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# Feminist Archives: Narrating Embodied Vulnerabilities and Practices of Care

*Abstract*

The outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 has exposed a shared condition of vulnerability on a global scale. How can we use vulnerability as an effective paradigm in order to foster collective political initiatives? This essay claims that the idea of care is key to understand the vulnerability framework as being both an epistemic and a political resource to address ethical issues. The first half of the essay recollects several arguments in Adriana Cavarero's and Judith Butler's most recent works, insofar as both theorists have insisted on the notion of vulnerability in order to interpret contemporary political mobilizations. The second part of the essay retraces a constellation of practices of care in the works of several Black and decolonial feminist thinkers situated in different socio-political contexts. Whereas for Christina Sharpe and Saidiya Hartman the focus is on the matter of Blackness and Black lives in their constitutive vulnerability, both Cristina Rivera Garza's and Sayak Valencia's works remarkably insist on the specific socio-political context of today's Mexico. These authors urge the readers to adopt a critical posture when encountering official narratives, also because in their texts they exhibit their own vulnerability. For them, writing, their writing is an ethical demand to imagine alternatives and to foster new entanglements between bodies persisting on the margins, at the limits of the norms that regulate legibility.

*Keywords*: vulnerability, care, archives, pandemic, wake work

## 1. *Introduction*[1]

For the past three years, the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 has exposed a shared condition of extreme precariousness on a global scale. We can identify two kinds of approaches which have been adopted, often at the same time, in order to cope with it, and two related uses of the notion of vulnerability. On the one hand, governments of many states have introduced security measures frequently combined with mainstream political imagery grounded in a paradigm that frames the emergency in terms of a 'war against the virus'. On this model, based on securitization, vulnerability is a problem to defend against at all costs. On the other hand, in news coverage, political analysis, grassroots activism, and scientific research, commentators have insisted on the importance of social distancing as an ethical duty. In this case vulnerability can be framed as something "universal and constant, inherent in the human condition" (Fineman 2008, 1): precisely because it is a common condition, we are all responsible for each other.[2] Although such a universalist claim has effectively raised awareness about the risks of the virus spreading within large communities, sometimes it too might lead to securitizing discourses.

This essay insists on a third kind of interpretation, by claiming that the idea of *care* is key to understanding how the 'vulnerability paradigm' can be both an epistemic and a political resource to address ethical issues. I adopt here the definition of care recently formulated in *The Care Manifesto*:

[2] As early as July 2020, Shah 2020 insisted on the urgency of adopting a different interpretation of the spread of coronavirus, namely the so called *One Health* paradigm in medicine, which considers the interrelatedness and embeddedness of all lives on the planet as its reference. See Levine 2020, which highlights that the pandemic has also presented us with the idea that body politics could compromise, rather than support, the efforts of mutual care performed by self-isolating.

"care is our individual and common ability to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive – along with the planet itself" (The Care Collective 2020, 6). On this account, the notion expresses both the idea of *cure* (with different nuances of meaning, such as 'taking care of', 'being responsible for'), and that of *interest* (consideration, concern, inclination). In particular, I investigate care from the standpoints of public ethics and of a 'political aesthetics', namely the study of collective practices and performances, and of the way they are narrated and perceived.

There are, in fact, different interpretations of the concept of vulnerability.[3] The claim of vulnerability can be used by any group of people that feels threatened by any form of diversity and 'otherness'; anything that does not belong to them; anything that they cannot control and with which they do not identify.[4] Therefore, such a claim can also foster discriminatory and/or racist discourses and practices. For example, Christina Sharpe has effectively described how the Black skin – the very idea of 'Blackness' – in the United States is often considered the "terror's embodiment", "*the* internal terroristic threat" (Sharpe 2016, 79). This is the rhetoric in place when residents of wealthy neighborhoods call the police at the sight of a Black person near their backyard or, as Sharpe remarks upon, when Black mothers must constantly warn their children about how to behave in order not to become the next victim of systemic racist violence. But whose claim of vulnerability is displayed and narrated by official discourses? Sometimes it is only that of the people who perceive Blackness as an unbearable threat. Therefore, the appeal to vulnerability itself can reproduce violence and reiterate segregation.

A crucial distinction has to be made between, on the one hand, the account of vulnerability based on the idea of a neoliberal autonomous and independent subject[5] and, on the other hand, a feminist tradition that

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[3] See, for instance, Mackenzie *et al.* 2014 for the broad spectrum of uses of the notion in moral theory and Schroeder and Gefenas 2009 for a discussion of the nuanced but also remarkably diverse definitions of vulnerability in medical research.

[4] For a feminist and decolonial reading of the embodied relationship between the stranger and the community, see Ahmed 2000.

[5] For simplicity's sake, I call it the neoliberal account of vulnerability, although this does not mean that every thinker who frames vulnerability by adopting an

thinks of vulnerability as a site of agency from which to foster collective practices in the name of care. The latter adopts relationality and interdependency as a starting point to understand vulnerability as a non-subjective state, and I locate my understanding of vulnerability within this debate according to this account. This essay therefore questions the *paternalistic* idea of care entailed by the neoliberal account of vulnerability, that understands it in terms of 'seeking protection from'.[6] Conversely, I claim the *inaugural* connotation of a feminist understanding of vulnerability as being a positionality from which to transform the socio-political context.

However, within the field of feminist theories the debate on vulnerability is broad. In the first part of the essay, I partially reconstruct it by pointing out the most significant differences as compared to the neoliberal accounts of vulnerability and care. In particular, I recollect several arguments in Adriana Cavarero's and Judith Butler's most recent works, insofar as both theorists have insisted on the notion of vulnerability in order to interpret contemporary political mobilizations, e.g., against racism, institutional violence, and violence and discrimination based on sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. In their arguments, a radical difference emerges between the use of vulnerability as a claim in identity politics and nationalist discourses, on the one hand, and on the other hand vulnerability as a collective practice in the name of inclusivity, solidarity, and – most importantly – care. A crucial problem that the project behind this article poses is how to reconcile the claim of vulnerability as a shared condition that sometimes emerges in its universality, and the contingent status of vulnerability as being unequally distributed. The way in which this essay addresses this concern is by remarking that *universality* (expressed by Fineman, Cavarero, and Butler when they discuss vulnerability as an ontological status inherent to the human condition) does not necessarily mean abstraction. For this reason, I insist on the topic of *narration* – especially in

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autonomous and independent account of the subject identifies their positionality as being neoliberal.

