5. Caring Infrastructures

Roadmap for an Otherwise

Building from the practice-based curatorial case study at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung and its inspirational companion practices, the present chapter shifts to a more theoretical and methodological exploration of "caring infrastructures." This notion, which emerged during my curatorial programming at M.1 and was central to my curatorial collaboration with Rosario Talevi and Gilly Karjevsky – together known as Soft Agency – for the "CARING" edition of the New Alphabet School at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin (June 2020),[1] and it now lies at the centre of the upcoming sections.

In an effort to "learn from Hohenlockstedt," I seek to not only critically situate and analyse my curatorial programming but also to make it *useful* for a wider community of practitioners by abstracting it and offering concrete methodological propositions for curating with care. As such, within this first part of the chapter I wish to embark on a search for the conceptual cores, boundaries, agencies, and terminological sisterhoods of caring infrastructures, to then explore its practice-based manifestations in the second part of the chapter.

1 The notion of "caring infrastructures" has shifted over the course of my research and might have contained different meanings at different points in time. As it was a central concept within the collaboration with Karjevsky and Talevi, I want to explicitly acknowledge the collaborative thought processes that have co-shaped my understanding of the term – a process for which I am deeply grateful. However, the presentation of the term in the context of this research project may or may not mirror their own understandings of the term, as for me the notion continued to develop independently following the end of our collaboration. The evolution of "caring infrastructures" has thus undergone densely collaborative phases, which I herewith explicitly recognise and lay open, and it has undergone rather solitary ones, which were later tested and remarked upon in workshops and Q&As, and which continue to evolve along the way. For further information on the programming, see Haus der Kulturen der Welt, and M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, "CARING – 4th Edition of the New Alphabet School," New Alphabet School, June 2020, https://newalphabetschool.hkw.de/category/caring/.

To do so, I want to recall the definition of "caring" that the political theorists and ethics of care scholars Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher have put forth.[2] They define "caring" as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible."[3] This understanding of the term has become influential for a range of scholarly positions, ranging from post-humanist philosophy, to political theory and techno science, to feminist art and curatorial studies. As the concept of "caring activism," which I introduced in the previous chapter, is indebted to the work of Tronto, as is my own curatorial and scholarly work and that of my close collaborations, such as Soft Agency, I want to further engage with Tronto's thinking in this portion of my research.

5.1 Thinking-with Joan Tronto: In Search of the Notion of Caring Infrastructures

In the case of the collaboration between Soft Agency, HKW, and M.1, the programming took place virtually, as its date fell into the height of the Covid-19 pandemic – a circumstance that worked strongly against our initial curatorial concept, for which we had envisioned group travel from the HKW venue in Berlin to the rural territory of M.1. Due to the programming's newfound digitality, the previously introduced editorial project *Letters to Joan* took on a very central role. For this written exchange, we had invited eight thinkers, artists, and activists to reflect on timely questions of care during these first unsettling months of the newly arisen pandemic.[4] In this chapter, I want to revisit certain elements of this publication as a way to further explore how the discursive effort of curatorial practice, with a commitment to a feminist ethics of care, can participate in constructing "as-well-as-possible-worlds."[5] In an effort at thinking-with, I establish the various layers of the notion of "caring infrastructures" in the ensuing sections, aiming to establish a useful methodology for curators to enact care within their respective practices.

In our introductory letter from March 2020, we – the curatorial collaborators Gilly Karjevsky, Rosario Talevi and myself – had written about our vision to think

2 As I already included this quotation in the introduction, I therefore will repeat it at full length only here in the footnote. Tronto and Fisher define caring "as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web." Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 103.

3 Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 103.

4 Sascia Bailer, Gilly Karjevsky, and Rosario Talevi, eds., *Letters to Joan* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt; Hohenlockstedt, Germany: M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, 2020).

5 Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 103.

through our curatorial programming as caring infrastructures, as a thinking tool towards social transformation.[6] To our initial letter, Joan Tronto had responded with a missive of her own.[7] I want to return to a particular passage from her response that my mind keeps returning to. As this chapter repeatedly turns to close readings of several elements of this passage, I quote it in full:

> I want to take a bit of a pause when you arrive at your notion of thinking about care as infrastructure, as you put it: "If we inscribe care into the building stones of our social infrastructures – does that generate a more just society?" Does using the metaphor of "infrastructure" make the task of inserting care too much about "stuff" and not enough about relationship? I realize that institutions shape our lives. But is it enough to want to reform institutions? How can we make infrastructure relational? What does infrastructural "practice" look like? Further, in the process of repair, can we ever reach down deeply enough to change the "building stones"? It seems to me that we first have to address where repair is necessary – responding to violence, hatred, "othering" processes – before we can fix institutions. But perhaps we can, to quote Chairman Mao, "walk on two legs."[8] Institutions affect people who change institutions in turn. So perhaps infrastructural change is necessary, but it might be too much to hope that changing infrastructure is somehow a permanent fix to our uncaring ways.[9]

It has been two years since this exchange of letters, since the public event occurred, since my curatorial collaboration with Rosario Talevi and Gilly Karjevsky has ebbed away, and yet I keep coming back to these questions, these thoughts, and this desire to think through the notion of caring infrastructures as a way to make care tangible and transformative. I regard this perpetual returning to the *Letters to Joan* as an ongoing process of thinking-with and writing-with Tronto, as articulated by Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (who builds on fellow technology scholar Donna Haraway's notion of thinking-with). To reiterate the previously introduced notion,[10] writing-with for Piug de la Bellacasa creates collectivity through the process of thinking and knowing:

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6 For the full letter, see *Letters to Joan*, 2020, https://newalphabetschool.hkw.de/letters-to-joan/.

7 Joan Tronto, "Dear Rosario, Sascia, and Gilly," in Bailer, Karjevsky, and Talevi, *Letters to Joan*, 42–44.

8 As I consider Mao Zedong a very controversial figure due to the violent bloodshed during the Cultural Revolution in China, I do not want to leave this mention of him unremarked upon. Without being able to go into detail, I suggest the following publication for further context: Marissa Bryan, "Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution: In Theory and Impact" (PhD diss., Coastal Carolina University, 2020).

9 Joan Tronto, "Dear Rosario, Sascia, and Gilly," 42–43.

10 See chapter 4 – "Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges."

> Instead of reinforcing the figure of a lone thinker, the voice in such a text seems to keep saying: I am not the only one. Writing-with is a practical technology that reveals itself as both descriptive (it inscribes) and speculative (it connects). It builds relation and community, that is: possibility.[11]

Following Piug de la Bellacasa's line of thinking, this approach is a way to introduce a thinking-with-care into collective and accountable knowledge creation – a knowledge creation that does not negate dissent and acknowledges the efforts that went into cultivating that very knowledge. This requires one to "explore ways of taking care for the unavoidably thorny relations that foster rich, collective, interdependent, albeit not seamless, thinking-with."[12] In performing a close reading of Tronto's response letter, I aim to connect care to her theoretical legacy, but also to not shy away from dissenting and diverging from it.

Tronto, in her letter to us, does not miss the chance to stress the troubled and burdensome aspects that define the lived realities of caregivers – a reality which surfaced in many of the letters she received, and a reality which I share as a single parent.[13] However, I keep on sensing this urge to turn the ethics of care, which she has advanced significantly through her work, into a lived reality. To make the tensions, the unsettling realities, the frustrations around care productive. To help care become the democratising tool that Tronto, in her writings, envisions it to be.

For me, this thinking around caring infrastructures does exactly this: it connects my lived realities, the mechanisms of exclusions around my caring responsibilities, to a wider ecosystem, and it demands that we address the "building stones" of our social and physical infrastructures as a form of micro-politics, which may have ripple effects for other parts of society.[14] As a researcher, as a curator, and as a single mother, I feel the urge to regain a sense of agency, of transformative potency, that includes not only my own (un)caring conditions but those of others – as Tronto proposes in her concept of caring-with.[15]

5.1.1 Infrastructures that Reproduce Otherwise

To better understand what caring infrastructures can be and what they cannot be, what both their potential and limitations are, I will unpack the above-quoted excerpt from Tronto's letter, with its many questions, reflections, and doubting thoughts:

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11 Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, "'Nothing Comes without Its World': Thinking with Care," *Sociological Review* 60 (2012): 203.

12 Ibid., 205.

13 Tronto, "Dear Rosario, Sascia, and Gilly," in Bailer, Karjevsky, and Talevi, Letters to Joan, 43.

14 To recall the definition of "micro-politics," see the section "Activist Dimension to Research and Practice: Anti-Hegemonic Micro-politics" in the introduction of this book.

15 Joan Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 23.

> Does using the metaphor of "infrastructure" make the task of inserting care too much about "stuff" and not enough about relationship? I realize that institutions shape our lives. But is it enough to want to reform institutions? How can we make infrastructure relational?

Here, I sense that we are facing a conflation of terms that we did not specify in our letter, and that may need further definition moving forward. Institutions and infrastructures share some characteristics, but they are not interchangeable concepts. Infrastructures are not to be confused with "stuff" or understood as "a thing stripped of use"; rather, they are characterised "only as a relational property."[16] Also, care itself is considered relational, as Tronto and other scholars have convincingly articulated.[17] Within the context of this account, then, it is therefore important to understand care as a relational practice, as gestures, words, and thoughts, as well as priorities and commitments.[18] Feminist sociologist Emma Dowling makes a case to understand care "as a particular configuration of social relationships that are politically and economically – and hence historically – conditioned, with all of the gendered, racialised and classed implications of power relations, as well as considerations of vulnerability, need, ability and disability."[19]

The "burden," the uneasiness, of care fosters the need for support structures, which alludes to the dimension, or potential, of care as not only a social but a *socially engaged* practice with a social justice agenda. In her publication *Support Structures*, the artist and architect Céline Condorelli claims that support structures cannot be reduced to a reactive gesture. Rather, through them a potential can be released that may bring forth "the unspoken, the unsatisfied, the late and the latent, [. . .] the not-yet-manifest [. . .] the invisible, the unseen, the behind-the-seen, the disappeared, the concealed, the unwanted, the dormant."[20] The feminist urbanist Doina Petrescu, in her contribution to Condorelli's book, describes support as what is "behind, below, and underneath, hidden. [. . .] It is the invisible that makes possible the visible, the absent which allows things to be present, the transient which make things lasting, the impossible that carry on the condition of possibility."[21]

Care and reproductive labour share these characteristics with the described notions of support structures. In fact, they can be regarded as support structures themselves, which, despite their life-sustaining role, predominantly go unnoticed. The

16 Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 3 (1999): 113.

17 Puig de la Bellacasa, "Nothing Comes without Its World," 198.

18 Emma Dowling, *The Care Crisis: What Caused It and How Can We End It?* (London: Verso, 2020), ebook.

19 Ibid.

20 Céline Condorelli, and Gavin Wade, *Support Structures* (London: Sternberg, 2009), 13.

21 Doina Petrescu, quoted in ibid., 79–80.

discursive emphasis on invisibility in regard to care work therefore marks an absence, an obscuring of the ones who are not accounted for, economically or sociopolitically. I argue that invisibility is thus a manifestation of structural absences and mechanisms of exclusion and marginalisation of caregivers in societal narratives and public accounts. The undoing of invisibility lays bare the contradictions of our socioeconomic systems, which foster tensions and vicious cycles of devalorisation. Like care work, infrastructures are directed to a position of *infra* – to the "below, underneath" – while also etymologically implying "later than; smaller than; inferior to"[22] – which resonates with the structural devaluation of care work.[23]

I argue it is precisely their relational qualities that enhance the risk of both care and infrastructure being underacknowledged and made systemically invisible. The Covid-19 pandemic has vastly demonstrated how, paradoxically, the *absence* of care is what can render it visible, can bring to the surface its underlying, life-sustaining relevance. This characteristic is shared with the notion of "infrastructure" that sociologist Susan Leigh Star has articulated: "The normally invisible quality of working infrastructure becomes visible when it breaks: the service is down, the bridge washes out, there is a power blackout."[24] Feminist art theorist Marina Vishmidt cites the global financial crisis of 2008 as an example in which the normalised repetition of daily routine stopped functioning and allowed for history and power relations to be seen.[25] As she puts it: "Broken infrastructure is loquacious."[26] Through their brokenness, infrastructures speak to "glitches" that have interrupted reproduction.[27] Thus, infrastructure is fragile and defined by its repetitive character, which means that "it works to enable a set of activities, and it works because the preconditions of its effectivity are neither visible nor relevant; these jut out when the infrastructure breaks down or if an element is isolated from the whole."[28]

Underlying, repetitious, invisibilised, underacknowledged until breakdown, relational – these are the shared characteristics of care and infrastructure. Yet where do institutions fit in this setup?

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22 Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. "infra-," accessed March 10, 2023, https://www.etymonline.com/word/infra-.

23 As previously elaborated on in chapter 2 – "Uncaring Conditions: Care Work Under Capitalism."

24 Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 382.

25 Marina Vishmidt, "Between Not Everything and Not Nothing: Cuts Toward Infrastructural Critique," in *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, ed. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (Utrecht: BAK –basis voor actuele kunst; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 265.

