

Critical Artistic Research and Arts Practices as Forms of (Radical) Care

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Cluster for Critical Artistic Research (CCARe) was born out of an urgent need to form a community for critical artistic and arts-based researchers with transnational experiences. At the time when the cluster was founded in 2019, many of the members—mostly non-Finns in Finland—expressed feelings of outsidership, lack of collectivity as a cohort, limited radical and critical institutional conversations on decolonial, feminist, and racialized discourses, and in general, a plethora of systemic issues that continue to perpetuate matters of marginalization amongst various communities. And so, CCARe discussions took place outside the university—in our kitchens, where through gathering, cooking, and sharing a meal, we started to think about strategies to work together in order to create opportunities for diverse discourses, and to the potentiality of change.

Formally CCARe was set up as a research group within the Department of Art at Aalto University, Finland. It functions as a network and platform for artistic and arts-based researchers examining a range of topics, that include, but are not limited to: critical artistic research, feminist and queer studies, intersectionality, postcolonial and decolonial studies, questions about more than human perspectives, new materialism, practice and collaboration, and experience driven knowledge.

Building upon this history, the December 2021 thematic issue of *Research in Arts and Ed-*

ucation then became an opportunity for us to further explore our common research interests, in particular to investigate, unpack, and invite more conversations on what *care* might mean as a radical form of community building, collective thinking, and healing. In this thematic issue, we wanted to focus on critical artistic research and arts practices as forms of (radical) care. By critical artistic research, we mean artistic research that engages critical theory and questions on social justice; it is our belief that such research practices can also be read as practices of care. In other words, when inviting authors to submit manuscripts in this issue, we were interested in care as it relates to intellectual critique, knowledge production, and forms of activism through and in the arts.

Understanding critical research approaches and societal activism in the arts as a practice of care expands the idea of care as an everyday experience. We agree with María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), that although care is such a common and evident experience in everyday life that it seems not to require any particular expertise or knowledge, “care remains ambivalent in significance and ontology” (p. 1). This ambivalence asks to recognize care as an affection, as a form of connection, as well as a form of labour, and sometimes as a form of oppression, in addition to practice of critical activism and potentiality of societal healing.

The thematic scope of this journal includes the questions of art and design practices and production, criticism, activism, pedagogy, curriculum and instructions. The articles of this issue include notions on care, such as, care as resistance, care as critique, care as community-making, care as solidarity and care as necessity. The contributions testify, for instance, moments when care becomes intensified due to neglect or pressure; moments of coming together and organising; to attempts of doing the work joyfully—and figuring out strategies and tactics that resist exhaustion.

Demonstrating the collective and collaborative nature of CCARe, the first paper of this issue is a co-authored visual essay by members of the CCARe research group, *Touching/Transforming:*

Notes towards collective critical artistic research practices and processes. Taking a poetic approach, these fragments - drawings and writings - are recounting personal impressions and experiences from the seminar *Touching/Transforming*, organized by the group in June 2021. *Touching/Transforming* was a two-day seminar that took place as a hybrid event in Suomenlinna at HIAP (Helsinki International Artist Programme) and online. The programme centred around a public online talk by skolt Sámi theatre director and activist Pauliina Feodoroff. Reflecting on the experience, the visual essay re-echoes the questions of language, land, lineage, body, bloodline, and belonging, that were all conveyed in Pauliina's talk.

In the following visual essay, *Selva—Research for an educational approach inspired by the life of plants*, Giulia Filippi explores the potential for a new educational approach that plant life presents. Through concepts of mutuality, anarchy and collectively, Filippi proposes that the “environment is always an assemblage, a community”.

In their article, *Caressing the Earth: of Maps and Mice, Flowers and Feet*, Celine S. Diaz and Dominik Fleischmann reflect on how relations to the more-than human world take form in some of their respective works, in order to produce “reciprocal rituals of care”. Diaz and Fleischmann's article hints to new kinds of relationships with *nature*, relationships that could imply practices of care.

Angela Marsh's article, *It's really just a love story (the paper)* centres around her art project entitled *It's really just a love story*. Not unlike Diaz and Fleischmann, Marsh proposes to reassess, through her art project, the *kinships with nature*, and reclaim it as “an act of care, both on the intimate and societal level, addressing human as well as ecological restoration needs.” In her article, Marsh advocates for new and decolonized interspecies relationships.

Marika Tervahartiala endeavours to create a caring and collaborative relation between herself - a human researcher-drawer - and Drawing, which she describes as a non-human entity. In *To Draw the Line: Resharing Authority and Taking Care of Drawing as an Emergent Agent in*

Artistic Research, Tervahartiala extends a dialogical space, whereby the researcher, Drawing, and the reader collectively embark upon an open-ended process-based journey of rethinking our approach and relationship with Drawing.