[6] On this account, the normative framework understands vulnerability as a juridical definition that presupposes a distinction between subjects worthy of institutional protection and others who are not. The 'selective vulnerability' model is often applied, for instance, to migrants seeking asylum for 'humanitarian reasons' as opposed to those who are considered 'economic migrants'.

the form of writing and doing research – as being itself (potentially) a practice of care.[7] Indeed, as Cavarero has pointed out, narration is a strategy to counter abstraction insofar as it is a relational practice and it accounts for one's own uniqueness and singularity.[8]

However, narration is not a neutral practice and the archive(s)[9] informing such narration is a highly politicized space. It establishes and

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[7] I first elaborated on the research project from which this essay is extrapolated while in Italy, during the first lockdown in 2020. For many of us, as researchers, writing and narrating were among the only ways to act politically. Indeed, sometimes research allows us to build communities even in physical isolation. Even in a lockdown, it can be a relational practice, although most of the relational exchanges happen virtually. Precisely the virtual connotation of many writing and sharing practices has posed urgent questions to feminist thinkers. Alongside the question of how *safe* the virtual space can be, I asked myself how *safe* it is to narrate our own story and be narrated by others. This led me to think about how narration works, as a relational and potentially radical practice.

[8] Cavarero's account of narration emerges precisely in opposition to philosophy and other disciplines, and it expresses the constitutive link between biographical stories and history. See Cavarero 2015, 9: "foreign to the defining language of philosophy and the human sciences, biographical narration […] assembles the fragments of a life experience that disclose the meaning of the uniqueness of that very life". The notion of narration that I use in the essay includes, on the one hand, practices that are more linked to the literary domain, like Hartman's critical fabulation and Rivera Garza's disappropriation in writing, and, on the other hand, philosophical and historical research. I also understand narration in a much broader sense, as the way in which we account for socio-political contexts, events, relations, and subjectivities.

[9] I adopt here Hartman's notion of the archive, which she formulates with reference to Foucault 1972, 128-129. According to this account, an archive is a set of discursive productions which have been framed according to norms that depend on the genre, the cultural context in which the author(s) writes, the translations, and so on. These norms are the terms of legibility that guide the way we approach the archive, and through which the archive produces narrations about us. For this reason, Hartman 2008, 10 points out that "the archive of slavery rests upon a founding violence", which "regulates and organizes the kinds of statements that can be made about slavery and as well it creates subjects and objects of power". Therefore, my research project has a double goal: both to retrace feminist archives that narrate embodied vulnerabilities and practices of care, and to question my own approach to them as a feminist researcher.

enforces – not just expresses – power relations and it can reproduce structural forms of violence. Advocating for the importance of having one's story narrated always has a flipside, which leads us to raise other questions. What does it mean to narrate embodied vulnerabilities? What happens to those subjects who are denied the possibility of freely expressing themselves or even of appearing in public? What happens if their political actions cannot be legible and understandable because of the way in which they are narrated? Who dictates the terms of legibility?

In the second part of the essay, I engage with the works of several Black and decolonial feminist thinkers situated in different socio-political contexts,[10] who address similar questions while describing practices of care that deal with narration – mostly in the form of writing, doing research, and questioning the archive, but also advocating for corporeal politics. Whereas for Sharpe and Saidiya Hartman the focus is on the matter of blackness and black lives in their constitutive vulnerability, both Cristina Rivera Garza's and Sayak Valencia's works are remarkable in their insistence on the specific socio-political context of today's and particularly on Tijuana's factual and symbolical connotation as a frontier territory.

## 2. Embodied vulnerabilities

Emmanuel Lévinas first argued that vulnerability is an ontological aspect of each human life, ambivalently linked both to violence and to the ethical choice not to commit violence (Lévinas 1996). In feminist theories, the topic of vulnerability has been addressed through the lens of a *relational* model in the study of politics, which entails the critique of the sovereign subject paradigm that has characterized Western political thought from Hobbes and the social contract tradition onward (see Pateman 1988; Pulcini 2001). In Fineman's account, vulnerability is at the core of a radical idea of equality and allows us to reconceptualize the role of "an active state in non-authoritarian terms" (Fineman 2008, 19). Indeed, if we think of vulnerability as something shared by all human beings, institutions are responsible for providing each citizen

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[10] On 'situatedness' as a pivotal methodological strategy in feminist theory, see Haraway 1988.

with the same resources and opportunities to live a happy life "despite our vulnerability" (Fineman 2008, 18). Therefore, the State is responsible, according to Fineman, for the advantages that some groups may have as compared to others in, say, finding a house or a job, starting a family, and so on.[11] Vulnerability is not, for Fineman, solely a juridical definition to identify groups in need of protection; it is, rather, a conceptual framework that allows us to develop a different idea of subjectivity that challenges the traditional account of the "autonomous and independent subject asserted in the liberal tradition" (Fineman 2008, 2). The vulnerable subject is indeed defined as such based on any of the precarious aspects that can characterize a life. For instance, different parameters, such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and culture can turn out to be more or less disadvantageous depending on the social, political, and geographical context in which the subject is situated. Therefore, vulnerability should be understood, according to Fineman, as a fundamental juridical connotation in jurisprudence and social policies. However, in Fineman's formulation quoted above "despite our vulnerability", the striking choice of the proposition leads us to interrogate vulnerability as a category, wondering how it can be considered a site of agency to make free choices in our lives, and therefore to make ethical choices in the name of care, instead of something *despite* which we are able to do such things.

Particularly at the end of the 1990s and during the 2000s, several feminist thinkers raised awareness of the necessity to move from ethical considerations on the topic of care to political arguments and possible practices. This is the case, for example, with Eva Kittay's studies on the social role of unpaid care labor and its traditional attribution to women, especially to migrants (see Kittay 1999 and Kittay 2010), which pose the critical questions of who the *subject of* care is and, instead, who is *subject to* care (Kittay and Feder 2002). At the same time, Kittay has insisted on the necessity of considering caregiving a public responsibility, thus pro-

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[11] Most of the times, Fineman refers to the contemporary institutional and juridical system of the United State. Therefore, although there is a significant European tradition of reception of her works, especially in the legal field, her remarks discussing the role of the institutions cannot be easily generalized. See Giolo 2018.

moting and defending universally accessible services that provide care. Moreover, instead of examining how notions of vulnerability and care emerge within specific institutional frameworks and juridical systems, Elena Pulcini's approach has investigated the way in which, by adopting these concepts, it is possible to rethink the role of the institutions and the social boundaries and responsibilities in the so-called Global Era (Pulcini 2009). Moreover, Pulcini has urged us to consider justice and care as being two interrelated paradigms and, by adopting the peculiar perspective of a 'moral psychology' to address ethico-political issues, she has investigated the emotions that activate both a demand for justice and a practice of care.[12] Rather than understanding the ethics of care in altruistic and oblative terms (an approach that feminist theorists have frequently criticized especially because it has too often justified the idea of a female responsibility to care/take care), in Pulcini's reading it emerges as an effective paradigm to think the social and the political, if understood as a mutual responsibility toward each other that presupposes equality (Pulcini 2020). With a specific argument for democratic theory, Joan Tronto has investigated the responsibilities of the State in granting welfare and public services. In Tronto's account, a public ethics of care can reshape our understanding of citizenship and democratic participation, as expressed in the notion of 'caring democracy' (Tronto 1993; Tronto 2013; Tronto 2015). Thanks to these and other critical readings, we can distinguish between different understandings of care ethics as being the outcome of a recognized condition of vulnerability and it is possible to demand institutional responsibilities rather than individual ones only.[13]

Fineman is not the only thinker to stress vulnerability as a constitutive trait of the human condition. Particularly after the tragic events of 9/11, Butler and Cavarero have engaged in a years-long exchange based on the idea that vulnerability is an *ontological* aspect of embodiment.[14] Based on

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[12] For a different interpretation of the role played by the emotions in understanding both care and justice as ethical paradigms, see Nussbaum 2013.