26 Ibid., 266.

27 Lauren Berlant, "The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3 (2016): 393.

28 Vishmidt, "Between Not Everything and Not Nothing," 266.

In Tronto's response letter, she goes back and forth between the terms "infrastructure" and "institution." To maintain the definitional boundaries between the two terms, I turn to the cultural theorist Lauren Berlant, who distinguishes structures or systems from infrastructures and their respective potential for change. Berlant argues that "[i]nfrastructure is not identical to system or structure [. . .] because infrastructure is defined by the movement or patterning of social form. It is the living mediation of what organizes life: the lifeworld of structure."[29] Hence, it is through infrastructure that the world is kept in movement and practically bound to itself;[30] however, this pattern of movement only becomes solid when seen from a distance.[31]

After establishing this conceptual understanding of infrastructures, it is important to look at the relevance of this distinction within the art sector. We must differentiate not only between systems and infrastructures but also between institutions and infrastructures. Building on the trajectory of institutional critique, which has circulated as a concept within the arts since the late 1960s, Vishmidt differentiates between institutional and infrastructural critique:

> At minimum, the shift from institutional critique to infrastructural critique [. . .] is the move from the institution as a site for "false totalizations" to an engagement with the thoroughly intertwined objective [. . .] and subjective [. . .] conditions necessary for the institution and its critique to exist, reproduce themselves, and posit themselves as an immanent horizon as well as transcendental condition.[32]

Vishmidt provides the labour market, urban development, and corporations as examples of these transcendental conditions.[33] In following her proposition, this shift from the institutional to the infrastructural therefore must include an expansion of scope, wherein institutional concerns cannot be diffracted from larger, infrastructural mechanisms, such as the "structural violence of capitalism, racism, and gender, which is so often mediated by the reckless expansionism of art markets and spaces."[34] From this perspective, the structures of (art) institutions are considered smaller elements in a wider ecosystem – of a more comprehensive, underlying infrastructure. As Star argues, infrastructures are characterised by a spatial or temporal scope with "a reach beyond a single event or on-site practice."[35] In this way, the

29 Berlant, "The Commons," 393.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 394.
32 Vishmidt, "Between Not Everything and Not Nothing," 267.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Berlant, "The Commons," 381.

art institution expands the scope of its social action beyond exhibition-making and the discussion of artistic positions.

Interestingly, Andrea Fraser, a prominent thinker and artist within the discourses of institutional critique since the 1980s, in a 2005 essay speaks to the co-option or the "institutionalisation of institutional critique." Here, she reflects on the shifts in discourse and perspective:

> In these discussions, one finds a certain nostalgia for institutional critique as a now-anachronistic artifact of an era before the corporate mega-museum and the 24/7 global art market, a time when artists could still conceivably take up a critical position against or outside the institution. Today, the argument goes, there no longer is an outside. How, then, can we imagine, much less accomplish, a critique of art institutions when museum and market have grown into an all-encompassing apparatus of cultural reification? Now, when we need it most, institutional critique is dead, a victim of its success or failure, swallowed up by the institution it stood against.[36]

Departing from Fraser's claim, cultural critique has been co-opted by the institution – and the extended argument would be that precisely because the institutional concept, in its narrow and possibly outdated version, no longer holds any transformative potential ("is dead"), an *infrastructural* approach is needed to understand and shift the realm of critique from "within the walls of the museum" out into the wider socioeconomic realm. What is needed is a conceptual thinking tool that is rather expansive and malleable and that can be introduced to the wider arts ecosystem as a transformative vehicle. I argue that the infrastructural thinking proposed in this research project is such a tool. With this transition from institution to infrastructure, I return to Berlant's suggestion to think of infrastructures as "patterns of movement," which implies a malleability as well as an entry point to think through the transformative potential of these binding elements that maintain worlds. This understanding resonates with Vishmidt's framing of infrastructure as a site of "reproducing otherwise":

> Infrastructure might be that which repeats, but this repetition is not without difference: it can monotonously produce the same differences (such as infrastructures that reproduce social inequalities), but it can also be a means of ensuring the reproduction of a wholly different form of social life over time. Finally, it is infrastructure's transitive character – between the material and the possible, between machines and working drawings, between cognitive maps and what is

36 Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum*, September 2005, https://www.artforum.com/features/from-the-critique-of-institutions-to-an-institution-of-critique-172201/.

> pictured on them – that enables it to ask political questions that can no longer be replied to in the abstract, with the false totalizations of rejection or complicity.[37]

This repetitive essence of infrastructure implies that it also reproduces structural violences on both an abstract and a material basis. Vishmidt speaks of "transcendental repetition," including such examples as capitalism, class contempt, anti-Black racism, and the "material conditions of possibility," which encompasses regulations, lead pipes, privatised governance, and so on.[38] Tronto also asserts the dual character of repetition: "Just as vicious circles reproduce themselves, so too do virtuous circles."[39] The power of repetition is further brought forth in gender theorist Judith Butler's understanding of gender as "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*."[40] In the case of Butler, repetition also carries the potential for subversion: "The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition."[41]

While existing societal patterns, habits, and norms might appear to us as rigid at first glance, they in fact act as the invisibilised, yet dynamic and relational, infrastructures that order our shared realities[42] – and, in doing so, their repetitive character carries the potential for social transformation. This potential for "reproducing otherwise" is the reason I favour infrastructures as a conceptual framework over an institutional focus. In this line of thought, social transformation goes beyond the walls of the museum (or any other art or academic institution) and finds its way into wider social, economic, and political spheres – via the social relations that sustain not only care and infrastructures but also society as a whole.

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37 Vishmidt, "Between Not Everything and Not Nothing," 266.

38 Ibid., 265.

39 Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 168.

40 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 179. Emphasis in the original. "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief."

41 Ibid.

42 Berlant, "The Commons"; Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure."

5.1.2 Relational: Care, Curating, and Infrastructures

To further shift the relation of curating and infrastructural activities with the potency to reproduce otherwise towards care, I want to return to the notion that care acts as a prism for understanding wider societal injustices. As established previously, for the Wages for Housework movement, unpaid housework constituted such a prism "through which the multiple facets of women's lack of power over their lives in society as a whole could be seen, understood, and reassembled."[43] If we consider care as a prism that sheds light on the intersecting "axes of domination," then we find a point of departure for the (curatorial) address of pending matters of social justice.[44] The notion of care as a prism focuses attention in the direction where transformation is most needed. When set in conjunction with an infrastructural perspective, such a redirection allows for a thinking of transformation that resembles a ripple effect: (micro-)changes within the conditions of care affect other parts of society and can thereby produce a more expansive effect that goes beyond the immediate context of any singular issue.

This line of thinking requires an acknowledgement of, or at least an openness to, the notion that one's individual self is impacted by and implicated in a wider infrastructural web of fellow creators and institutions, which connects us to wider realms of society and economy.[45] To borrow the words of the urbanist AbdouMaliq Simone, one needs to consider "people as infrastructure," in the sense that they co-produce, in "complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices," the infrastructures and platforms that provide for and reproduce life in the city.[46] Akin to the ways in which cities are co-produced by people via relational infrastructural activities, the art sector produces its platforms and infrastructures through the relational webs that expand between the activities of curators, artists, scholars, audiences, and museum staff, and these webs extend to objects, places, and (art) spaces.[47] While each of

43 Louise Toupin, Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972–77 (London: Pluto, 2018), 3. Previously mentioned in section 2.2 – "Care as a Prism and Call for Action."

44 Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *This Is a Manifesto for the 99* (London: Verso, 2019), 22.

45 For his proposition of "people as infrastructure," AbdouMaliq Simone analyses the activities of residents in a range of African urban hubs and how they engage in "complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices," which, ultimately, "become an infrastructure – a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city." AbdouMaliq Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg," Public Culture 16, no. 3 (2004): 407.

46 Ibid.

47 To contextualise the quote from AbdouMaliq Simone, I want to create a link to the ongoing infrastructural discourse within the architectural field. In their chapter "Infrastructural Love: Caring for Our Architectural Support Systems" the architects Hélène Frichot, Adrià Carbonell, Hannes Frykholm, and Sepideh Karami elaborate: "Housing becomes a site that is more than

the actors that co-constitute the art field is not necessarily directly associated with (art) institutions that they could change from within, we are all parts of interdependent webs of relational infrastructures that can co-shape these configurations: by adding pressure, by refusing, or by actively engaging with them.[48]

This line of thinking is in close alliance with the definition of curator Maria Lind, who describes the curatorial as a social activity that encompasses "a range of relational and infrastructural activities" and as "a way of thinking in terms of interconnections" between objects, people, processes, places, and discourses.[49] Following this trajectory, feminist scholars and practitioners have resisted and challenged the

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merely a personal problem. By situating housing as an infrastructure of care that 'patterns' urban social life, the call for access to affordable and good-quality housing becomes part of a process of 'political contest and change.' […] In two influential articles, Simone argues that people, their actions, and relations form an infrastructural support system for the city, what he calls "people as infrastructure." A similar argument is forwarded by [urban studies scholar] Ash Amin, who discusses the "liveliness of sociotechnical systems" and how the life of a city can be narrated through its material infrastructures. There is, Amin insists, "nothing purely technical or mechanical about even the most digitized infrastructures." Infrastructures, he goes on, are implicated in human experience, shaping behavior, arousing anger and frustration, and affecting social disposition and a spectrum of emotions to which we propose to add love and relations of care" (p. 12). For a full reading, see Hélène Frichot, Adrià Carbonell, Hannes Frykholm, and Sepideh Karami, eds. *Infrastructural Love: Caring for Our Architectural Support Systems* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2022).

48 For strategies of how to engage with hegemonic constellations, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1985); Lara García Díaz and Pascal Gielen, "Precarity as an Artistic Laboratory for Counter-Hegemonic Labour Organization," *Frame* 30, no. 2 (2018): 41–59.

49 Lind, in Hoffmann and Lind, "Conversation: To Show or Not to Show." Note that Lind's definition of "the curatorial" is placed in opposition to "curating": "For me the term 'curating' is used as the technical modality of making art go public. It is a craft that can be involved in much more than making exhibitions – beyond the walls of an institution as well as beyond what are traditionally called programming and education. This is 'curating in the expanded field.' The curatorial is understood as a multidimensional role that includes critique, editing, education, fundraising, etc. But even more importantly, the curatorial goes beyond 'roles' and takes the shape of a function and a method, even a methodology." See Maria Lind, "Situating the Curatorial," *e-flux Journal*, no. 116 (March 2021): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/116/378689/situating-the-curatorial/. There is a wide discursive field that expands between curator-scholars such as Maria Lind, Beatrice von Bismarck, Irit Rogoff, Jean-Paul Martinon, and Dorothee Richter, who have, at times, taken contrasting positions to the notion of the "curatorial/curating." In the framework of this research, I do not follow the rigid linguistic distinctions that some of these authors propose, but I do use the different terms with precision when citing the respective authors who attend to such distinctions (e.g., when referencing Lind, I will speak of the *curatorial* and not *curating*). For further readings on this discourse, see Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, and Thomas Weski, *Cultures of the Curatorial* (London: Sternberg, 2012); Irit Rogoff, "The Expanded Field," in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, ed. Jean-Paul Martinon (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Dorothee Richter, *Curating:*

association of curating with independence, hierarchy, and control,[50] rather emphasising its relational and infrastructural character that is rooted in an interconnected thinking.[51] If curating is a socially engaged, relational, infrastructural activity, etymologically bound to situate itself amid questions of care and caught between movements of in/dependences, then it is not bound to "stuff" but to relations and social encounters.[52] Rather than locating the entry point of curatorial care at the nexus of the human-object encounter, I thus situate curatorial care as a radically relational, infrastructural practice.

It is precisely the overlapping notions of curating as a relational practice, infrastructures as potential carriers of reproducing otherwise, and care as a prism to comprehend wider social urgencies that lead us closer to identifying the core characteristics of *caring infrastructures*.

From this coupling of curating and care with infrastructures, the notion of caring infrastructures emerges on the horizon as a curatorial approach that can generate the necessary methodologies to enact transformative processes within the arts. To accomplish such transformation, the building of caring infrastructures within the arts needs to be understood as a situated, micro-political, and relational infrastructural process, in which curators (or other cultural practitioners) provide the necessary support structures to respond to the multiple caring needs and capacities of the artists, collaborators, audiences, and team members and thereby foster the conditions of their presence.[53] This process must include a close look at the multitude of relations, scales, and elements of any given curatorial undertaking, which should be allocated and revised according to the caring needs and capacities of the specific context. The various elements of caring considerations align themselves to a relational and malleable chain of supporting elements. Together, they form caring infrastructures.

5.1.3 Beyond the Symbolic: The Practice of Building Caring Infrastructures

Having established the conceptual frameworks and productive overlaps between curating, care, and infrastructures, let us now direct our attention to a pending ques-

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Politics of Display, Politics of Site, Politics of Transfer and Translation, Politics of Knowledge Production. A Fragmented and Situated Theory of Curating (Zurich: OnCurating, 2023).

