020) “Multilogues on the Now” (Display, Prague, 2016–19), and the online anthology *Diagnosis* (Artalk, 2018). She was a cofounder and editor of Artyčok.tv London (2010–15), editor for *Flash Art* (CZ/SK), and her writing has appeared in *Frieze*, *Springerin*, *Romboid*, *A2*, *Block Magazine*, *Contradictions*, and many others.

k\are is a collective that tries to create various fluid platforms exploring ways to collectivize care. Agnieszka Habraschka and Mia von Matt are part of k\are. Agnieszka Habraschka was born in Poland as the child of a disabled nurse and came to West Germany at the age of six. She studied cultural studies, worked in theater and later with Arika, a political arts organization in Scotland that makes access the condition for all curatorial practice. Now she lives in Berlin and works as an artist around the topics of trauma, care, and access, and as a consultant and curator in various areas of cultural organizing. Agnieszka identifies herself as disabled and is learning German Sign Language. Mia von Matt came to Berlin from Vienna in the early 2000s to be a writer, mother, musician, and performance artist. Her texts are primarily presented performatively and as audio pieces. In addition to diverse performative projects in institutions such as HKW or Volksbühne, she is the founder of the podcast series *Bahamasuede*, “a topless radio show for all mother lovers of cunts,” developing a range of formats with and for her guests including play, live music, and sound collage, working toward a caring production in an intimate space.

Elke Krasny, Professor for Art and Education and head of the Institute for Education in the Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Krasny's interdisciplinary scholarship, academic writings, curatorial work, and international lectures address questions of care at the present historical conjuncture with a focus on emancipatory and transformative practices in art, curating, architecture, and urbanism. Her interdisciplinary approach connects feminist theory, care ethics, cultural analysis, environmental humanities, and memory studies. The 2019 volume *Critical Care: Architecture and Urbanism for a*

*Broken Planet*, edited together with Angelika Fitz, was published by MIT Press and introduces a care perspective in architecture addressing the anthropocenic conditions of the global present. Her 2020 essay “Care Feminism for Living with an Infected Planet” develops care feminism for pandemic times.

Chantal Küng, born 1985 in Basel, lives and works in Zurich, where she teaches at the master in art education program of the Zurich University of the Arts and at the fine arts program of the F+F School of Art and Design Zurich. She graduated with an MA in fine arts from the Institut Kunst, FHNW, Basel. and has worked as an artist, art educator, theorist, researcher, curator, and filmmaker. She is writing her PhD on the feminist artistic pedagogy of Doris Stauffer at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

Sophie Lingg lives and works in Vienna. As a freelance curator, she initiates collaborative exhibition projects, develops and realizes art education formats and experimental workshops, and participates in collaborative artistic projects and exhibitions. She studied art and education at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, where she is currently working on her PhD and teaches at the Institute for Education in the Arts.

Claudia Lomoschitz works and researches in the intersecting field of performance, fine arts and knowledge production. She holds a MA degree in performance studies from the University of Hamburg and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, where she works as lecturer and university assistant. She is researching performative historiography for her PhD, with a focus on the physicality of knowledge. Her artistic works had been shown at brut Wien, SZENE Salzburg, Kunstraum Niederösterreich; Belvedere 21, Lichthof Theater, and Kamnagel. She took part in a *apap* (advancing performing arts project) residency 2018 and received a danceWEB scholarship at *ImPulsTanz* 2018. [www.claudialomoschitz.com](http://www.claudialomoschitz.com)

Cathy Mattes (Michif) is an Indigenous curator, writer, and art history professor based out of Sprucewoods, Manitoba, Canada. Her curation, research and writing centers on dialogic and Indigenous knowledge-

centered curatorial practice as strategies for care. Curatorial projects include “Kwaata-nihtaawakihk – A Hard Birth” (Co-curator Sherry Farrell Racette, Winnipeg Art Gallery, February 2022) and “Inheritance: Amy Malbeuf” (2017, Kelowna Art Gallery). She has a PhD in Indigenous Studies from the University of Manitoba, and currently teaches at the University of Winnipeg in the History of Art program.