[13] See also Ferrarese 2018, Rozmarin 2017, and Gilson 2014.

[14] Murphy 2011 retraces the earlier stage of this exchange in detail, whereas, in this essay, I mostly focus on the texts published by the two authors more recently.

this understanding, the subject position is only a projection that we must understand in its constitutive relationality and interdependence, which are key notions that have been introduced by the two theorists alike. In F*rames of War*, Butler importantly differentiates between two accounts of vulnerability: on the one hand, *precariousness* is a shared bodily condition that characterizes human life in its corporeality; on the other hand, the use of the term *precarity* stresses that each human life has different social, cultural, ethnic, racial, economic, and gender conditions (see Butler 2009, 3). In their most recent book they offer a helpful definition of vulnerability:

> 'Vulnerability' should not be considered as a subjective state, but rather as a feature of our shared or interdependent lives. We are never simply vulnerable, but always vulnerable to a situation, a person, a social structure, something upon which we rely and in relation to which we are exposed. Perhaps we can say that we are vulnerable to those environmental and social structures that make our lives possible, and that when they falter, so do we. To be dependent implies vulnerability: one is vulnerable to the social structure upon which one depends, so if the structure fails, one is exposed to a precarious condition (Butler 2020, 36).

In order to understand vulnerability as a shared condition, it is necessary to dismantle its understanding as a "subjective state", as Butler points out. Alongside Fineman, they stress that vulnerability is pivotal for a radical understanding of equality, which is a condition that everyone experiences due to the constitutive interdependency of all lives. With a quasi-phenomenological argument, Butler frames equality as an *experience* and locates it in the body, the irreducible site from which to question the subject position:

> Equality is thus a feature of social relations that depends for its articulation on an increasingly *avowed* interdependency – letting go of the body as a "unit" in order to understand one's boundaries as relational and social predicaments: including sources of joy, susceptibility to violence, sensitivity to heat and cold, tentacular yearnings for food, sociality, and sexuality (Butler 2020, 36).

As a radical critique of the neoliberal idealization of a self-sufficient *homo oeconomicus* (see Brown 2015, 106-107; Pulcini 2020, 15-31), inter-

dependency is not just dependence. It entails asymmetrical relations, but it calls for relationality in the most structural sense, as it refers to the way in which all lives depend upon social structures and infrastructures, connections to other people, animals, natural environments, and artificial objects – as the pandemic has made even more clear (see Shah 2020).

The written exchange between Butler and Cavarero has been fruitful and ongoing at least for the past ten years. Butler refers to Cavarero's 'postural' ethics, a conceptual framework that the Italian philosopher has developed based on the imagery of motherhood, being a symbolic and aesthetical way of thinking relationality in terms of vulnerability and dependence (Cavarero 2016). Cavarero's critique of rectitude is framed in gendered imagery, inasmuch as rectitude characterizes, as a *phallic* posture, the individualistic ontology rooted in Kant's formulation of the (modern) subject and then converted in the neoliberal efficiency model. The autonomous individual with his own desires and interests, inevitably portrayed as male, appears in Hobbes' representation of the state of nature. In Rousseau's *Émile*, he is the citizen-subject of the entire social contract tradition, to give but two paradigmatic examples. The vertical posture is a symbolic embodiment of the expectations of a structurally patriarchal society, in which the individual is an agent responsible for his own choices and actions who never has to rely upon others in his adulthood (see Pulcini 2001). What if we rather *incline* this vertical figure, suggests Cavarero? What if, instead of imagining *a* figure, we imagine a network of inclinations? Motherhood is, for Cavarero, the perfect embodiment of this symbolic architecture, representing the absolute asymmetric exchange between two interrelated bodies.

Among other crucial interests, the two theorists certainly share the reference to Hannah Arendt's work, especially when they address topics like equality, democracy, and political concerted actions. Butler represents the performativity of mobilizations – as collective gatherings that entail the physical attendance and sometimes the stable occupation of a public space – by using the notion of *assembly* (Butler 2015). According to Butler, getting together is a bodily performance, a way to display the shared vulnerability of a *plural* political actor. In the assembly, each body clearly emerges as political precisely because it is precarious, inasmuch as it *persists* at the very limits of the norms that regulate both public space

and the ways of thinking and being legible. For this reason, Butler claims that a body's agency depends particularly on the social conditions in which it acts and on the norms that it re-enacts sometimes iteratively. But there *is* agency even in precarity. Butler mentions events, like the so-called Arab Spring uprisings in the early 2010s, the anti-austerity Indignados movement in Spain in 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York in 2011, and the occupation of Gezi Park in Istanbul in 2013 (to mention a few), in which groups of people have been exhibiting the precarity and the needs of the human body in a concerted way, thus remarking that they are political issues.

Butler formulates the notion of assembly, as being a fully democratic mode of political interaction *and* action, in remarkably Arendtian terms, namely as a horizontal and plural space of appearance in which everyone can express their own self. However, Butler harshly criticizes Arendt for erasing (especially in *The Human Condition*) the so-called 'social question' from the political sphere in her distinction between private and public, and, above all, between the economic and social sphere – to which the German philosopher relegates labor – and politics, namely the sphere where the individuals who are free from any bodily needs can interact and share their own uniqueness:

> Arendt's view clearly meets its limits here, for the body is itself divided into one that appears publicly to speak and act and another one, sexual, laboring, feminine, foreign, and mute, that generally is relegated to the private and pre-political sphere. Such a division of labor is precisely what is called into question when precarious lives assemble on the street in form of alliance that must struggle to achieve a space of appearance (Butler 2015, 86).

For Butler, assembly is the only truly democratic performative interaction, which notably distinguishes certain forms of gathering and mobilization from others, and such a distinction is based on vulnerability. The nonviolent kind of assembly that Butler evokes takes place in a public space in which the political actors can *safely* display their embodied differences and precarity, and even adopt them as the basic point of reference for their political claims. However, it is undeniable that most of the time, when Butler discusses vulnerability, the notion appears to be a coping mechanism – something inextricably linked to violence. A similar

approach also emerges in Butler's formulation of an ethics of nonvio-
lence (Butler 2020) as being a constant struggle, a *fight* against both the
temptation to commit violence (even as a form of self-defense) and the
appeal to consider some losses more grievable than others. Butler's ac-
count of nonviolence means that one recognizes one's own vulnerability
in the other's precarious conditions, but at the same time it fosters a
*negative* understanding of both vulnerability and care. It does not come
as a surprise that Butler has eventually claimed that neither concept can
be the foundation of a new politics (nor of an ethics, for that matter).[15]

The way in which vulnerability is narrated is, indeed, pivotal in or-
der to avoid the slippery slope of marginalization and victimization to
which the account of 'vulnerable groups' can lead, especially in the legal
field. Therefore, I ask, how are we to narrate vulnerability as expressing
a feature of our interdependency, rather than a subjective state? Butler
themselves provides us with a crucial conceptual tool to narrate vulnera-
bility in an inaugural way, which is precisely the notion of assembly. The
performative effectiveness of assemblies consists in inaugurating spaces
of appearance – to borrow Arendt's notion again – which are not nec-
essarily *new* material spaces, but could be public structures, buildings,
squares that are re-organized in a way that allows the assembly to gather
and to share experiences. This interpretation gives us the opportunity to
insist on what assemblies initiate and to interrogate both the moment
of inauguration of something new and its duration.