50 See section 3.2 – "Unsettling Curatorial Care: Histories, Theories, and Practices."

51 Jens Hoffmann and Maria Lind. "Conversation: To Show or Not to Show," *Mousse Magazine*, December 2011; Megan Johnston, "Slow Curating: Re-thinking and Extending Socially Engaged Art in the Context of Northern Ireland," *OnCurating*, no. 24 (December 2014): 24.

52 For a detailed discussion on relational curating, socially engaged art, and care, return to chapter – "Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges."

53 For a definition of "micro-politics," see the section "Activist Dimension to Research and Practice: Micro-politics for an Otherwise" in the introduction of this book.

tion from Tronto's paragraph, where she rightfully asks: "What does infrastructural 'practice' look like?" To paraphrase and expand on this question for the purpose of this study, I wish to articulate what the *practice of caring infrastructures* looks like.

We can begin to answer Tronto's question by recognising the importance of care-as-a-practice. *Care needs to be done*, in the same way that Maria Puig de la Bellacasa reminds us of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's call: "it's not enough to shout, 'Vive the multiple!' ... the multiple has to be done."[54] Care contains affective and ethical dimensions. However, if these do not ultimately manifest in an *infrastructural practice of care*, then they remain within the symbolic realm. Yet, addressing the urgencies of care can never be a performative, a symbolic gesture; it must stem from an active, counter-hegemonic engagement with the social (infra)structures of the respective field, in this case, the arts.

Returning to Vishmidt, she argues that institutional critique and emancipatory agendas within the arts find their limitation in their defending "disclosure or deixis as the normative one for art."[55] In these schemata, she continues, "art can point, but it can't grab."[56] That is to say: to point to the contradictions and shortcomings of care within capitalism is important – but it is not enough. In light of care-washing, which turns care into an empty signifier for political or economic instrumentalisation and manipulation,[57] it is imperative for critical cultural practices to reach beyond the symbolic, the representational, in order to maintain and highlight the essential importance of care as the basis of humankind's existence. A meaningful relational curatorial practice of care needs to arrive at a juncture where it is in a position to place "agency over indexicality,"[58] and thereby to explore its potential "to grab."

While the representational potential of art "to point" forms one important facet within a complex mosaic of necessary (infra)structural changes within the arts, this pointing must be regarded as the method of departure – it must certainly not be the end of the effort. Thus "indexing care" as a way of "unsettling care" matters,[59]

54 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, quoted in Maria Piug de La Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 72.

55 Vishmidt, "Between Not Everything and Not Nothing," 267.

56 Ibid.

57 Andreas Chatzidakis, Jamie Hakim, Jo Littler, Catherine Rottenberg, and Lynne Segal. "From Carewashing to Radical Care: The Discursive Explosions of Care during Covid-19." *Feminist Media Studies* 20, no. 6 (2020): 889–95.

58 Vishmidt, "Between Not Everything and Not Nothing," 266. The full quote reads: "A preliminary reading could discern in this shift a pervasive tendency to prioritize the 'real' (the irreducible, the traumatic, the chaotic) over the delimited, instrumental impact over symbolic action, agency over indexicality."

59 Michelle Murphy, "Unsettling Care: Troubling Transnational Itineraries of Care in Feminist Health Practices," *Social Studies of Science* 45 (2015): 717–37

as it can shine light on care's contradictions, ambivalences, pitfalls, and structural deficiencies, on the violence of gendered and racialised norms, and on the exclusions that aggregate around care.

5.1.3.1 Transforming Each Building Block

The infrastructural lens situates the curatorial as a relational ecosystem, where the address of certain (infra)structural elements – or building blocks – can allude to change within the wider systemic web. Yet, within this practice of caring infrastructures, what is the role of the individual elements, the building blocks? How are they characterised, how do they relate to one another, and what is their role within the process of transformation? In search for answers to this line of questioning, I turn to another element of Tronto's excerpt:

> Further, in the process of repair, can we ever reach down deeply enough to change the "building stones"? It seems to me that we first have to address where repair is necessary – responding to violence, hatred, "othering" processes – before we can fix institutions.

I firstly, and briefly, turn to the small word "repair," which, like "care" and "healing," has become a trending term in the arts. It has become common, for example, to invite artists, curators, thinkers, and audiences to consider how "colonial wounds" can be "healed."[60] However, healing and repair seem to imply a sense of wholeness, flawlessness, or a previous state of equity within (art) institutions that needs to, or could be, reinstated.[61] As art institutions' historical emergence is tied to elitism, cultural superiority, colonialism, and gendered hierarchies, there is no "desirable point of return" that repair could lead us towards.[62] Instead, I argue, the notion of "repair" needs to be tied to a counter-hegemonic rearticulation of the infrastructures of the arts in their current and future forms, in the sense of the term provided by the political theorist Chantal Mouffe. The focus of addressing the violence of exclusion and

60 Examples of curatorial engagements with the notions of repair and healing include Gropius Bau, "Exhibition: YOYI! Care, Repair, Heal," 2023, https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/gropius-bau/programm/2022/ausstellungen/yoyi-care-repair-heal; Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, "Symposium: From Restitution to Repair," 2022, https://12.berlinbiennale.de/program/from-restitution-to-repair/; SAVVY Contemporary, "Event: Decolonial Approaches to Health, Social and Cultural Repair," 2022, https://savvy-contemporary.com/en/events/2022/repair/; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, "Event: New Alphabet School on HEALING (Faju)," 2022, https://archiv.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p_192883.php.

61 Independent of my position voiced here, I recommend novelist Maggie Nelson's passage on "repair" in *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint* (Dublin: Random House, 2021), 29ff. In this passage, she mainly builds on the work of the queer scholars José Esteban Muñoz and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

62 For further reference, see section 3.2.2 – "Independent Curating: The Curator-as-Author."

the "othering" processes of the art field lies not so much in reinstating a possible sense of wholeness or flawlessness but in rearticulating, hacking, and subverting the invisible and visible building stones of any given curatorial undertaking. The infrastructures of the art sector thus need to be critically rearticulated, such that they no longer reproduce mechanisms of exclusions but rather – via the notion of "reproducing otherwise" – become fields of agency for counter-hegemonic rearticulation along the lines of feminist care ethics. In this setup, the building blocks constitute the elements out of which infrastructures are built – and, in a micro-political stance, it is the individual building blocks that need to be responsive to the urgencies of care in order to facilitate the overall construction of *caring infrastructures*.

However, Tronto, in her letter, puts up for debate the possibility of even reaching down deep enough to grasp the building blocks to substantially alter, hack, subvert, and transform them. Her query hints at the *radicality* that transformation must acquire to be able to address the roots of the problem. In the same way that mine and other feminist scholars' thinking explores the literal meaning of "curating," through its Latin etymology, as a "care-taking" practice,[63] I want to propose an equally productive investigation of the origin of "radical." Stemming from the Late Latin *radicalis* and the Latin *radic-*, *radix*, "radical" means "root."[64] To reach down to the building blocks of the arts' infrastructures, we thus need to undertake a literally "radical" process of understanding and addressing the "root" of the urgencies at stake. As care, curating, and infrastructures are relational constructs, the process of building caring infrastructures must be relational too. I propose to understand this radically relational process as one of micro-politics. Through such a micro-political approach, each element, each building block, of a curatorial process can be critically examined and rearticulated, be it communication, budgeting, documentation, or accessibility, in order for the larger constellation of building blocks – that is, the infrastructure itself – to be radically transformed.

Through such a micro-political approach, the potential resistance to change from involved actors and institutions can be lowered, as they are not burdened

63 For example, see Elke Krasny's elaboration on the use of the literal: "I make use of the literal as a sharp tool for critical feminist analysis and practice. The literal is not bound to any one practice or discipline in particular. Quite on the contrary, the literal can become most useful in its complexly challenging translations into material, political, social, cultural, aesthetic conditions and other languages. One can hold the literal up to what it is, what it can mean, what it could do. The literal enables performative acts. In pursuit of the literal, I weave together feminist care perspectives in political theory, political philosophy on public space and assembly, critical museology, urban sociology, and citizenship studies." Elke Krasny, "Caring Activism. Assembly, Collection, and the Museum," *Collecting in Time* (2017), https://collecting-in-time.gfzk.de/en.

64 "Word History: The Roots of 'Radical'," Merriam-Webster, accessed July 16, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/radical-word-history.

with the sheer thought of transforming entire ecosystems at once. They are instead invited to partake in small-scale, incremental changes that focus on each building block separately, slowly transforming the wider infrastructural setup over time.

5.1.3.2 Feminist Care Ethics as a Guiding Compass

While I have begun to outline that micro-political infrastructural change is necessary in order to enact infrastructural curatorial care, the *direction* that this transformative rearticulation must take still requires address. The transformation requires a set intentionality regarding not only *whether* but *how* the building blocks can be altered. Accordingly, I want to briefly return to Lauren Berlant's understanding of infrastructure as that which keeps our world "practically bound to itself," which *patterns* social form.[65] I propose that Tronto and Fisher's articulation of a feminist ethics of care defines *how* this world is bound to itself. Feminist care ethics, as elaborated earlier, are rooted in the rejection of the assertion of autonomy, independence, and hierarchical care-as-control. Rather, they emphasise the acknowledgement of mutual vulnerabilities and interdependency, and our life-long need for care and democratic processes.[66] These ethics of care serve as the guiding compass that provides direction as to how the building blocks of a curatorial project should be rearticulated. Their proposed ethics of care may serve to shape the patterning, the intentionality, the moral boundaries, that distinguish a relational curatorial format from any kind of loose sociality. Infrastructures are thus what provide a patterning framework to bring people, sites, and objects together, while a feminist ethics of care defines *how* they are brought together – it is precisely what turns infrastructures into *caring infrastructures*. When the micro-political rearticulations of each building block, according to feminist care ethics, are taken together, they align themselves into a chain of supporting elements, which allows for the construction of caring infrastructures within a curatorial process.

5.1.3.3 Defining Caring Infrastructures

To return to Tronto's opening question within this section – What does an infrastructural practice look like? – we must conclude that in order to actualise care's democratising potential, the conscious building of caring infrastructures must be regarded as a methodological undertaking, and it must be grounded within a lived practice. To reiterate, caring infrastructures within the arts are the result of a methodological sequence revolving around the building of support structures that respond to the multiple caring needs and capacities of the artists, collaborators, audiences, and team members and that foster the conditions of their presence –

65 Berlant, "The Commons," 394.

66 To return to my earlier introduction of Berlant's notion of infrastructure, see section 5.1.1 – "Infrastructures that Reproduce Otherwise."

thereby producing tangible frameworks for practising in congruence with feminist care ethics.

This curatorial methodology requires the curator, or any other critical artistic or cultural practitioner, to look closely at the multitude of relations, scales, and elements (the building blocks) of a given curatorial undertaking and to rearticulate them in a micro-political and counter-hegemonic fashion and according to the caring needs and capacities of the specific context. To take the example of budgets, one may seek out, in the specific instance, how financial resources are currently allocated, how pay is distributed, and how these processes could be aligned with the feminist care ethics of mutual care, interdependence, and democracy – thereby countering economic hierarchies and capitalist exploitation. Would this shift in perspective allow for the funding of travel for children and partners of artists invited to partake in public programming, if this support was needed? Would the introduction of democratic principles alter who gets paid and how much? Would this lead to an abolition of unpaid internships in the arts? As a consequence of these questions – once acted upon – the wider infrastructural web of the curatorial process may be affected, as budget reconfigurations require, in most cases, related adjustments to programming. The result could be a downscaling of the overall project to retain enough budget to fairly pay everyone engaged. In the set of methodological propositions towards caring infrastructures presented in the upcoming section, I thus suggest considering a curatorial degrowth agenda, whereby less programming results in more financial care for the contributors.[67]

This example showcases that the process of building caring infrastructures is rooted in thinking through ecologies, as this approach precludes a practice that considers only disjointed fragments, that sees individual building blocks only as an afterthought and that might add (or take away) caring elements in an arbitrary fashion. This methodological approach does not entail *ex-post* add-ons to already finite projects; rather, it forms the core of a curatorial practice of care and permeates every aspect of the curatorial process. As one curatorial decision affects another, it is imperative to take seriously the ecological-relational character of caring infrastructures.