Elizaveta Mhaili, born in Yerevan, Republic of Armenia, in 1985; she grew up in Tbilisi, Georgia, where her family hosted partisans of the Kurdistan Workers' Party. The partisan stories made a lasting impression on Elizaveta. Freedom and independence of the Kurdish people, and freedom and independence of all people, are her dream. In 1992, the family moved to Kostroma, Russia. Elizaveta graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy, Saint Petersburg State University. Since 2017, she is involved in organizing actions and meetings dedicated to the Kurdistan freedom movement. Her focus is on women's self-defense units of the EPJ and on women's experience in Russia and Eastern Europe.

Jelena Micić, moved from Serbia to Vienna. She studies textual sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and is involved with the student union of the academy (Office for Social Politics and Economic Affairs), university representative in the student parliament, and initiator of the Third Country Student Working Group. As the *kültür gemma!* fellow, she was active in the campaign *Pay the Artist Now!* (IG Bildende Kunst). She conceptualized and organized the *I KNOW I CARE* Open Working Group, established during the festival *Wienwoche* (2019). She has co-curated the exhibitions “Multiple Singularities” (2020) and “Balkanization” (2016). For her artistic practice, she received the *Ö1 Talentestipendium für bildende Kunst* (2018). She is a founder of the informal group *UMETNIK\**.

Carlota Mir is a feminist curator, researcher, and cultural worker. She is currently a PhD student in the doctoral program at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. She works at the intersection between contemporary art, feminisms, social movements, art

history, and architecture. In her work, she interrogates the notion of feminist collectivity through making connections and genealogies between past, present, and future practices. Trained across disciplines and territories, she holds a BA in art history and French (University Sussex / Paris Sorbonne IV), an MA in contemporary art and visual culture (UAM / Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid), and a post-master in architectural history and theory (Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm).

Fabio Otti is an art teacher, drag performer, university lecturer, and PhD student in the doctoral program at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, specializing in contemporary drag performances and their interconnection with activism, identity politics, and curatorial practice.

Ven Paldano (they/them) is a non-binary trans-masculine identified QPoC entrepreneur, architectural assistant and community organizer, who cofounded Brighton QTIPoC Narratives Collective to make 'safer space' for QTIPoC. Ven is particularly focused on the power and application of craft, skill sharing, community mental health and wellbeing. They have immersed them-self in learning the skills of site carpentry, plastering, BBQ from Southern American Pitmasters and French cooking for the last fifteen years. These disciplines have led them to question the effects of colonialism within their own gender identity, the built environment, how property laws have driven us to today's oppressive border control systems, the roots that drive neoliberal property development schemes and the definition of 'safe space.' They are currently studying an MA in Architecture (RIBA Part 2) at the RCA with an aim to focus on policies that isolate the marginalized in urban space.

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez is an independent curator, editor, and writer based in Paris, whose research interest spans situated curatorial practices, empathy, transnational feminism, slow institutions, degrowth, and performative practices in former Eastern Europe. In 2019 she was the curator of the Contour Biennale 9 (Mechelen, Belgium) and, together with Giovanna Zapperi, curated the first comprehensive exhibition of the videos of French actress and feminist

activist Delphine Seyrig (1932–1990) at the LaM, Lille, and Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid. She co-founded, with Élisabeth Lebovici and Patricia Falguières, "Something You Should Know," a seminar series held at the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) and is a member of the research group Travelling féministe at the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, both in Paris.

Nina Prader is an artist, author, independent publisher, and print activist. Her work applies printed matters to radical goals in art, education, and community. [www.ladylibertypress.org](http://www.ladylibertypress.org)

Lesia Prokopenko (born in 1988 in Kiev, Ukraine) is a researcher and writer with a background in arts. Since 2013 she has been taking part in the work of the Institute for Public Art at Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts. She worked as the head of projects at the "School of Kyiv — Kyiv Biennial 2015"; curated and co-organized a number of exhibitions; presented talks at Konstruktivnämnden (IASPIS) in Stockholm, Winzavod in Moscow, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and the University Center at the New School, New York. She also translated *The Three Ecologies*, by Félix Guattari, into Russian.