Cavarero goes in this direction in her 2019 book D*emocrazia sorgiva*
(published in English as Cavarero 2021), by highlighting that the radi-
cally egalitarian approach that Butler adopts when they discuss the per-
formativity of assemblies is, in fact, the essential precondition of de-

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[15] See Butler 2020, 118-130: "Postscript: Rethinking Vulnerability, Violence, Re-
sistance". Among Butler's examples, the most relevant are the refugees, who are
often denied citizenship and criminalized, and women and trans people who
are victims of discrimination, violence, and *feminicídio*. These examples are par-
ticularly effective in portraying forms of violence and discrimination that are
anything but the most evident and dangerous outcome of a socio-political as-
set. The structural connotation of such violence is enforced by the police and
the legal systems, and even encoded in the legal procedures that reproduce
discriminations.

mocracy, if one considers the proper meaning of the notion (Cavarero 2021). In the book, Cavarero retraces the conceptual core of the idea of democracy by once again turning to Arendt with the declared aim to call into question the vocabulary of Western political thought, from Plato onward, based on concepts like sovereignty, government, war, and violence. For Arendt, democracy *happens* as an authentic and primary experience of one's own uniqueness *and* relationality – because one's own uniqueness can be expressed only in a plural and relational context. For Cavarero as well, politics has nothing to do with the separation between rulers and ruled, between people in charge and people who participate in the political life only when they are expected to vote. Politics is no *herrschaft*, no domination: "Prior to any form of government, the word democracy evokes a certain spatial arrangement, a horizontal plane for the interaction of equals. To describe it in the vocabulary of Hannah Arendt, it evokes a communal space of reciprocal appearance, where a plurality of unique beings acts in concert" (Cavarero 2021, 3-4).

Cavarero insists on describing this kind of participation in spatial terms: as an open space, like a theatre, in which the participants are political actors and politics is the horizontal platform on which the interactions happen – what is *between* them. Its phenomenological connotation entails the authentic experience of belonging and participating in a plurality. Cavarero qualifies this notion of democracy with the adjective "surging" (*sorgiva*) which, etymologically, refers to the source, the origin of a concerted action – something radically different from the *in*-surgent and oppositional character of many uprisings and insurrections. Surging designates the natality, the beginning of something new, but also its duration. It requires from all participants a common disposition to be inclined toward each other, exhibiting one's own vulnerability and dependency rather than trying to prevail over one another. Hence, the radical egalitarianism that characterizes democracy at its core cannot be understood without thinking vulnerability.

In the "Preface" to the English translation of *Surging Democracy*, published in 2021, Cavarero addresses the tragic historical events that happened after the Italian edition appeared, namely, the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and the outbreak of protests, within and beyond the United States, after an African American man, George Floyd, was murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis on May 25th, 2020 (Cavarero 2021, xiii-xiv). So-

cial distancing, mask mandates, free (even domestic) testing, and other crucial initiatives organized on a global scale by both institutional and non-institutional entities in order to help people who lost part of their family, their job, and/or their house – namely, the *social infrastructures of care*[16] – have since then remarkably transformed our ways of living and inter-acting with one another. Despite such a threat for their own health conditions, when Floyd was murdered, thousands of people decided to show up in the streets, and in many other public spaces, to lament their outrage and to reappropriate the right to visibility, the right to walk safely in public while refusing to acknowledge the gaze that perceives them as the "embodiment of terror" (Sharpe 2016, 79).

Cavarero argues that those protesters did more than enact a practice of care toward Floyd's family. By gathering in public, they also displayed their own embodied vulnerability. Not only did they *protest* and *denounce* structural racism and police violence, they were also able to initiate something, to inaugurate a new series of shared political experiences that required – and still require – taking care of each other while being in public: e.g., keeping a physical distance while marching together; wearing masks while chanting and screaming. The Black Lives Matter protesters and the supporters who demonstrated with them enacted these practices of care precisely by recognising the shared precarity that characterizes Black lives, aiming to preserve each participant – and especially the most vulnerable ones – from the contagion but also from other risks that are always present when one exhibits one's own body for political reasons.

## 3. Practices of care

Cavarero's account of vulnerability invites us to investigate the tensions within this paradigm. Along with Cavarero, I claim that vulnerability is not a negative category – something *despite* which one acts in certain ways – but rather it is the reason for which one embraces an ethical choice in the name of care. But then, how do we *frame* vulnerability, in

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[16] In Kern 2021 the idea of care infrastructures recurs, as the author insists on the fact that the coronavirus pandemic has illustrated once again how much they are neglected in almost every urban context.

both theoretical approaches and political initiatives, so that it leads to practices of care? Which practices of care can *stage* vulnerability as an embodied, shared condition without framing their claims in terms of identity politics? Can practices of care promote a plural *subjectivation* – namely the construction of a plural political subject – by questioning the subject position? In order to at least partially respond to these questions, I have retraced, in the work of several feminist thinkers, a constellation of practices of care in which embodied vulnerability appears to be a site of agency from which to promote inclusivity, solidarity, and even radical forms of dis-identification.

### 3.1 Writing, narrating, and engaging the archives

Both Sharpe and the Mexican writer and literary critic Cristina Rivera Garza pose similar questions that interrogate both their own work and the socio-political context in which each of them is situated: what does it mean to write and how should one write in a necropolitical context?[17] How can one do research by consulting documents from institutional archives that keep reproducing the same structural violence as the official narratives? These questions introduce a new 'layer' of care work that concerns writing and doing research as possible practices of care.