5.1.3.4 Assuming Curatorial Agency

Practising curatorial care through establishing caring infrastructures means assuming curatorial responsibility for the overall structures, context, and ecologies of one's work environment and its modes of production. Such a practice urges curators to make full use of their agency not only to address matters of care at a representational level but to actively alter affective, social, financial, and physical

67 See Proposition #5: "Consider Curatorial Budgeting as Political" in section 5.2.1 – "Practice-led Propositions towards Building Caring Infrastructures."

infrastructures in alignment with a feminist ethics of care. This understanding may serve as a roadmap for cultural practitioners to integrate care as method into their field of work, from contributing to the curatorial-activist pursuit of challenging discriminatory art historical canons and representations to highlighting questions of care as central to society and the overall economy, while building the foundations of caring infrastructures across the cultural sphere. The offer of caring infrastructures as a curatorial strategy is also an offer of a professional toolkit, one that hopes to go beyond gendered notions of care – as these imply that certain social groups should carry out care, because caring comes "naturally" to them or because their values already align to care.[68] The proposal for caring infrastructures is a possible pathway towards *degendering the practices of care*, as this practice detaches care from scripted gendered norms by offering it as a methodological toolkit that anyone can implement. With this proposition for caring infrastructures, I begin from the previously introduced feminist, activist, caring, and relational approaches to curating, with their counter-hegemonic impetus, but I amend them with an *infrastructural* perspective that translates ethical considerations into practice-led steps towards (infra)structural justice. In a capitalist society, where uncaring conditions for caregivers and care-receivers prevail, the centring of feminist care ethics must be understood as part of a counter-hegemonic formation that challenges not only the patriarchal, White, and elitist modus operandi of the arts but also the wider sociopolitical conditions.

With caring infrastructures, I further want to put forth a practice-led curatorial method to regain a sense of agency over everyday life as well as the place that care holds within in – not as a site of coercion, of burden, but of the actualisation of the self and a democratic society, and how this manifests within the arts. I am aware of the highly idealistic character of this undertaking and that it diverges from Tronto's articulated scepticism in regard to the potential of such an infrastructural approach, when she writes: "So perhaps infrastructural change is necessary, but it might be too much to hope that changing infrastructure is somehow a permanent fix to our uncaring ways."[69]

Conscious of curating's various limitations when it comes to substantially altering the hegemonic configurations that span art, care, curating, and capitalism,[70] for now I nonetheless want to follow the Marxist-feminist thought of Silvia Federici, who frames the sphere of social reproduction as the central terrain for social transformation, which – in a feminist tradition – locates the personal as

68 The feminist critique that care work is naturalised as women's work was articulated in chapter 2 – "Uncaring Conditions: Care Work under Capitalism."

69 Tronto, "Dear Rosario, Sascia, and Gilly," in Bailer, Karjevsky, and Talevi, Letters to Joan, 44.

70 See chapter 6 – "Limits of Curatorial Care" for a (self-)critical reflection of the agency and the limitations of curating with care, and the notion of "caring infrastructures" in particular.

the site of political struggle and change.[71] I argue that through micro-politics – through micro-changes in the micro-building-blocks of our relational webs – a different present and future are possible. The micro-political approach of caring infrastructures might find its resemblance in the metaphor of the butterfly effect, wherein small-scale, mundane, everyday acts of care contain the possibility to produce counter-hegemonic ripple effects within the wider infrastructures that we are enmeshed in, prompting sometimes unforeseen, larger changes at the other end. In the dialogic spirit of thinking-with Joan Tronto, I end this section by foregrounding the agency and impetus that cultural professionals possess to enact care in all its facets: Ultimately, if not us, who will fight for a society that centres care? And if not now, when?

5.2 In Search of a Practice: Towards a Curatorial Methodology of Caring Infrastructures

Whereas the previous section offered a theoretical engagement with the notion of caring infrastructures, moving forward I specifically tend to the articulation of the methodological components necessary to enact caring infrastructures within the arts. I propose eight practice-led propositions for rearticulating the building blocks of caring infrastructures in order to transfer a feminist care ethics into a lived practice of care within the arts.

For this undertaking, the particular, situated experiences of my curatorial practice at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung are taken as inductive, practice-led processes of knowledge creation that can serve as a point of departure for other curators and cultural practitioners to align their practices – whether interdependent or institutional – with democratising principles and methods of, through, and towards care. This approach aligns theoretically with the thought of the artistic research scholar Anke Haarmann, who argues:

> To identify this practice of research as *methodos* – as a way of knowing – in artistic practice can only mean, according to the thesis, to work it out inductively from concrete artistic practices, because the arts, like philosophy, are committed to a consistent form-content relation, that is, they set the systematics and form of their method according to the content they are concerned with.[72]

71 Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Brooklyn, NY: PM Press, 2012); Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

72 Anke Haarmann, "Künstlerische Praxis als methodische Forschung? Zur kunsthistorischen Ermöglichung einer künstlerischen Forschung," Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ästhetik, September 2011, 8, http://www.dgae.de/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Haarmann.pdf.

It is precisely such a nexus that I aim to establish, where the curatorial form (of care) and its content (on care) find their congruency in caring infrastructures. The central challenge is to close the gap – the potential discrepancy – between the often emancipatory public face of an institution and the underlying patriarchal, White, and elitist (infra-)structural frameworks that sustain its public profile. This process requires openness, sensitivity, and self-criticality from the engaged arts practitioner, who seeks to build from the approaches proposed in this research project. While working at M.1, I did not always arrive with the anticipatory sensitivities needed to provide the necessary care without the participants pointing them out to me, but I brought the necessary openness to respond to them and to consider them in the subsequent sessions. Depending on from which social positions the curators and organisers of an event act, a high level of empathetic thinking – especially in the case of gendered, classed, racial, and bodily privilege – may be required to allow them to *anticipate* the needs of a diverse audience and provide openness and flexibility to respond to the given needs and possibly changing circumstances. Therefore, these curatorial strategies towards care must always be viewed in light of the specific context. Some aspects may turn out to be unfit, or even superfluous, to realise, while others may appear more feasible and urgent than expected at first, and still other aspects may be missing for a given curator's or artist's respective creative practice. The overall focus of the propositions I outline in the next section relates primarily to project-based, temporary, institutional, and freelance curatorial practices within the non-profit art sector. While they do not particularly reflect on the specific modes of operation within the commercial realm, the propositions certainly have useful application in that sector, too.

Instead of formulating a manifesto in a traditional sense, I offer eight micro-essays, each of which consists of a curatorial proposition followed by a discursive engagement with the ambivalences and potentials that aggregate around that particular element, in conversation with the learnings I received from my curatorial practice in Hohenlockstedt. The text thus oscillates between self-critical reflection, a search for counter-hegemonic curatorial pathways, and hands-on curatorial propositions – inspired by feminist democratic care ethics.[73] At the end of this chapter, I recombine the eight propositions into a shortened version, resulting in what I call a "soft manifesto" for a lived practice of care within the arts.[74]

The dimension of softness of the manifesto refers to its approach and tone, eschewing the confrontational or militant language that one might traditionally associate with activist manifestos. As transformative processes already contain the risk of triggering frictions, resistance, and shut-offs, a soft manifesto is more subversive,

73 My approach of feminist care ethics is rooted in Joan Tronto's work, as previously established in the introduction section "Care as Feminist Ethics."

74 See section 5.3 – "Soft Manifesto for Caring Infrastructures."

as it seeks to persuade through clarity and calmness in its style, with the potential to allow for a more subtle opening to its transformative content. In sync with relationality and feminist care ethics, the manifesto aims to make transparent the necessary steps towards micro-political transformation in a manner that is compelling, accessible, and comprehensive.

Many manifestos within the arts stem from the point of view of artists, and rarely as self-critical accounts *by* curators *for* curators. A useful example of the former is the collaborative manifesto towards care entitled "How Not to Exclude Artist Parents," which provides specific considerations for art institutions on how to not exclude artists with caring responsibility, from the perspective of artists.[75] Another valuable resource is art critic Katy Deepwell's anthology of fifty feminist manifestos, written primarily by artists, as is the selection of "Propositions for Feminist Collective Practice" gathered by the feminist researcher and artist Alex Martinis Roe in her book *To Become Two*.[76]

Further, activist crip artists have created resources for artists to write their own access forms, used to indicate the support structures that they require from institutions to attend and contribute to their cultural programmes.[77] A prominent example within this field of crip activism is the "disability access rider" by artist and writer Johanna Hedva.[78] These resources are part of a selection of prompts for a more caring otherwise within the arts that stem from the initiative Intersections of Care. This platform collects guidelines, toolkits, and propositions from anti-racist, anti-ableist, feminist, queer, and trans practitioners and collectives on its website.[79] Other resources, such as (feminist) codes of conducts and codes of ethics, stem from art institutions and museum associations themselves; for example, the codes of ethics by the International Council of Museums (ICOM).[80] Therein, it is formulated

75 Artist Parents Network, "How Not to Exclude Artist Parents: Some Guidelines for Institutions and Residencies," Artist Parents, 2021, http://www.artist-parents.com.

76 Katy Deepwell, *50 Feminist Art Manifestos* (London: KT press, 2014), and Alex Martinis Roe, *To Become Two: Propositions for Feminist Collective Practice* (Berlin: Archive Books, 2018).

77 Access Docs for Artists, initiated by Leah Clements, Alice Hattrick and Lizzy Rose, accessed on September 26, 2023, https://www.accessdocsforartists.com.

78 Johanna Hedva, "Hedva's Disability Access Rider," *Sick Woman Theory* (blog), August 22, 2019, https://sickwomantheory.tumblr.com/post/187188672521/hedvas-disability-access-rider.

79 Intersections of Care, "Intersecting Guidelines of Care," accessed September 20, 2023, https://www.intersectionsofcare.net/guidelines/.

80 For examples of feminist and ethical codes of practices within the arts see ICOM – International Council of Museums, "Code of Ethics, " 2004, https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf; Feminist (Art) Institution, "Code of Practice," 2017, http://feministinstitution.org/code-of-practice/; Les Créatives, *Rosa Heft für Gleichstellung in der Kultur* (Pink Booklet for Gender Equity in the Cultural Sector), ed. Dominique Rovini, with Lucrezia Perrig, Sidonie Atgé, and Noemi Grütter (Geneva, Switzerland: Association Les Créatives via Atar Roto Presse Suisse, 2021), https://lescreatives.ch/2023/wp-content/uploads/2

that, for example, "museums work in close collaboration with the communities from which their collections originate as well as those they serve."[81] ICOM's code of conduct exemplifies a seeming trend within the arts to allocate the agency for change within the cultural sector either to institutions or to artists, who are affected by the lack of support structures. Rarely are such manifestos or codes of conducts formulated by or directed specifically at curators as accountable agents responsible for shifting the art system from their particular position of power. One of these scarce accounts is the prompt formulated by the London-based Black feminist curatorial duo Languid Hands. In their text "On Care and Curating during this 'Moment,'" they make a case for curatorial care to be extended beyond the material scope of an exhibition, reaching into the very conditions – the infrastructures – of the arts, to promote the safety and care of Black people:

> Our experiences of working with white led institutions has inspired within us a new meaning of what it means to curate (from Latin cura "care") the work of black people. As black curators, our care must extend beyond the material production and handling of the work itself, to supporting the conditions in which black people might survive in a world that does not care for them, in a world aggressively indifferent to their safety.[82]

Joining their proposed urgency to rethink the conditions of production and the structural care needed within the arts, I aim to contribute to closing the aforementioned gap of curatorial formulations towards a more just art sector by drawing from feminist democratising care ethics. I deem it particularly important not only to formulate such propositions as "demands from below" (e.g., from the perspective of artists) but also to *assume responsibility as curators* and to formulate propositions regarding how we, as curators, in our respective positions of power, can challenge the given norms. I hereby reconnect with Joan Tronto's formulations of feminist care ethics as being intricately tied to "affix responsibility."[83] Only by articulating these demands and propositions from and for curators can these arenas of curatorial responsibility be tied to the theories and concepts of curatorial practice

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021/09/ROSAHEFT-DIGITAL-1.pdf; and Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, University of Leicester, "Trans-Inclusive Culture: Guidance on Advancing Trans Inclusion for Museums, Galleries, Archives and Heritage Organisations," September 2023, https://le.ac.uk/rcmg/research-archive/trans-inclusive-culture.

81 ICOM – International Council of Museums, "Code of Ethics," 2004, https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf. My emphasis.

82 Languid Hands, "On Curation & Care during This 'Moment,'" Cubitt, 2020, https://www.cubittartists.org.uk/languid-hands-on-curation-care-during-this-moment.

83 Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 30. On previous mentions about care and responsibility, and their relationship to curating, see the introduction section "Care as Feminist Ethics" and chapter 4 – "Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges."

– thereby claiming the provision of caring infrastructures as fundamental to the field's professional conduct.

The following propositions, in the form of short essays, provide insight, and possibly inspiration, for other practitioners who wish to include critical curatorial care in their own practices while also providing solid ground upon which care-receivers, caretakers, and freelancing practitioners can build up the arguments for their own particular needs. All too often, freelancing artists and curators find themselves in the precarious position of having to constantly point out the lack of support structures, the lack of caring infrastructures – while, in most cases, having to accept the sobering reality that their needs will remain unmet.[84] I therefore argue that it is part of (institutionalised) curatorial responsibility to not let the construction of caring infrastructures fall onto the shoulders of freelancing artists and cultural practitioners, who – due to the prevalent lack of support structures – are forced to become activists for fair pay and equity. In such instances, these practitioners are easily dismissed as "nagging bitches" – a term Federici uses in her early work to reflect on the ways housewives are perceived when advocating for gender justice – or as "feminist killjoys," to borrow queer-feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's formulation.[85]

In this set of tensions between institutions and freelancers, the institution often regards the demanded gestures of care as acts of benevolence, of "being nice,"[86] rather than as substantial acts of structural justice and professional ethical conduct. Yet taking seriously the lived realities of employees, collaborators, and audiences with caring responsibilities and physical and mental impairments is a form of institutional accountability towards gender, racial, class, and disability justice that requires complex consideration.[87] Some of the curatorial propositions in the upcoming sections might seem obvious or tedious and others "too much," but I argue that it is the interplay of seemingly mundane details that creates the set of caring support structures needed for a shift of consciousness within the arts.