Uhlig's visual essay examines the *Buy Nothing Project*, presenting a case that the gift economy generated through the initiative as a form of community care. Focusing on her dissertation project, *Between Order and Disorder* and its two other iterations, where members of the *Buy Nothing Project* played an important role, Uhlig highlights how socially-engaged and participatory exhibitions can be potential spaces of co-creation and collaboration.

In their article, *Collaborative Poetic Inquiry as Micro-Resistance: Reconciling Art Educators' Identity Dissonance in Professional Spaces*, Michelle Attias and Audrey Reeves reflect on their personal and professional experiences of working in the public university context—whereby dominant structures of race, class, sexuality, and ableism consistently perpetuate systems of marginalization. Building upon this inquiry, the two art educators propose collaborative, experimental, and poetic ways to reflect on such power dynamics, which are often at play in the academy, and offer suggestions to reconcile some of these workplace conflicts and potential ways to create opportunities for new narratives.

In the following article, *Where's the Time to Care? The Temporal Politics of Caring for Educational Technologies*, Hong-An (Ann) Wu prefaces her action research project, where she worked on a series of workshops with teens in a library setting in the US Midwest. The aim of these interventions was to collectively address, critique, and challenge normative representation in video games—such as *Minecraft*—creating the possibility to re-write and re-design more inclusive gaming worlds. Reflecting on the findings of the workshops series, and drawing on feminist technoscience scholarship on care, temporality, and technologies, Wu's article unpacks technological disruptions and obstructions, resulting a need for care in pedagogy.

Anouk Verviers' article focuses on *Au milieu des bureaux empilés (In Between Desks)*, a

socially engaged art project where 83 students from 11 schools in Canada and Switzerland took part in a series of conversations. The aim of the initiative was to investigate whether it is possible to create open and critical spaces for discourse, sharing experiences, and critique for students within the school setting. Taking an analytical approach, the article then proposes one framework that has the potential to foster independent thinking and community making amongst students.

In her article, *Kenyan Children & Youth Acquire a Space to Create During COVID -19*, Lucy Mugambi reflects on an educative art project born in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mugambi raises awareness of the range of problems that school going children and parents in Kenya had to face during and after the lockdown. The author proposes that many turned to “creative, alternative means of taking care, educating, and keeping their children busy and mentally healthy at home.” The Virtual Community-Based Art Education project emerged from a graduate school course in the Spring of 2021.

In their article, *A Politics of Care and Responsibility: Art and Education for Sustainable Development*, Censu Caruana, Isabelle Gatt, Raphael Vella and Charmaine Zammit analyse a research project called *Visual art education in new times: Connecting Art with REal life issues* (CARE). The EU-funded project studies the implementation of principles of Education for Sustainable Development into art education. Central to the article is the idea that art education could be a way of “extending our sense of care” to the more-than-human, to our environments and ecosystems, and to the coming generations.

In response to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting series of lockdowns in Australia, Stacy Holman Jones, Daniel X Harris, Alyson Campbell, Misha Myers, Peta Murray, Mish Grigor, and Ripley Stevens, initiated a research project *Staging Australian Women’s Lives: Theatre, Feminism and Socially Engaged Art*. As a collective of feminist and queer performance scholars and artists, their goal was to document the history and social impact of womxn theatre

makers in the Australian context (from 1970 to the present) as a way of mapping feminist strategies used to address gender inequality and oppression. The paper, *On Care-Fulness: Critical Creative Expressions of Care in a Feminist Theatre Research Project* offers a critical reflection on the intentions and methodologies on the collective's project, opening up a series of urgent questions that reflect the group's commitment to radical and ethical modes of artistic practice, thinking, and history.

Focusing on specific aspects of her artistic doctoral research project that engage object-oriented methodologies, in *Object Companionship: An Artistic Research Method and Object-led Praxis in Participatory Theatre*, Mari Rusi-Pyykönen highlights the impact of neo-liberal politics on the project-based design of participatory theatre practices.

In their essay, *A Place to Meet: Living with Critical Theory as a Mode of Care in Everyday Artistic Practice*, Myriam D. Diatta, Stacy Holman Jones, and Kate McEntee engage in a crossover of fragments of each one's practices. The essay relies on a tangle of critical theory, praxis, and the everyday, in a real concern for care.

In *Person-centred music-making as a cultural change agent for compassionate healthcare: through the lens of experiential workplace learning*, Krista de Wit addresses rapidly aging patient populations and the urgency to develop compassionate patient-centred healthcare culture and discourse. Through a participatory music practice in Dutch hospitals, de Wit suggests a particular potentiality for music-making for social change, and proposes cultural exchange and significant impact between healthcare professionals and patients.

All contributions of this collection offer a unique and important approach to critical artistic research and arts practices as forms of (radical) care. The articles provide excellent examples of effort of care during the trying times, such as the global pandemic. They also reflect significant local societal and artistic issues in different historical and geopolitical environments. We hope the readers will find the articles relevant to respond to the diversified and complex current global

demands for care within artistic practices and research.

References

Puig de la Bellacassa, M. (2017). *Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds*. University of Minnesota Press.