Sharpe's notion of "wake work" is crucial to understanding how the way one engages the archives can foster a specific practice of care. In I*n the* Wake: O*n* B*lackness and* B*eing*, Sharpe aims to express the precarity of all Black lives, insofar as Blackness always means living in the aftermath of

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[17] Mbembe 2003, 12 defines 'necropolitics' as a specifically contemporary account of sovereignty that subjugates life to the power of death (the 'necropower' – *nekros* in ancient Greek means "corpse"): "to exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power". This definition explicitly refers to Foucault's account of biopower (namely, a political rationality that exercises control over biological existences), a notion that, according to Mbembe, does not account for contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the constant threat of death, like the specific kind of power that characterizes late-modern colonial occupations from Africa to Palestine. Necropolitics marks the failure of liberal democracies by fostering "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations" (Mbembe 2003, 39-40).

a history of slavery and exploitation.[18] It is an indelible mark on the black skins of those who carry the legacy of subjugation and the temporality of "the past that is not past":[19]

> This kind of movement happens all over the Black diaspora from and in the Caribbean and the continent to the metropole, the US great migrations of the early to mid-twentieth century that saw millions of Black people moving from the South to the North, and those people on the move in the contemporary from points all over the African continent to other points on the continent and also to Germany, Greece, Lampedusa (Sharpe 2016, 4).

The legacy of migration, slavery, exploited labor, and racism, as a mark over Black bodies, keeps reproducing violence by means of racist gazes, words, and acts. Sharpe narrates her own family's story – a long line of losses all linked, in different ways but through centripetal connections, to the very fact of being Black in the United States. She expresses such a legacy produced by anti-Blackness and white supremacy with the expression "in the wake", which designates several things, i.e., the track left by a ship on the surface of a body of water; the air currents that follow a body in flight; the past (in terms of temporality) which is not past; celebration, memory, ritual, grief; and also "a watch or vigil held beside the body of someone who has died, sometimes accompanied by ritual observances including eating and drinking" (Sharpe 2016, 10). Sharpe represents Black people's lives by using the image of a ship – which immediately reminds us of the cargos carrying slaves in the Middle Passage until the mid-19th century – and anti-Blackness as being the "weather" in this navigation,[20] which persists, as structural racism does in contemporary societies.

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[18] Sharpe 2016, 14 argues that one cannot just mourn the "Black non/being" inasmuch as it is not an event that happened in the past but rather it is interminable. Indeed, wake work is the "paradox" of "how slavery's violence emerges within the contemporary conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, material, and other dimensions of Black non/being as well as in Black modes of resistance".

[19] Sharpe 2016, 105: this is a crucial formulation with which Sharpe defines the impossible temporality of slavery and racism.

[20] Sharpe 2016, 102-134.

Writing – as Sharpe does – about what it means to live "in the wake" (in the "afterlife of slavery"[21] and property and with the legacy of a precarious life) entails a specific kind of work that is similar to the often exhausting tasks of taking care of the dead before burial and organizing the ritual observances that usually absorbs the whole family. This is a kind of work – "hard emotional, physical, and intellectual" (Sharpe 2016, 10) – that gets multiple bodies involved: the dead and all the other interrelated bodies who share a condition of vulnerability to death and to the pain caused by loss.

Such work is an active and constant practice of *care* through writing and narrating histories – not just that of Sharpe's own family but also other histories the archives have silenced. It is precisely by challenging these silences and by opening the cracks in the official archives that Sharpe's project enacts a practice of care, insofar as she refuses to let go of several already-forgotten voices and histories that she finds in the archives. All writers and researchers have a personal relationship with the archive they retrace and to which they refer. Saidiya Hartman – a crucial reference in Sharpe's work – has pointed out that the way she constructs counter-narratives is not by looking for new sources, but rather by holding on to extant archival materials and engaging with them in a critical and even creative way (Hartman 2021, 129). Many of the stories that both Hartman and Sharpe narrate are retraced by assembling unpredictable pieces from different sources in which those stories may not even seem relevant.[22]

Moreover, this specific way of engaging the archive also makes the fundamental claim that care must be considered a crucial topic for every theoretical work. When one examines structural systems of violence and precarity, care cannot be dismissed as being less relevant than other questions. It surely is not a secondary issue when tackling structural racism in contemporary societies, because "wake work" is work but it is also a practice of care in the first place. Sharpe's book is not written *for* everyone, although it speaks *to* everyone. In my opinion, her project aims

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[21] Sharpe 2016, 5. The expression is Hartman's: Hartman 2007, 6.

[22] In Hartman 2008, the author claims that, by retracing the presence of Venus in the archive of Atlantic slavery, her aim is to redress the archive's violence.

to create a community that involves people who do the "wake work" by writing about their own experience of being Black vis-à-vis structural racism, and also everyone who lives "in the wake". It clearly makes the point that the writing of people who do not live "in the wake" is *not* "wake work", and, nonetheless, is an invitation to everyone to engage in a critical relationship with all archives and narratives, and – in general – with our own writing practice. Despite what appears to be a radical pessimism in her writing, "impossible possibilities" (Sharpe 2016, 105) is a crucial lemma that Sharpe adopts to interpret the whole idea of living "in the wake" and of "wake work", inasmuch as it expresses both the fatigue and the constant struggle of Black people's lives, and the choice to embrace that struggle enacting practices of critique, solidarity, and care.

## 3.2 Disappropriation: assembling/assemblages

No archive is *given* in a horizontal or plural form; instead, it presents structural hierarchies, discriminations, exclusions, and silences. Rivera Garza makes this claim by focusing on the case of today's Mexico, where the official narratives would mostly deny and obscure a political situation in which violence is perpetrated by both narcotraffickers and the state, which has become "a war machine" (Rivera Garza 2020, 3). She wonders if writing can in any way represent a critical alternative to structural violence and claims that the writer's task is to interrogate the archive, to figure out how to engage with it in order to question the violence that it reproduces. It is necessary to find the small cracks through which to access its silent zones. Most of all, Rivera Garza insists on the fact that a researcher has to question their own subject position. Therefore, she investigates writing techniques, finding strategies for "disappropriation", a crucial notion with which she designates "survival strategies based on mutual care and the protection of the common good, challenging the ease and apparent immanence that marks the languages of globalized capitalism" (Rivera Garza 2020, 5). With disappropriation – which is a way to question the subject position and the specific roles of author and reader in relationality involved in writing and reading – writing reveals its communal nature:

> Writing always involves a co-authorship; the result is always a text-in-common. And when I say "in common", I mean not only the physical latticework comprised by author, reader, and text, but also […] the

experience of mutual belonging, in language, and in collective work with others (Rivera Garza 2020, 5).

For Rivera Garza, the phenomenology of communality that writing materializes is enacted as a form of labor – communal labor. Therefore, disappropriation in writing is an active challenge to the "unequal exchange of labor" (Rivera Garza 2020, 4) perpetrated by authors who claim ownership over the collective experiences they narrate. Disappropriation means thinking production and questioning property in a neoliberal economy, even – and maybe most importantly – in places, like Tijuana, in which globalization openly shows its hyper-violent face. Authorship *is* a form of capitalistic accumulation. In times of financialization and precariousness, what does it mean for a writer to acknowledge the 'plural authorship' that makes writing possible?