However, the propositions formulated in this chapter are not all-encompassing. The proposed building blocks reflect the most pressing foci which emerged from my

84 For an example of a conversation among freelancing artists who are also caregivers, see Andrea Büttner, Camille Henrot, and Basim Magdy, "Shifting Mindsets: Welcoming Parenthood in the Art World," moderated by Emily Butler, Art Basel Conversations, June 14, 2023, YouTube video, 1:05:06, https://www.artbasel.com/stories/conversations-art-basel-shifting-mindsets-welcoming-parenthood-art-world?lang=en.

85 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017) and Sara Ahmed, *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook: The Radical Potential of Getting in the Way* (New York: Seal, 2023).

86 Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars, and Tomislav Medak (Pirate Care), "Care and Its Discontents," *New Alphabet School* (blog), Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2020, https://newalphabetschool.hkw.de/care-and-its-discontents.

87 Hettie Judah, *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)* (London: Lund Humphries, 2022).

own curatorial practice. Following the metaphor of building blocks, I invite practitioners to join the process of proposing an otherwise, by conceiving further building blocks. Such further building blocks could include questions of ecological sustainability, human-non-human relationships within curatorial practice, architectural and spatial considerations towards care (what some have called "care-spacing"), and digitality and archiving, as well as propositions specific to the commercial art gallery sector and further perspectives from embodied Black and brown experiences, from lived crip, queer, and trans experiences, from neurodiverse experiences, and from experience of caregivers who attend to the needs of care-receiving adults.

These few examples highlight the need to see my eight propositions as only a prompt towards a much wider conversation around "curating with care" from a multitude of perspectives. While the propositions might be limited in their range of themes, they do – as a collection – formulate a methodology of analysis and practice that can, and should, be expanded to accommodate other themes, perspectives, and areas. Precisely because this notion of caring infrastructures can never be all-encompassing, this section on the propositions is followed by a concluding chapter, which reflects on the limitations and contradictions of practising curatorial care within capitalism.

The added value of these considerations to the discourses of curating, care, and feminism is that they nevertheless allow rather abstract ethical considerations to be grounded within a lived practice of care that takes seriously the relational webs that span from the personal to the macro-political, routed through the (infra-)structural conditions within (art) institutions. As established previously, the care crisis is not a momentary condition but rather a constant crisis as a result of the contradictions of capital and care.[88] Thus, it is imperative to rethink the conditions of care – also mired within the cultural complex – from an infrastructural point of view.[89] Infrastructural issues need to be approached through infrastructural thinking and practices.

88 See Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," *New Left Review*, no. 100 (2016).

89 See chapter 2 –"Uncaring Conditions: Care Work under Capitalism."

5.2.1 Practice-led Propositions towards Building Caring Infrastructures

Building Block: Situating

Proposition #1: Gain a Sincere Understanding of the Context

When embarking on a new curatorial project, hold space and time for observation of the context and for deep listening to the community before developing public programming. This allows the project to emerge from the context rather than become an external imposition.

At the start of my curatorial position at M.1, I asked for a three-month research phase, during which time no public programming would be held, so that I could acquaint myself with the institution, the village, its inhabitants, potential artists, and curatorial formats. This research phase, which included observation, meaningful interaction, and engaged listening, preceded the participatory curatorial programme. I used these learnings and experiences from the community as the point of departure for my curatorial undertaking. This allowed me to build *from* and *with* the community rather than impose a public programme that would operate with a logic – or urgency – foreign to the community. This phase was rooted in the sensation of what "feels right to me," in feminist activist Audre Lorde's sense, which also caused a feeling of vulnerability, as I was deviating from the trodden paths of institutional curating, which tends to rest upon more rigid planning and scheduling of programming.[90]

While many larger art institutions operate under the privileged condition of having curatorial teams dedicated to researching and conceptualising larger exhibitions for up to several years, more precarious, underfunded (independent) art spaces work under the immense pressure of having to produce visible results quickly. In both instances, the funding structures (often a mix of private and public sources) have developed in such a way that art organisations have to justify their activities through high visitor numbers, thereby diminishing the time for the "invisible" processes of active listening and contextual immersion in new settings and topics.[91] Irrespective of the scale of the arts organisation, its public programme,

90 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Feminist Series (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 56.

91 The pressure for curators and directors to deliver measurable results is high: "In the US, although most museums are private, many still receive government money. Funders in the public sector, mostly on the state and local level, are tuned to measurables, and attendance is a matrix. Corporate and foundation donors often want to know these numbers, as do today's trustees, who care more about headlines and the visuals of big crowds." See Brian Allen, "Exhibitions Are a Numbers Game, Whether We Like It or Not," *Art Newspaper*, March 27, 2019.

in many instances, relies on the involvement of independent – or to borrow from Elke Krasny, *interdependent* – curators and arts practitioners, who oftentimes do not reside where they work, as they are subject to the neoliberal project logic of the cultural sphere, with its call for hyperflexibility and hypermobility. This, in many instances, makes the appointed curator of a given project a stranger to the community in which they are invited to work. Contrary to this arrangement, the curator Megan Johnston, makes a strong case that a socially engaged curatorial practice requires a meaningful understanding of one's immediate context, which includes engaging with local experts to gain deeper knowledge about "the cultural politics, the poetics of place, and to investigate issues conscious and unconscious that affect everyday lives."[92] This process includes a deeper understanding of the social structure of the place, who is in charge of what; who is included in which communal operations and who isn't; what resources are at hand, and which ones are at stake. As this process takes time and sincere commitment, Johnston considers these elements crucial for her proposed approach of "slow curating":

> The notion of taking time is important, as is working in collaboration with a sense of place and alongside working artists and the community. It means promoting reciprocal relationships, open-ended proposals, and outcomes that can be decided by different people and at different times in the process.[93]

Similarly, the artist collective ruangrupa asserts that their projects begin with a "certain type of sensibility [...], a very local sensibility that grew from being in Jakarta. We are interested in what is available in a certain context. The question that underlies our processes is always repeating, but the answer becomes always very different."[94]

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92 Johnston, "Slow Curating," 26.

93 Ibid.

94 ruangrupa, "Interview with ruangrupa: Our Exhibitions Are an Alibi," interview by Franz Thalmair, Platform 6 – documenta fifteen, 2020, https://www.documenta-platform6.de/ruangrupa-our-exhibitions-are-an-alibi/. Without being able to shortly encapsulate the extensive discourse and dispute around the curatorial work of ruangrupa at documenta fifteen, I want to add that – despite the group's best intentions to approach Kassel with a sensitivity towards the local – the tensions arose precisely because of differences in cultural, historical, religious, political, and aesthetic understandings and approaches. For further discussion, I suggest *OnCurating*, no. 54, "documenta fifteen – Aspects of Commoning in Curatorial and Artistic Practices" (November 2022). For a discourse analysis of the controversy, I suggest the forthcoming research on "Antisemitismus und postkoloniale Debatten am Beispiel der documenta fifteen" [Anti-Semitism and postcolonial debates using the example of documenta fifteen], more information on which is available at: Bildungsstätte Anne Frank, documenta Institut, and Frankfurt University of Applied Science, "Nach der documenta fifteen: Forschungsprojekt

However, time is not always a given resource, and one must consciously consider the temporalities of ones' curatorial concept – and, on occasion, negotiate these with partnering institutions. I therefore propose to intentionally carve out space, time, and adequate methods and strategies for situating oneself within the given context from the outset of a project, in order to approach the respective community from a place of genuine curiosity and care. Such an approach, in the long run, may increase visitor numbers due to a sensitive and authentic engagement with the questions and concerns of the surrounding communities or, at least, allow for a shift of thinking from quantitative to qualitative relationship-building with the audiences. Despite the tremendous effort that these processes of community engagement may entail, the relations established along the way form the social fabric from which a radically relational curatorial practice – one that is responsive and useful for the community (*Curaduría Útil*) – can unfold. Therefore, intentionally carving out space for the process of deep listening and the situating of the curatorial concept within a given context is a crucial dimension of curatorial care. In consideration of feminist care ethics, these processes can be understood as operations to democratise cultural programmes. They form the basis for a relational approach to curatorial care from which all other public formats and audiences can emerge.

analysiert Antisemitismus-Kontroverse," press release, *Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences*, 2022, https://www.frankfurt-university.de/de/erweiterungen/news/news-liste/news-detail/nach-der-documenta-fifteen-forschungsprojekt-analysiert-antisemitismus-kontroverse/.

Building Block: Visibility & Representation

Proposition #2: Create the Conditions of Visibility for Underrepresented Perspectives

The agency of curators lies in the power to challenge canons and patterns of representation. Curating with care needs to create the conditions that bring underrepresented themes, perspectives, and social groups to the fore of public visibility and discourse, in tandem with structural changes.

Framing curating as a sociopolitical practice with a dedication to an ethics of care can contribute to shifting the power and representational matrix within the arts.[95] The programming at M.1 departed from this curatorial-activist take on representation, which is committed to "levelling hierarchies, challenging assumptions, countering erasure, promoting the margins over the center, the minority over the majority, inspiring intelligent debate, disseminating new knowledge, and encouraging strategies of resistance."[96] The central mode through which the curatorial cycle at M.1 addressed artistic production on care was the artist prizes.[97] The awardees, MATERNAL FANTASIES and Malu Blume, combined film, installation, and performative elements around the thematic focus of care, using an array of artistic methods to challenge a rigid reality that seems to enshrine traditional gender roles and limited ideas of community and care.[98]

As the curator of the open call for artist projects and the co-editor of their respective publications, it was my aim to foreground what commonly remains obscured: the domestic labour of women, the ambivalences of caregiving, the diverse conceptions of motherhood, and the queering of collective care and solidarity alliances. Art historian and cultural theorist Johanna Schaffer reminds us that the politically charged term "representation" is derived from the Latin *repraesentare*, "to make present": This concept of making the absent present concerns the level of representation as well as that of imagination and that of substitution."[99]

While I propose to practice curatorially with heightened awareness about whom and what topics one grants centre stage and in what light these themes, social groups, or perspectives are represented, it remains to be the case that the

95 This line comes from my earlier publication Sascia Bailer, "Care for Caregivers: Curating against the Care Crisis," in *Curating with Care*, ed. Elke Krasny and Lara Perry (London: Routledge, 2023), 193.

96 Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018), 22.

97 For details, see section 4.3.5 – "ART: Discourse & Artistic Production on Care."

98 See sections – 4.4.5.1.1 "MATERNAL FANTASIES" and 4.4.5.1.2 – "Malu Blume."

99 Johanna Schaffer, *Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit: Über die visuellen Strukturen der Anerkennung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 78. My translation.

demands for political visibility, via aesthetic representation, are contested. Schaffer stresses the importance of considering not merely *that* something becomes visible but *how* it is visiblised, as well as what it displaces via its own presence.[100] She argues that, all too often, positional political debates act as though there is a causal link between visibility and political power.[101] Feminist scholar Peggy Phelan states provocatively: "If representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young White women should be running Western Culture. The ubiquity of their image, however, has hardly brought them political or economic power."[102]

This relationship further has to be seen through the analysis of feminist art historical positions, which have exposed the gendered hierarchies that structure the visual field: "'Woman' became an object – of the male gaze – and she thus became readily available and her image commodified. The gaze is as a rule associated with the male (subject) and the viewed or displayed with the female (object)."[103] This assertion of Dorothee Richter, who builds on the seminal work of art historians Sigrid Schade and Silke Wenk,[104] is echoed by art theorist Anja Zimmermann when she highlights the "significance of this gaze regime for the definition of gender difference itself."[105] Considering the gendered and racialised hierarchies that structure the visual field, these scholars argue that marginalised groups, in order to become "politically" visible, have to identify with "their" representations; they have to inscribe themselves in the images through which they are designated and made intelligible.[106]

The two M.1 prize awardees did not speak for groups to which they do not belong and rather departed from their own situated knowledges as a femme (Malu Blume) and dissident mothers (MATERNAL FANTASIES), while also producing visual aesthetics and narratives that they wanted to portray publicly. As such, I argue that their (self-)representations hold emancipatory political value and do not reproduce their societal marginalisation. This understanding seems to be echoed in the work of feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis, who sees the task of women's cinema not so much in absenting or destroying narrative and visual pleasure but rather in constructing a different referential frame, in which the "measure of desire is no longer just the male

100 Ibid., 122. My translation.

101 Ibid., 12.

102 Peggy Phelan, quoted in ibid., 15.

103 Dorothee Richter, "A Brief Outline of the History of Exhibition Making," OnCurating, no. 6 (2010): 29.

104 For a detailed discussion and extensive bibliography, see Sigrid Schade and Silke Wenk, "Strategien des 'Zu-Sehen-Gebens': Geschlechterpositionen in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte," in *Genus: Geschlechterforschung/gender studies in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften: ein Handbuch*, ed. Hadumod Bussmann and Renate Hof (Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 2005), 144–85.