Patricia J. Reis is an artist and researcher employing interactive media to appeal to the visitor's sensoriality. She graduated from ESAD.CR in 2004, completed a masters at Lusofona University in 2011, and a PhD in Art at University of Évora (Portugal) in 2016. Since 2015 she lectures at the University of Art and Design Linz and at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. She is currently a postdoctorate fellow at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Since 2012 she is a board member of the collective Mz\* Baltazar's Laboratory. Her artwork has been highlighted in several national and international institutions.

Elif Sarican is an anthropologist, writer, and organizer. She is an activist in the Kurdish women's movement, where she works on communicating their aims to an international audience. Elif works on the social and cultural transformations triggered by movements with a focus on the institutionalization of women's liberation and ecological justice.

Soft Agency: Gilly Karjevsky is a curator working at the intersection of art, architecture, and the politics of urban society. Rosario Talevi is an architect interested in critical spatial practice, transformative pedagogies, and feminist futures. Together, they are two of the founding members of Soft Agency, an international group of experienced female and non-binary architects, designers, scholars, artists, writers, and curators working at the forefront of spatial practices. The agency's work is rooted in feminist methodologies and radical, interdisciplinary practices that experiment with alternative formats, rethinking economy, political relationships, and alternative modes of participation. Through the creation of workshops, events, exhibitions, publications, and public programs, Soft Agency, seeks to disrupt and reimagine the lively entanglements through which we organize civic life.

Amelia Wallin is an Australian curator, writer, and the Director of West Space in Melbourne. Her work centers on commissioning and facilitating cross-disciplinary artistic exploration, as well as interrogating alternative models for institution building. Her recent research and writing examine reproductive labor in the space of the contemporary art institution, in relation to feminisms, care, and practices of instituting. Amelia has held curatorial and administrative positions at Performa in New York, and the Biennale of Sydney, Performance Space, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Vivid Ideas, and Performing Lines in Sydney. Amelia has contributed writing to *Running Dog*, *Runway*, *un Magazine*, *Artlink*, and others.

Verena Melgarejo Weinandt studied fine arts and art and cultural sciences at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the Instituto Universitario Nacional del Arte Buenos

Aires. Her work combines scientific, curatorial, artistic, and educative practices. Currently working as research assistant at the UdK Berlin, she is head of the project "Wissen über Brücken – Conocimiento sobre puentes. Relating to Gloria E. Anzaldúa in Words, Vision and Context." She has taught and lectured at universities and in non-institutional contexts. Her works have been exhibited at Salta, in Argentina; nGbK Berlin; Wiener Festwochen; and the 2019 BIENALSUR, Colombia.

Stefanie Wuschitz works in artistic research with a particular focus on gender and technology. She graduated with an MFA from the University of Applied Arts Vienna in 2006 and completed her master's at ITP (New York University) 2008. After a fellowship in Sweden she initiated the feminist hackerspace Mz\* Baltazar's Laboratory. In 2014 she finished her PhD on feminist hackerspaces at the TU Wien. She held research and post-doc positions at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, TU Wien, University of Michigan, and UdK Berlin. Her art installations have been exhibited on national and international venues.

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This exciting and cutting-edge book, which contributes to an area that does not receive much attention within curatorial studies, focuses on the challenges of curating, understood as a practice of critical caretaking that is connected to the activist politics of feminist and queer struggles. The texts push for emancipatory and transformative politics. Moreover, they stress activism as a continuous care practice that aligns with radical social justice. But this important volume does not only focus on the pitfalls, failures, and challenges that must be faced; it also works toward hope, joy, and the power to imagine and build communities based on care, justice, and prosperity. I find this to be its greatest achievement.

**Tal Dekel** (Tel Aviv University)

*Radicalizing Care* is brimming with the energy of newly enfranchised voices committed to just, accessible, and empathetic spaces. Originating in a conference to support the aspirations of the Schwules Museum Berlin to become a more inclusive LGBTQIA+ environment through programming addressed to women\*, this book collects a wide range of urgent and inspirational texts that unpick the legacies of racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia in public spaces of many kinds. The timeliness of the projects and the authors' commitment provide consistency in the volume, whether the contributors are considering activities taking place in Berlin, Rojava, or Hong Kong. This is a book for anyone with an interest in contemporary curating as the political work of caring for communities and the planet.

**Lara Perry** (University of Brighton)

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