Rivera Garza retraces several disappropriative strategies aimed at subverting uses of archival material which are considered more 'conventional'. It is the case of documentary writing, which can be a "practice of otherness" when it questions "the aesthetic and political relevance of how the altered voice – the other's voice – is created, distributed, and archived" (Rivera Garza 2020, 18). Language experimentalism can moreover be considered a disappropriative practice, especially when one begins to confuse which of the languages one knows as one's first.[23] Writing workshops that stage organized communal writing and even something that most of us frequently do, like copy-and-paste, can enact disappropriation. Indeed, these are all different ways to unsettle structures and codes that regulate legibility in terms of both writing and reading. They are also forms of *assemblages* that, as Rivera Garza remarks, remind us of avant-garde art and performances: in a text that is basically a collage or a readymade,[24] the author's voice cannot be easily retraced insofar as many other voices are gathered in it, thus composing new archives.

Rivera Garza presents some statements that characterize disappropriation in writing practices in what she calls a *manifesto*: writing is material labor undertaken by subjects using their bodies; the stories that are narrated in a text are embodied in the first place, and they display both history and

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[23] On the crucial nexus between language and identity see Anzaldúa 1987.

[24] Rivera Garza 2020, 59 explicitly refers to Marcel Duchamp's readymades.

conflict; writings incorporate not just one but multiple layers of connections between bodies and experiences; the communal work of writing is based also on a fundamental relationship with the earth which is not determined by property (see the whole section, Rivera Garza 2020, 64-9). Therefore, if writing stages the embodiedness and the embeddedness that characterizes vulnerability, the work of disappropriation is that of "disentangling the materialities immersed in those authorial claims" (Rivera Garza 2020, 65).

Both Sharpe and Rivera Garza root their own writing practices and strategies of *wake work* and disappropriation in the exhibition of a *resistant* form of vulnerability. It means insisting on the specific kind of communality that writing entails. Indeed, both highlight the particular type of labor that writing in a necropolitical context requires. For Rivera Garza this understanding is very radical, insofar as she claims that the *materiality* of writing is the communal experience that it narrates and expresses. Such practice is, for her, inextricably linked to the precariousness of labor conditions within the community that gives birth to each text.

Communality is a key notion in both Sharpe's and Rivera Garza's work, in which the destabilization of the subject-author position is a key component. Not only does their work discuss alternative uses of the archives and strategies of disappropriation like collages – artistic practices that question the borders between disciplines – but it also *presents* assemblages of different voices by means of recursive quotations and references. My reading is that these assemblages give expression to a collective voice and recreate on the page a community of philosophers, poets, feminist theorists, novelists, visual artists, and many others.

Sharpe insists on the revolutionary meaning of this practice, which is a way to present a different archive from those acknowledged by official narratives. It is an archive that insists on the attempt to narrate lives doomed to be non-narratable or impossible to narrate; a new archive which tackles and even embraces the *dis*-integration of language (Sharpe 2016, 69). Historical knowledge is, indeed, always situated, and Hartman remarks on the fact that the task of a critical theorist or writer is to question who the actors involved in the production of such knowledge are. Who are the narrators and from which position do they narrate their story? Which creative resources can we use to engage the archive in imaginative ways that can do justice to the stories that are silenced in it? Hartman reflects explicitly on this question:

Making new narratives entails a creative practice untethered or indifferent to the rules of the historical guild, and directed by the assembly, the ensemble, the multitude, the chorus. What might be possible if I chose not to leave these lives as I found them in the state archives and newspaper articles, but instead imagined another kind of existence? […] The experiment in prose and the construction of a serial, recursive narrative enabled me to tell stories that exceeded, even as they did not escape, the ditto, ditto of archival violence (Hartman 2021, 130-131).

### 3.3 Corporeal politics

Like Rivera Garza, the transfeminist theorist and activist Sayak Valencia, in a book entitled *Gore Capitalism*, also discusses necropolitics by adopting the situated reference to Tijuana, Mexico: a city at the border which *materializes* the border, in which life emerges in its deepest precariousness (Valencia 2018). Valencia is a relevant reference within the constellation of voices presented in this essay, because they discuss corporeal politics. Moreover, the theorist insists on the specificity of frontier territories crossed by necropolitical practices as being places in which vulnerability manifests itself both in the precariousness that characterizes all lives and in its extremely unequal distribution.

As Butler highlights, the body is a site that, despite being performatively crossed by norms, cannot be *reduced* to them in its legibility. It both questions and performs identities and it always enacts networks of relations in the first place. Valencia points out that precisely in the places (like the border between Mexico and the United States and in many other border areas) where bodily vulnerabilities are particularly threatened, they can become a *communal* resource to enact collective practices. This is the political wager of feminist movements that aim to *use* the body – its symbolical meaning, its aesthetical performances, and the collective practices and assemblies in which bodies gather – as both an epistemological and a political resource. Valencia presents a radical critique of neoliberalism that has undertaken a transformation in what they call the Third World that is increasingly manifesting itself also in the First World, in the form of what they term *gore* capitalism. They introduce this concept in order to identify the *necroempowerment* of capitalist practices that exploit labor and bodies, for which hyper-violence has become a commod-

ity. The pervasive character of what Valencia describes as an "episteme of violence" (Valencia 2018, 26), on the one hand, structurally reconfigures the concept of labor, by rooting it in the *destruction* rather than the use of the body; on the other hand, it becomes a spectacle ("gore" designates the spectacularization of violence in the media: something fictional and grotesque) and a political tool to control the entire population in urban areas and other territories.

Valencia brings back that notion of vulnerability to its semantic core, namely the idea of *vulnus*, the Latin word meaning 'wound'. By walking through the streets of Tijuana, all bodies exhibit their constitutive vulnerability with the awareness of becoming potential targets, potential casualties. How is it even possible to imagine ways in which, in these socio-political contexts, embodied vulnerability can become an epistemic resource to stage collective practices of care? For Valencia, the response to this question is situated precisely in the body, and, even more specifically, in the role played by *gender* in identity construction. If gender performances are a crucial element for expressing embodied vulnerability, they are also a site of dis-identification that allows us to enact practices of resistance. According to Valencia, gore capitalism produces subjectivities – what they call the *endriago* subjects, namely small-time 'businessmen' within the economy of crime and hyper-violence – who embody a masculinity that is marginalized, obedient, and subjugated to the heteropatriarchal masculinity of the subjects who control the financial system and hold necropower, namely power over life *and* death (Valencia 2018, 256). Gendered violence is pivotal for this kind of masculinity to establish itself by fostering misogynist narratives. Indeed, masculinity is itself, for Valencia, a political cartography, discursively articulated in the combination of heteropatriarchy and necropolitics through the strict linking of the following three pairings: nation/state, body/gender, and masculinity/power. Valencia claims that such a global, gendered order, articulated in structures and infrastructures linked for instance to labor, requires historical revision.

As a conceptual framework, gore capitalism portrays women, "understood as subaltern or dissident in relation to heteropatriarchal categories" (Valencia 2018, 257), as being doomed to embody only the negative connotation of vulnerability. However, for Valencia there is a way in which the awareness of such an extreme condition of precarity, closely

tied to gender, becomes a resource. *Transfeminist* theories and practices can indeed make gender a specific site of agency precisely by means of the critique of gender roles and gender construction. A crucial step in this direction is, for Valencia, rethinking masculinity itself, insofar as "gender identities are part of the habitus that has artificially naturalized them and created gendered social constructions of the world and the body, while converting perpetrators into victims" (Valencia 2018, 262). The failure of all different models of masculinity and the psychological cost that the naturalization of such categories has imposed on subjects who have attempted to conform to these models proves how gender it-self reproduces fundamental structures of violence.