105 Anja Zimmermann, "Skandalöse Bilder – Skandalöse Körper: Abject Art vom Surrealismus bis zu den Culture Wars (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 2001), 119.

106 Kerstin Brandes, quoted in Schaffer, *Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit*, 52.

subject. For what is finally at stake is not so much how 'to make visible the invisible' as how to produce the conditions of visibility for a different social subject."[107]

Curators – and particularly curators who seek to curate according to feminist care ethics – hold the responsibility to produce the *conditions of visibility* of what de Lauretis calls "different social subjects." In this light, curators who strive towards fostering conditions of visibility and representation quickly arrive at a crossroads where they have to take a political stance in regard to their role in advancing structural transformations (that go beyond the conditions of visibility).

I argue that curators are confronted with three possible ways of renegotiating the relationship between feminist art, curatorial care, the conditions of visibility, and structural changes. Firstly, curators can opt to become active in fostering conditions of representation and visibility as forms of recognition of formerly invisiblised positions and in establishing an altered position towards the depicted images and subjectivities on display. Secondly, curators can become active by instituting according to feminist principles without renegotiating these topics in the symbolic realm – that is, through representational or thematic exhibitions and events that address feminist or sociopolitical urgencies. Finally, curators can, and arguably, should, aim towards both contributing to the visual representation of feminist issues through the arts *and* putting in place feminist institutional structures.[108]

From a feminist perspective, the latter option appears as the most valuable pathway to enact care curatorially. Thus, curators seeking to engage with anti-hegemonic practices cannot stop at using their curatorial agency to challenge existing canons and patterns of representation, nor at critically considering the aesthetic-political questions of power relations implicated within gendered gazes, nor at carefully selecting the themes to which they intend to grant representational space. Rather, a curatorial practice of care must also *produce conditions of visibility* that go beyond hegemonic social subjectivities. To do so, I propose expanding one's curatorial focus beyond the *what* and the *how* of aesthetic representation to include the underlying (often invisible) support structures that enable the visual-representative and political presence of different social subjects. The renegotiation of the fields of the visible must go hand in hand with the renegotiation of the invisible structures that support its public moments. In short, art institutions should not fall into the traps of care-washing, whereby they "showcase care" without "enacting care (infra-)structurally."[109]

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107 Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 8–9.

108 For further reference, see OnCurating, no. 52 (2021).

109 I herewith connect to the line of thought from the introductory section "The Caring Turn within Arts and Research," where I made a case to understand the caring turn as a celebratory moment only if it connects representational and structural questions.

Building Block: Accessibility

Proposition #3: Provide "Care for Presence"

As a curator, create "conditions for presence" for a range of audiences, artists, and collaborators by considering which curatorial choices and prerequisites allow for their presences. These prerequisites may include free on-site childcare, shared meals, physical considerations for inclusion and rest, and inclusive temporalities and communication.

Practising a feminist curatorial ethics of care includes thinking along the boundaries of absences and presences. What are the conditions, which are created curatorially, for the absence or presence of certain audiences, team members, artists, and collaborators within a cultural project?

This line of questioning reconnects with the thoughts on a relational curatorial practice, which I have previously established.[110] Here, the curator is seen as an entity enmeshed within a larger relational ecosystem whose agency rests in the power to shift and alter current conditions of visibility/invisibility, presence/absence, low/high hierarchies, and so on. Returning to the metaphor of the "curatorial butterfly effect," micro-political adaptations may lead to changes that go beyond the immediate realm and – aligning with the notion of a *Curaduría Útil* (useful curating) – enact transformative elements useful to the sociopolitical concerns of the audiences and other stakeholders.

This understanding of a relational curatorial practice highlights the interplay between the delimiting or enabling physical, social, cultural, and mental factors that characterise the conditions of such presences or absences. The various intersecting infrastructures in place define how audiences consider whether or not this programming is for them. At this juncture is where oppressive structures, such as class, race, caring responsibilities, and bodily abilities, intersect in the cultural field and define whether someone will feel drawn to – and will be physically and logistically able to – participate. Hence, a curatorial politics of presence within a largely urban-centred, elitist, and ableist cultural scene needs to actively deconstruct these barriers and put in place elements that allow for the presences of a variety of participants, contributors, and collaborators.

Within political activist discourse, such considerations are often to be found under the keywords "accessibility" and "anti-discrimination." Writer, educator, and disability justice advocate Mia Mingus also makes a case to reconsider these meaning of these terms: "We must [. . .] move beyond access by itself. We cannot allow the liberation of disabled people to be boiled down to logistics. We must understand and

110 As I have outlined in chapter 4 – "Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges."

practice an accessibility that moves us closer to justice, not just inclusion or diversity."[111]

In a shared effort of moving closer to a more just cultural sector, I consider it crucial to reframe the approach of accessibility as an approach of curatorial care. This way, *care for presence* must be understood not as an additional task of curators (for example, when framed as "accessibility-as-logistics") but as curating's core essence. Here it is important not just to consider this curatorial care for presence for the development of audience groups (as it is often the case in cultural institutions) but also to take seriously the notion of "care for presence" for the entire ecosystem of the arts – including its respective audiences but also its team members, (freelancing) artists, and collaborators. The conditions we as curators foster for freelancing artists (possibly with caring responsibilities or other forms of supposed "restrictions") matter just as much as those we create for diverse audiences to be present in our cultural institutions or public frameworks. The beauty of providing care for presence lies in realising that plentiful synergistic effects can be created as we build caring infrastructures across the art sector's social groups – on-site childcare might be a support structure for the audience members, the freelancing artist-parent, and the curator-parent alike; a ramp at the entrance is a physical support structure for both wheelchairs and strollers; a shared meal, free of charge, is nourishing across generations, bodily abilities, and income groups. Practising care for presence is an invitation to practice intersectionally, bringing awareness to and formulating support structures for a range of so-called marginalised groups and their diverse needs.

In the following section, I highlight possible curatorial choices that could be considered prerequisites or building blocks of a curatorial framework of caring infrastructures.

– Prerequisite: On-site Childcare

Since a central support structure for artists, collaborators, and audience members with caring responsibilities is the provision of childcare, at M.1. we offered free on-site childcare for events (Image 58). Our provision of childcare demanded physical alterations to the institutional space; therefore a former gallery space was turned into a playroom, which remained intact for the next curatorial cycle of 2021–22.[112]

111 Mia Mingus, "Changing the Framework: Disability Justice," *Leaving Evidence* (blog), February 12, 2011, https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/changing-the-framework-disability-justice/.

112 The 2021–22 curatorial cycle was under the artistic direction of Agnieszka Roguski. See Agnieska Roguski, for M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, "kuratieren 2021/22: IN:VISIBILITIES," accessed December 2023, https://www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de/en/kuratieren/2021-2022/.

Image 58: Children playing during the workshop series "Care for Caregivers" at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, October 2019. Photo: Laura Mahnke.

This institutional decision to make space for the presence of children and allocate budget for on-site childcare during the artists residencies marked an exception within the German-speaking cultural landscape. Not only do institutional leaders need to understand the political necessity of allocating resources to childcare but funding bodies also need to commit to covering such costs. A survey of the Swiss visual arts association Visarte shows that only 7 percent of Swiss arts organisation offer residencies and cultural formats that are inclusive to artists with caring responsibility.[113] Attending to the same precarious situation, the Swiss cultural foundation Pro Helvetia, launched a pilot project that

> supports artists who are parents of underage children by offering additional financial support for childcare and children's travel in order to facilitate these

113 Philippe Sablonier on behalf of Visarte Schweiz (Swiss professional association of visual artists), "Bericht zur Studie "Kunstberuf und Familie." Erkenntnisse und Handlungsanleitungen zur Vergabepraxis von Atelierstipendien," Visarte Schweiz, June 2023, https://visarte.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/0_Visarte_Studie-Kunstberuf-und-Familie_2023-07-04-def-D-mit-Illustration.pdf.

> artists' participation in residencies or research trips. This additional funding option applies to research trips and new Pro Helvetia residency calls.[114]

The term "pilot project" highlights the novelty and test character of this parent-friendly funding approach, which must be considered part of a growing zeitgeist that demands caring infrastructures. The grassroots international network Cultural ReProducers advocates for incorporating the needs of artist-parents into the cultural sector and provides a list of parent-friendly residencies and funding around the world.[115] The pending widespread implementation of caring infrastructures becomes particularly apparent in the case of highly renowned residencies that continue to explicitly exclude on-site family members (let alone offer on-site childcare).[116]

The exclusion of people with caring responsibilities from public programming and residencies – via a lack of support structures – is consequential: if an artist residency does not permit children, it excludes artist-parents not only from that particular opportunity but prevents a chain of potentially successful outcomes from unfolding. Parent unfriendliness prevents artist and curator parents from gaining important visibility and building networks (and so from profiting from the "halo effect" of the institution); this might make it much more difficult for this parent-artist to receive invitations to group exhibitions, get offers for solo shows, or secure representation from leading galleries.[117] When taking serious the infrastructural dimension of curating, this seemingly small detail clearly becomes an enabling or delimiting factor for mid- and long-term effects. I therefore propose that on-site childcare, support of childcare costs during artistic production, support towards travel costs for children and an additional caregiver, and general caregiver friendliness of arts

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114 Pro Helvetia, "Residencies and Research Trips," accessed October 1, 2022, https://prohelvetia.ch/en/residencies-and-research-trips/.

115 See their manifesto: Cultural ReProducers, "Manifesto," accessed September 22, 2022, https://www.culturalreproducers.org/p/manifesto.html.

116 For example, the German-government-funded, Los Angeles–based residencies Villa Aurora (for artists) and Thomas Mann House (for writers and researchers) do not allow family members to join the resident; visitors for up to fourteen days are permitted each quarter. They argue that this decision is due to spatial limitations. When I initially began to look closer at their residencies, I could not find any alternative child-support options. Now (as of Spring 2024), they offer an additional monthly allowance of 400 euros for the first child and 100 euros for each additional child. They further offer support in finding external housing for other family members. However, I fear that these conditions still make it very difficult for parents, especially single parents, to attend the residencies, as off-site housing and private childcare in the US are incredibly costly. For further details, see VATMH e. V., "Thomas Mann Fellowship," accessed February 2024, https://www.vatmh.org/de/thomas-mann-fellowships.html.

117 For further reference, see Judah, *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*.

programming and residencies are a central building block in making arts organisations more diverse and inclusive.

– Prerequisite: Inclusion, Disability, Immobility, Rest

I invite curatorial practitioners to approach the questions of inclusion, disability, and immobility from a perspective of queer-feminist interdependence, which rejects the notion of humans as autonomous subjects without a need of support structures.[118] Feminist cultural theorist Merri Lisa Johnson and queer and disability studies theorist Robert McRuer reflect, in "Cripistemologies," on the thinking of the women's studies scholar Susan Wendell, who identifies the everyday world as "structured for people who have no weaknesses."[119] Wendell asks the question: "Where does a person sit down to rest, if necessary, at the grocery store?"[120]

It is thus important to question the heteronormative and ableist standards that lead to social and physical infrastructures geared towards audiences and collaborators "with no weaknesses." Alongside the lack of support structures for caregivers, there are a range of overlooked accessibility needs for care-*receivers* that configure who is able to (physically) access art institutions and their programming.

A central condition of presence is that of geographical and spatial accessibility of art institutions, particularly when situated outside urban cultural hubs, such as in the case of M.1. Apart from hosting the events within a wheelchair-accessible space, these concerns required us to coordinate carpooling for regional attendees, which was primarily a support for elderly participants without cars and for whom public transport would have been too exhausting and individual taxis too costly. For guests from further away, we at times offered shuttles from and to the nearest train station and free overnight stays at the institution, if capacity allowed for it.

For the exhibition *Mothers*, Warriors, and Poets: Care as Resistance* at StadtPalais Stuttgart (May–July 2023), which I co-curated with Didem Yazıcı, it was our concern, together with the participating artists, to foster conditions of presence that would welcome a range of people with their diverse needs.[121] Apart from on-site childcare and sign-language interpretation on the opening day, for vision-impaired visitors we offered an audio description of the exhibition, its space, and its video works, which was produced by a cultural agency for inclusion (Image 59). Further, the programming was presented in both German and English, the exhibition texts

118 As laid out in chapter 4 – "Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges."

119 Susan Wendell, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability," Hypatia 4, no. 2 (1989): 104–24.

120 Susan Wendell, quoted in Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer, "Cripistemologies," Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies 8, no. 2 (2014): 133.

121 Mothers*, Warriors, and Poets was initiated by the artists Marie Lienhard, Renate Liebel, and Anna Gohmert, who invited the artists Julia Wirsching and Anna Schiefer, Didem Yazıcı, and myself as curators to the exhibition *Mothers*, Warriors, and Poets: Care as Resistance* at StadtPalais Stuttgart (May–July 2023). See https://mothers-warriors-and-poets.net.

were offered in three languages (German, English, and Turkish), and the website was made screen-reader friendly.

Within the framework of the *Care as Resistance* exhibition, the conceptual, organisational, and financial responsibility for creating these conditions for presence fell not to the institution but to us freelancing curators and artists who had been invited to exhibit in the space of the institution. While I strongly argue that institutions should take on the conceptual, administrative, and financial responsibility for matters of inclusion, I still want to emphasise that these are central *curatorial* concerns within a framework of care – whether enacted from a position of institutional association or when freelancing.

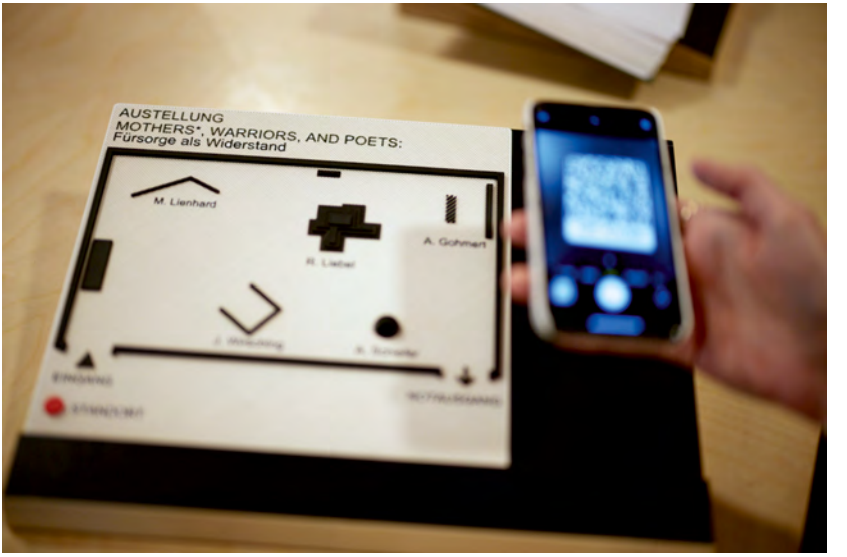

Image 59: Haptic board of the exhibition space with a QR code to access audio description of the exhibition for visually impaired visitors, specifically created for the exhibition Mothers, Warriors, and Poets: Care as Resistance, StadtPalais, Stuttgart. 2023. Photo: Julia Ochs.*

Once a diverse audience has entered the institutional space, it is important to continue to provide social and physical infrastructures that allow audience members to exercise their agency – even though, or possibly precisely *because*, they might need to withdraw and pause. In line with these considerations, smaller and larger art institutions and events have begun including resting places in their spatial arrangements. The various exhibition venues at documenta fifteen in Kassel, Germany, for example, included "quiet spaces" with low noise and low light for visitors

to take a break. For the 2022 exhibition *Crip Time* at MMK – Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, the benches for resting were artistic contributions by Finnegan Shannon (Image 60).[122] Under the title *Do you want us here or not* (2021- ongoing), the blue benches with white lettering were integrated into the exhibition space as useable artworks (rather than externalising rest spaces into different areas of the building).[123]

Image 60: Finnegan Shannon, Do you want us here or not (MMK), 2021–ongoing, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt. Acquired with generous support from the City of Frankfurt. Photo: Diana Pfammatter.

My proposition for the construction of infrastructures of accessibility and inclusion in remote places and for a range of audiences includes the curatorial labour of attending to seemingly mundane questions of how to reach the venue, where to

122 Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt, "Crip Time," 2022, https://www.mmk.art/de/whats-on/crip-time.

123 Ibid. Finnegan Shannon, "Do you want us here or not," artist's website, 2018, https://shannonfinnegan.com/do-you-want-us-here-or-not. Also at documenta fifteen the rest spaces seemed to have been artistically crafted or designed. However, this information (of how, how, when) is not to be found on documenta's website, and nor did the "quiet spaces" in Kassel contain wall texts that disclosed the design credits. See documenta fifteen, "Accessibility," 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/accessibility/.

sit and rest, and how to see, touch, and engage with the works and their content. This form of curatorial care blurs the boundaries between caregivers and care-receivers, as it aims to create conditions for the presence of all people. Creating curatorial conditions for inclusion, immobility, and rest needs to be considered as turning the notions of thinking-with care into a lived practice, in alignment with queer, feminist, and crip positions on interdependence, contingencies, empathy, and vulnerabilities.[124]

– Prerequisite: Inclusive Communication

Within the context of a socially engaged curatorial practice, communication is rarely disengaged from the curatorial concept but rather is co-constituent. I therefore want to stress that the communication methods and linguistic choices applied within a curatorial project can be agents of care that either create or disable processes of shared presence and creation and can diminish barriers of access in regard to class, ethnic background, and disabilities. Within relational curating, strategies of communicative engagement play a central role in connecting with a range of audiences.[125] The crucial task lies in the curator's ability to spark interest for artistic processes within communities that might not be accustomed to regularly attending "art events."

The invitation cards for the workshops at M.1 did not focus on promoting the arrival of an international artist to the rural community but rather presented a question central to the theme of the workshop. The workshop on trust, led by the Paris-based dancer and performance artist Myriam Lefkowitz, asked: "What are the conditions for mutual trust?" (Image 61). The visual artist Julieta Aranda asked in her workshop on time: "What kind of future is dormant within us?" (Image 33).

As a result, each invitation card gave space for a critical question(ing) – thereby establishing a connection between the content of the workshop and the lived experience of caregivers who encountered the leaflets across the region's public sphere. Just like the workshops' own critical interrogation of questions of everyday caregiving, *to question* also emerged as a key curatorial strategy for community engagement. Over the course of the series, I came to understand this approach as a curatorial communication method that enables a tender linkage between more abstract academic discourses on the one hand and locally situated care practices on the other.[126]

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124 Puig de la Bellacasa, "Nothing Comes without Its World."

125 The propositions of this section focus on communication between the institution or the curator with the respective communities and potential audiences of a given curatorial project. Though not spelled out, communication is also crucial in relation to the team, collaborators, board members, funding bodies, and so forth. The section therefore serves as an example of reconsidering communication strategies in the different parts of a curatorial cycle.

126 This passage comes from my text Bailer, "Care for Caregivers: Curating against the Care Crisis."

Image 61: Leaflet for Myriam Lefkowitz, "Workshop on Collective Self-Care," from the series "Care for Caregivers," M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Moritz Küstner, Festival Theaterformen 2017. Graphic design: Michael Pfisterer.

Not only communication strategies but also language itself can play a central role in fostering the presence of a diverse audience. Within the globalised art sphere, it is common to organise English-language events and to show films, performances, and other artistic works in English, whereas the main language of the site of display is not English. This turns fluency in English into a prerequisite for cultural participation, which makes it inaccessible for large portions of a potential audience (i.e., it presents a class barrier). For example, documenta fifteen – curated by a non-German collective – was an exhibition located in Germany that oftentimes was accessible only to English speakers, and at times only to those with Indonesian language skills. As someone fluent in English, I didn't notice this bias until an older friend of mine mentioned that she had a hard time understanding most of the works since she speaks only German.

At M.1, I engaged international artists who were not native German speakers, and so I set the intention to translate all events into German to make them inclusive for the local audience of rural Northern Germany. Due to a lack of additional funds and personnel, the translation into German mainly fell to me, yet I deemed

this effort a necessary one in order to make the curatorial programming accessible beyond circles of the higher educated with a proficiency in the lingua franca. At times, programming participants translated for their peers, making it more of a collective process of intercultural communication and support. In return, because several of the artists used English as their primary language, the workshops also attracted non-German-speaking participants and, hence, this bilinguality opened the programming up to a richer audience in regard to cultural class and country of origins.

Language and communication measures are a condition for presence because they can break down barriers of access. The curatorial consideration of subtitling artistic works, commissioning audio descriptions of visual works and the exhibition at large, using plain or easy language in exhibition texts,[127] and providing sign-language interpretation for live events or braille for written documents constitutes forms of curatorial care. Online programmes may make automated translation into multiple languages easier than on-site events.

I therefore propose curators should critically examine the communication strategies within a given curatorial project and consider the enabling functions it may serve within the respective context. Further, such measures of communicative access also need to be made transparent, as it is key for potential audiences to obtain the information about support structures in *advance* of the event.[128]

From my own practice-based experience, I argue for an understanding of communication strategies of care as including 1) empathic questions, and an accessible language, as a way to connect with the given community; b) the use of language as a way to translate more abstract, global, or academic discourses into locally situated contexts; c) the consideration of more traditional modes of communication, as a way to stay connected with elder communities; and d) attention to the language and translation of public programming and exhibitions, as a key element of accessibility to cultural participation. While many of these considerations may seem mundane, my experienced reality of both collaborating with institutions and attending

127 Many terms are used to describe more inclusive styles of written English, among them "easy English," "plain English," "everyday English," and "easy-to-read English." While each of these styles may differ slightly, the general idea is to make one's language as accessible as possible, using simple sentence structures and avoiding jargon and complicated terms. For further details on the difference between plain English and easy English, see Centre for Inclusive Design, "Easy English vs. Plain English. A Guide to Creating Accessible Language" 2020, https://centreforinclusivedesign.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Easy-English-vs-Plain-English_accessible.pdf.

128 Transparency still isn't a given. It occurred to me, regarding a past instance, that my co-curator and I had provided an art institution with accessibility information as part of our exhibition text – later, we realised that this information had not been put on the website, as it had been disregarded as "internal notes."

their public programming shows a continued lack of communication-related support structures, despite their central social function.

– Prerequisite: Inclusive Temporalities

Regarding time, or chronopolitics, as an anti-normative structure becomes a political matter for curators concerned with feminist care ethics. Researcher and curator Hana Janečková, in reflecting on her own practice, states:

> [C]urating 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.[129]

This line of thought connects to issues considered in Proposition #1, whereby the time dedicated to understanding the needs of the community is central. For this current proposition, I want to specifically look at the politics of time in regard to scheduling public events.

Art critic Hettie Judah, in an article for the *Guardian*, asks: "How can you attend your own show's launch party if it clashes with children's bath time?" as a way to kickstart a conversation on her research on how motherhood has affected the practices of the fifty artists she interviewed.[130] This question might sound banal, or even cynical, but the struggles and mechanisms of exclusion to which it alludes have great significance. Often the most prominent public speaker events, performances, and screenings occur in the evening, when most caregivers are occupied putting their dependents to sleep. This might make it difficult not only for caregiving artists to contribute to public programming but also for audience members with caring responsibilities to attend. Additionally, a variety of "working-class" jobs, such as in food and service, do not allow for the attendance of evening cultural events and neither do the many other fields that require shiftwork, such as elder care, nursing, and other medical professions. Therefore, temporalities matter not only for people with caring responsibilities; it is also a matter of class and accessibility. This result highlights the necessity to think through the thematic and structural dedication to care in tandem.

While there exists no time slot that would allow everyone to join, it is important to be aware of the inclusive and exclusive potential of the timing of events. Judah,

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129 Hana Janečkova, "Cripping the Curatorial," in *Radicalizing Care: Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating*, ed. Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg, Lena Fritsch, Brigit Bosold, and Vera Hofmann (London: Sternberg, 2021), 89.

130 Hettie Judah, "'Motherhood Is Taboo in the Art World – It's as If We've Sold Out': Female Artists on the Impact of Having Kids," *Guardian*, December 2, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/dec/02/motherhood-taboo-art-world-sold-out-bourgeoisie.

at a public event in Zurich, suggested that it might make sense to vary the hours of programming, so that different people can attend at different times.[131] Therefore, if curatorial work is community engaged, it is important to confer with the different audiences about scheduling, to try out different times, and to adjust them when needed.

The Covid-19 pandemic has made it much more common to livestream and record cultural events, which allows audience members to view the material on their own schedules. Yet on "one's own schedule" is a rather political concern, in light of excessive (domestic) care work, widespread chronic burnout within the paid workforce, and marginalised time for leisure or personal recharging, all of which compete with the ability to watch past events on one's "own time."

When time is considered curatorially, not only the start and end times of an event are important but so are the temporalities within the public programming itself – its density, its breaks, and its "unprogrammed" time slots that allow for informal exchange and gathering. For the workshop series at M.1, I proposed four-hour workshop slots with an hour-long shared lunch break. This temporal setup allowed enough travel time for people to arrive from larger surrounding cities with one- to two-hour commutes; it gave enough time for local families to have a relaxed morning; and it provided the artist with sufficient time to work more closely with the participants. After the workshop (usually around 4 p.m.), enough time was available for people to stay a bit longer and engage in informal conversations with the other participants or with the artist. Overall, the long break and the two intensive two-hour workshop blocks were timeframes that could be bridged for those with children by the on-site caregivers. For me, as both the curator and a single parent, it was important to not exhaust the day with excessive programming, as I was awaited by a child who desired my attention and also had to deal with post-workshop cleaning and reorganising of the space and materials. I therefore propose to consider temporalities as political curatorial concerns, as doing so may lead to a questioning of normative cultural formats and the production of temporal frameworks that allow for diverse audiences and practitioners to be present – whether virtually or physically.