Transfeminism – being both a political episteme and a political prac-tice aimed at resisting the structural violence of gore capitalism – is, for Valencia, always plural, insofar as it is an inclusive alliance that keeps growing. The idea of trans* expresses for Valencia the complexity of a *ter-ritorio fronterizo*; the complexity of dis-identification and at the same time the subject's process of *becoming*. Indeed, "the prefix *trans* refers to some-thing that cuts through what it names, re-centering and transmuting it. When added to feminism(s), it creates a space of transit, a transhumance between ideas, a transformation that creates epistemological linkages" (Valencia 2018, 263).

Alliance is the term with which Valencia expresses communality. An alliance is *g-local*: it can be reproduced on a transnational level, but it is situated at a 'local' level in each body that starts its own revolution by questioning its subject position, by disobeying gender expectations, and sometimes by dis-identifying. Its point of departure is precisely the aware-ness of the embodied character of vulnerability but also of its embedded-ness in networks of relations. The enactment of practices of resistance that start from reciprocally sharing embodied experiences is what Valencia calls *"living revolutions"* (Valencia 2018, 280, emphasis of the author).

## 4. *Conclusion*

In both Butler's and Cavarero's ethical perspectives we find a crucial formulation of equality as an *experience* which translates into democratic coexistence, namely the possibility for everyone to express oneself in

the public space and for all opinions that are not harmful to matter on political grounds. Both Cavarero and Butler describe politics in phenomenological terms, as the experience of acting in concert. Although they significantly diverge in certain respects, both theorists use the vulnerability paradigm, as framed by feminist theories, as a crucial resource for interpreting the radical claims of contemporary political mobilizations and for reframing the terms of human coexistence when acting politically in concert. A strong link between the two readings is the topic of care and the claim that the neoliberal representation of the independent subject is an illusion and that it has to be dismantled in order to cope with systemic issues such as a global pandemic, climate change, systemic racism, and patriarchy.

Among the different critiques regarding the use of vulnerability in legal studies, some concern its understanding as an *ontological* concept (namely vulnerability as a shared human condition) and others its use as a political and legal identification of specific groups or individuals as being 'vulnerable subjects'.[25] The first type of critique points out that the universalistic account of the notion fails to witness the unequal distribution of precarity in the lives of certain subjectivities and groups, who therefore end up not being represented in the juridical realm. As for the particularistic account of vulnerability as characterizing specific groups and/or identities, the claim is that this categorization reproduces and even fosters the isolation and marginality of groups and individuals identified as needing *protection*.[26] It can even lead to the opposite of care when the very system (the police; the legal and the judiciary institutions) that is supposed to protect a community in fact reinforces and reproduces the same discrimination it allegedly counters. Butler embraces the latter critique, highlighting that by defining groups or individuals as 'vulnerable' we essentialize a condition of vulnerability that is rather *produced* by socio-political factors.[27] In this way, according to Butler, we fail to account both for the agency of such subjects and groups in resisting

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[25] See Giolo 2018 and Pariotti 2018.

[26] Morondo Taramundi 2018 criticizes in these terms Fineman's nexus between the 'vulnerable subject' and the 'responsible State'.

[27] Butler 2020, 121-2.

those conditions, and for the systematic and structural connotation of certain forms of violence. Butler's claim is that vulnerability, in its embodied and relational connotation, is only helpful if it allows us to see how forms of resistance emerge.[28]

Although I share Butler's concern about possible developments of the concept, especially in legal theory, I still consider the vulnerability framework a productive way to understand politics and to actively initiate political mobilizations, groups, even institutions. As Butler urges, I do not adopt a subjective understanding of the notion, which might minoritize the subjects deemed to be 'vulnerable'. Instead, the crucial link between vulnerability and care can be understood only by considering relationality and communality as constitutive of any subjectivity.[29] Nevertheless, as Pulcini has rightly pointed out, there are different kinds of community, which can be more or less inclusive, and different emotional and affective turns that enact practices (allegedly) performed in the name of care. It is therefore necessary to understand to what extent forms of relationality and communality based on care have "an emancipatory and normative potential" which "gets the entire social structure involved" (Pulcini 2020, 11, my own translation).

I call 'performances of vulnerability' all assemblies and public interactions in which bodies gather with a political goal, while adopting a specific narration and interpretation of vulnerability as being a shared condition that all individuals embody, although each one does so in different ways using different resources and opportunities to express oneself. I have proposed reading care as a key notion for understanding the inaugural character of these kinds of gatherings and demonstrations. Indeed, they are not solely a reaction to pervasive conditions of inequality, discrimination, and violence, but rather they initiate something by

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[28] Butler 2020, 124: "In some ways, we see again a form of theatrical politics that asserts their power and, at the same time, the limits imposed on that power". Strikingly enough, here Butler does not refer to the distinction between precariousness and precarity and, instead, reduces the concept to its development in the representation of 'vulnerable subjects'.

[29] As Guaraldo 2012, 55 points out, vulnerability is the specific shared dimension that makes human life thinkable, insofar as it expresses the crucial nexus between corporeality and relationality that characterizes the human.

performatively influencing the socio-political context in which they are enacted and by perhaps transforming it. Vulnerability is not *inevitably and inextricably* linked to violence – as merely its flipside – although it acts on its structural reproduction.

In order to interrogate practices of care rooted in the exhibited vulnerability of both the body and the community (or the assembly), in the second part of the essay, I traced a constellation of feminist thinkers who, I claim, discuss care in these terms. There are several reasons why I collected these voices in what I call a feminist archive. First, for Sharpe, Hartman, Rivera Garza, and Valencia, *situatedness* is crucially at stake when they adopt specific strategies to write and do research: to narrate, in this case means 'to account for'. For them, the archive is not a neutral space; rather, it is itself a network of relations that potentially reproduces structural forms of violence. Second, by reading them together, an empowering understanding of vulnerability emerges. Indeed, for the people who live in border territories like Tijuana, crossed by structural forms of violence, and for Black people living *in the wake* of slavery in the United States, what Rivera Garza calls 'necrowriting' – namely, the specific kind of labor *and* fatigue that writing in a necropolitical social context entails – *is* a form of resistance rooted in vulnerability. And third, while urging the readers to adopt a critical posture when encountering official narratives, in their texts these theorists exhibit *their own* vulnerability. I understand their work as being an ethical demand to imagine alternatives and to foster new entanglements between bodies persisting on the margins, at the limits of the norms that regulate legibility – as in Butler's account of precarity. This way of writing and doing research means rooting *communal* work and even life in the specific labor that entails re-narrating the story of that very community in a different way. Engaging the archives and the norms that regulate the displayed examples of collective memory might mean exposing colonial and racist practices, and other radical and structural forms of violence, but also exhibiting forms of relationality and communality.

Cavarero's notion of inclination expresses care but also interest/investment in the first place, which *is* a form of care. Even more so, from the specific situatedness of Black lives, Sharpe's wake work is a form of care work as it performs a refusal to let go of the voices that have been silenced or even foreclosed within the archive. It means choosing to be *with* someone

else in the wake. In the same way, Hartman's narration of "counter-histo-ries of slavery" (Hartman 2008, 4) by means of critical fabulations[30] is a manifestation of care work. Moreover, all the practices of disappropriation, resistance, and dis-identification that I have located in this constellation of voices, both when they happen in the individual body and when they are enacted in a plural and public scenario, are always relational. They always happen in a communal context – what Valencia calls the *alliances* – and *that* specific context produces these practices as practices of care.

Therefore, the account of care that emerges in this archive is *plural and inaugural*; it is performed as communal work while, at the same time, *building up* communities. Indeed, by means of practices of disappropri-ation, by questioning their own subject-author position, by recollect-ing many different voices and creating collages of quotations, poetries, chants, and even images, all these feminist writers' texts are the expres-sion of assemblies/communities: the one to which the stories are told, the one that the different narratives express, and the one in which each subject-author is already situated. They might be the same community, or they might be different ones, and they could potentially proliferate as long as the text keeps reproducing its own archive and enacting its own relationality by circulating. From the extreme vulnerability of a life "in the wake", the endurance of "wake work" is so powerful as to create communities based on care.

An example of the creation of communities of care which is particularly significant in my own experience is the grassroots transfeminist movement Ni Una Menos [Not One Less], born in Argentina in 2015 and now active in many countries throughout both the American and the European continent

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[30] Hartman 2008, 11 explains the methodology of critical fabulations by saying that "fabula" designates "the basic elements of story, the building blocks of the narrative". Hartman has applied the methodology of critical fabulation as a count-er-narrative in the novel Hartman 2019, which is partially historically informed narrative and partially literary imagination. Hartman remarks on the importance of critical fabulation with these words: "every historian of the multitude, the dis-possessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of histor-ical actor" (xiii).

(Ni Una Menos 2017). The violence, against which the movement protests, intersects patriarchy, coloniality, racism, and various other classifications of discrimination and marginalization. The outcome of such violence is not an unpredictable and occasional tragedy; rather, it is enacted on a daily basis by means of the reproduction of social structures and hierarchies and it is, indeed, structural. Ni Una Menos is a perfect example of the *g-local* connotation of the phenomena in the so-called Global Era (Pulcini 2009). As we have seen, understanding the notion of *g-local* can be complicated and enriched by the specific account of 'local' introduced by Valencia, which translates the situatedness and singularity of each body. At the same time, Valencia's use of the prefix trans\* (which expresses both trans\*territoriality and trans\*identity) is pivotal for understanding the movement's organization. It expresses the capacity of each body to *perform* a revolution by building alliances through the network of relations in which it is embedded.[31]

By participating in the transfeminist assembly of Ni Una Menos routinely, each body enters and at the same time *embodies/performs* the alliance, while experiencing a powerful expression of agency precisely in its interdependency. Born as a response to a structural and pervasive violence that potentially reduces each life to its most precarious conditions, the Ni Una Menos movement has created a network that is widespread on a global scale. Every year, on March 8th, the movement performs the International Women's Strike against gender-based violence (*huelga feminista y transfeminista*).[32] On the one hand, it has fostered care in terms of protection by creating *safe spaces* for women, LGBTQ+ people, and all allied subjects and groups who fight against gender-based violence and

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[31] Social platforms and, more broadly, technologies play a crucial role in making such trans\*territoriality possible for the movement. See Pavan and Mainardi 2018.

[32] The choice of the strike, as a very specific kind of struggle but performed in a multiplicity of ways at the international level, has several meanings. It is a way of claiming that care work – notoriously feminized and mostly, but not exclusively, performed by women – is work and must be recognized as such, and fairly protected and supported. At the same time, it entails not just striking from traditional social roles and labor structures, but also from *gender* identities and the related social roles and expectations, which can lead to violence and discrimination. See Gago 2020, especially chapter 1 "#WeStrike: Toward a Political Theory of the Feminist Strike".

support the movement's struggles, e.g., for housing rights, universal in-
come, and equal opportunities for everyone regardless of sex, gender,
and sexual orientation.[33] On the other hand, it has reinterpreted care
in terms of *equality among differences* through the structured system of the
assemblies in which each decision is debated. Moreover, the movement
has created infrastructures of care, such as providing people with free
legal and psychological support and finding housing for undocumented
people and women escaping domestic violence. Transfeminist sister-
hood, as a powerful and pervasively structured kind of 'political kinship'
and alliance, is itself an infrastructure of care.

To conclude, we need to interrogate ourselves regarding how to nar-
rate and interpret vulnerability – in its embodied and embedded conno-
tation – and practices of care, both when we investigate the two notions
from a scientific perspective and when we act politically by advocating
them. At the same time, we need to interrogate the positionality and sit-
uatedness from which we narrate these ideas, and we need to frame the
feminist archive(s) to which we refer and question the power relations
reproduced by such archive(s). The authors that I have connected with-
in this feminist archive explain and adopt several strategies to narrate
vulnerability and care in these terms, like inclination (Cavarero), criti-
cal fabulations (Hartman), wake work (Sharpe), disappropriation (Rivera
Garza), and trans*feminism (Valencia). If, in Cavarero's account, narra-
tion is the outcome of action (according to the Arendtian understanding
of the notion of 'action'), for the Black and decolonial theorists to which
I refer it is the outcome of a *struggle*.

In the first part of this essay, I retraced several critical interpretations
of care ethics that demonstrate how the concepts of vulnerability and
care have not always been interpreted in egalitarian terms (Tronto 2013;
Tronto 2015; Pulcini 2020; Butler 2020). My claim is therefore that, when
we narrate embodied vulnerability and practices of care, it is necessary,
on the one hand, to advocate for an *egalitarian* and democratic represen-
tation in the public sphere (so that all voices can be heard and all stories
can be told) and, on the other hand, to account for the singularity and

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[33] To get an idea of the movement's mobilizations and of the language it uses
to communicate, see: http://niunamenos.org.ar/category/manifiestos/.

*difference* of each experience in its corporeal and interrelated dimension. Indeed, all *performances* of vulnerability and care require the institutionally recognized infrastructures of care that make them possible.[34] At the same time, the connotation of the infrastructures of care and their distribution vary in the different socio-political and geographical contexts, insofar as they are the outcome of political decisions. We need narrations and performances of vulnerability and care, as local *and* as widespread as possible, so that such infrastructures can be safeguarded, implemented, and broadly distributed. For a politics of care to be truly inaugural, it must foster narrations and performances that operate at the intersection with the social infrastructures of care, thus transforming the socio-political context in which it acts.

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