– Prerequisite: Shared Meals

As all of the curatorial formats at M.1 included a shared meal, food served as a key social moment for the participants to come together informally, to exchange experiences and thoughts, and to form networks. Our meals were either prepared together with the artists and participants, by the institutional team, or by a member of the community. In the framework of the "Care for Caregivers" workshop series at M.1, it was Julieta Aranda who situated collective cooking as a political, anti-neoliberal

131 Visarte Zürich, "Workshop with Hettie Judah at Binz39," 2023, https://www.visarte-zuerich.ch/news/book-launch-event-mit-hette-judah.

practice of "wasting time together" by incorporating joint cooking and eating into her workshop "Vegetable Resistance."[132] This artistic approach allowed participants to enact alternative forms of sociality, using food as a medium.

The provision of nourishment (whether through communal meals or the offering of coffee and pastries) not only fostered an atmosphere of hospitality but also addressed the physical needs of those involved. Providing shared meals must also be viewed through the lens of feminist, anti-capitalist theories on subsistence. For the feminist scholar Maria Mies, subsistence must be understood in opposition to capitalist commodity production:

> Subsistence production has an entirely different goal [than commodity production], namely, the direct satisfaction of human needs. This isn't accomplished through money and the production of goods. For us, quite essential is that it is a direct production and reproduction of life. That's why we talk of "life production" rather than "commodity production".[133]

Within the framework of curatorial care, the "direct satisfaction of human needs" can thus be understood as a way to enact radical feminist propositions for an otherwise. While the offering of food, that is, the nourishing of the participating bodies, at first glance may seem external to a curatorial position, I argue with Maria Mies that food can form a counter-practice to the draining everyday conditions under capitalism. Further, the provision of food can serve as a strategic element of community engagement and allow for alternative, non-consumerist, collective forms of being-with. It also lowers classist barriers of participation, as providing communal meals attracts a range of community members and builds an opportunity to engage them in an artistic process. This process can be further aided when the food is sourced locally, from other collectives, shops, or cooks within the area, as it builds a trusting relationship that might inspire others connected to those communities to join the event.

Building on the long-standing social function of food within the arts, I propose that curators should consider shared meals as an integral part of the politics of presence, as communal nourishment fulfils a multitude of roles within the construction of caring infrastructures.[134]

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132 M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, "A Workshop on Time with Julieta Aranda: Vegetable Resistance – What are We Seeds for?," November 2019, https://www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de/en/kalender/2019/11/23/ein-workshop-zum-thema-zeit/.

133 See Maria Mies, "The Subsistence Perspective," transversal texts, August 2005, https://transversal.at/transversal/0805/mies/en.

134 For a historical situating of artistic practices in relation to food, return to chapter 4 – "Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges."

Building Block: Networks

Proposition #4: Foster Networks and Alliances

Curatorial care recognises the relational quality of its practice, actively connects and acknowledges existing social webs, and integrates itself into the social fabric of its site to foster alliances between art and non-art or community practices.

Part of relational curating, inspired by feminist care ethics, is recognising the myriad interconnections and alliances within a community, seeking out those relations, and strengthening them further. Megan Johnston, in the context of socially engaged curatorial practices, argues that it is an "intentional process of collaboration, context, and engaging within communities – working with artists who employ social practice methods as well as with artists who have more of a traditional studio practice."[135] This process fosters a web of relations that transcends the traditional boundaries of the art field and its institutions, engaging with extra-institutional and self-organised spaces and forming (temporary) alliances and collaborations with many non-art actors and communities. This understanding of curating as a radically relational practice grants importance to existing relational webs, which cultural practitioners may connect with, allowing for increased trust in new curatorial undertakings that otherwise might not have organically emerged from the community (e.g., through an appointed curator who may be foreign to the region).[136]

Particularly during the "Holo Miteinander" storytelling cafés, the team at M.1 and I strategically connected with existing local networks, grassroots initiatives, and self-organised clubs. In this context, the invited locals were engaged as experts who could analyse and address the changes needed in regard to housing, food, working, leisure, and other such topics. For example, during the storytelling café on "Mobility," the grassroots shuttle-bus initiative for rural connectivity Bürgerbus Kellinghusen was present and shared information about the initiative's origins, operations, and volunteer engagement strategies. This created an interesting dialogue between the different parties and provided an informed basis about the realities but also the potentials for solidarity practices within the rural area. During the "Social Muscle Club" exchange event, a range of social initiatives also contributed to the programming, food, and social support of the event, while the programming itself contributed to strengthening the sense of community. While each group received a fee for its role, the collaborations were also meant to initiate prolonged working relations throughout the course of the curatorial programme. In a way, the

135 Johnston, "Slow Curating," 24.

136 For the establishment of the notion of curating as a radically relational practice, see chapter 4 – "Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges," and section 5.1.2 – "Relational: Care, Curating, and Infrastructures."

actors formed part of a relational web of objects, spaces, people, and practices that, recalling AbdouMaliq Simone's proposition of "people as infrastructure," turned into a "platform providing for and reproducing life in the city."[137] In the case of Hohenlockstedt, this meant strengthening and reproducing the town's sociality. By establishing such spaces of encounter between the bodies of diverse communities creates the conditions for political acts, according to Judith Butler:

> No one body establishes the space of appearance, but this action, this performative exercise happens only "between" bodies, in a space that constitutes the gap between my own body and another's. In this way, my body does not act alone, when it acts politically. Indeed, the action emerged from the "between."[138]

Part of a relational curatorial practice is to intentionally carve out such "spaces of the in-between," which allow collective political action, solidarity, and synergy to emerge. Anti-racist and feminist practices have long recognised the importance of alliances – a practice that relational curators can learn from, thereby emphasising the central linkage between a critical curatorial practice and wider social justice movements. I therefore propose regarding a curatorial practice of care not as isolated from existing social webs but as thinking and practising in alliance with existing social structures and collectively building *with* and *from* them – not in an extractivist or co-opting mode, but in an effort to join counter-hegemonic forces towards an otherwise.[139]

137 Simone, "People as Infrastructure," 407.

138 Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," transversal, September 2009, https://transversal.at/transversal/0808.

139 For a discussion on the need for counter-hegemonic alliances, see Chantal Mouffe, "Critique as Counter-Hegemonic Intervention," transversal texts, August 2008, https://transversal.at/transversal/0808. I return to this notion in relation to curatorial care in section 6.4 – "Caring in Concert."

Building Block: Budgets

Proposition #5: Consider Curatorial Budgeting to Be Political

Consider curatorial budgets as a key field of agency to enact caring infrastructures, including fair pay and support structures for caregivers and care-receivers. Acknowledge the capitalist framework under which art and curating are subsumed, and take seriously the need for fair working conditions for all contributors, avoiding the exploitative narrative of "a labour of love." For restrained budgets, consider a "curatorial degrowth agenda," where reducing the scope of a project frees up resources for fair pay and caring infrastructures. Make your decisions to downscale transparent to inspire collective change across cultural organisations.

"[I]t's not us choosing to be economistic about gestation, it's capitalism," writes political theorist and writer Sophie Lewis in defence of the Wages for Housework movement, rejecting the prevalent critique of the movement's effect of "economising" private social relations. I want to transfer this argument to the precarious art sector, which continues to put cultural producers in a position of justification when demanding fair pay for artistic, curatorial, scholarly, or writerly labour. Here, exploitative labour practices dominate under the seemingly innocent disguise of "affective renumeration," or what feminists have called "the labour of love." So, to extend Lewis's argument to the cultural field: *It's not us choosing to be economistic about cultural production, it's capitalism*. As long as cultural practitioners operate within a capitalist framework that requires a financial income to account for housing, food, education, clothing, and other means of survival, their work needs to be remunerated adequately. It is only from a position of class privilege that one can disregard questions of pay as secondary, thereby upholding expectations that people can and should perform certain labour for no or low fees. As long as we, as curators and artists, are implicated in the structural violences of neoliberal capitalism – with largely unaffordable housing, sustenance, childcare, and elder care – we need to regard questions of pay and budgeting and its (re)distribution as a concern of feminist politics. Meanwhile, the lived reality of cultural producers remains highly precarious: unpaid internships, self-exploitation, and low-paid, unstable working conditions very much characterise the cultural sector in Central Europe, and beyond.[140] Therefore, it is important to recognise the powerful and normative role of money within the arts, which defines whose needs are considered "worthy" and whose aren't.[141]

140 For discussion that homes in on these topics, see Anja Liersch, Friederike Evers, and Sarah Weißmann, *Spartenbericht Bildende Kunst 2021* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021), 47–48.

141 Charlotte Perka and Saskia Ackermann, "Liebe Sascia," in *KANON. Die Experimentelle Klasse*, ed. Joke Janssen and ANna Tautfest (Hamburg: Argument Verlag, 2021), 195.

Curatorial budgeting must therefore be seen as a central terrain of agency to enact feminist care ethics, from where one can democratise the artistic field and begin to build caring infrastructures. Yet as curators, we have different roles in this set of (economic) power relations: we might be directors of institutions, with a say in budgetary and human resource issues; we might be employed in poor and unstable working conditions ourselves; or we might be freelancers fighting for grants and residencies to be opened up not only to visual artists and writers but also to curators, to have a basis for subsistence. Whatever our role and agency may be, we have to recognise that our curatorial responsibility includes the co-creation of sustainable labour conditions for everyone involved – ourselves included.[142] Thus, practising curating with care requires breaking with the long-standing tradition of curatorial care primarily for (art) objects and (also) a centring of one's curatorial care on the (economic) well-being of the humans involved in and impacted by the programming.[143]

Hence, the way in which each curator deals (or does not deal) with questions of budgeting in general, and unpaid labour in particular, are political decisions – *political curatorial* decisions. These include decisions about who gets paid how much, for which labour, and whether anyone goes unpaid. It includes the decision to make or not make transparent the budgetary calculations.[144] Curators further have to con-

142 As argued previously with Reckitt, the art world can become sustainable only if the ones participating in it can reproduce their livelihoods and can be provided with a support system that includes childcare and social benefits. For more, see Helena Reckitt, "Support Acts: Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction," *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 5 (2016): 6–30.

143 I want to note that this perspective on equal pay is derived from working within a Central European context with a wide variety of private and public funding bodies – to pay everyone is not only a political question but also one of privilege. In many cultural contexts, (public) funding is extremely sparse or non-existent, and cultural programming heavily relies on collective organising, all of which is unpaid. It seems unlike to bear any fruit to cry for fair pay in a context that contains no realistic basis for such claims. However, in a country such as Germany, where resources are generally available and, instead, are rather distributed unfairly across economic sectors, it does make sense to uphold, or even increase, the pressure on funding bodies, large cultural organisations, and government entities to provide a basis for fair pay within the cultural sector. Apart from financial resources, cultural organisations might have regular access to other kinds of resources that are not monetarily quantifiable but still potentially very powerful in making participatory or artistic projects happen (either as part of an organisation's programme or in support of a community initiative). These resources range from the capacity to share physical space, having access to a range of networks and well-trained staff, being legally registered as an organisation, which provides access to funding processes that more informal entities oftentimes do not qualify for. Thus let us consider the various forms of capital (or: privileges) that are accessible to us and see how we can form a resourceful basis for our projects despite financial restraints.

144 For example, see the "Art/Museum Salary Transparency 2019" spreadsheet started by the curator Michelle Millar Fisher, for which she crowdsourced the salaries of art and museum workers to identify pay gaps. For more, see "Art Workers Circulate Pub-

sider *how* they channel their funds: Do their purchasing decisions support local businesses or transnational corporations? Are the entrance fees set too high, excluding vulnerable groups? Are parts of the budget invested in sustaining caring infrastructures that may outlive the curatorial project itself?

At M.1, it was important both for myself and my colleagues to ensure that everyone involved was paid fairly from my allocated curatorial budget, including everyone from the caregiver for the on-site childcare, to the curatorial assistant, to the artists and other collaborators. The local actors whom we engaged in the participatory programming of the storytelling cafés were all offered a fee for their contributions. Additional budget was allocated to artists who brought their children or partners (or both) to Hohenlockstedt, as well as to collaborators with dependents with special needs, who could not always leave them with the on-site caregiver.

However, there were still limitations on our ability to compensate fairly, particularly when it came to artist fees for large collectives as well as other contributor fees within the framework of institutional collaborations – which, in retrospect, did not mirror the economic value which I would have liked to attribute to the individual contributors. It is at the intersection of the working conditions of practitioners inside (staff) and outside (freelancers) the institution that the infrastructural perspective unfolds one of its many relevant facets: it is not enough for arts organisations to centre their (curatorial) responsibility only on the labour conditions *within* their institutions – they also have to assume responsibility for the freelancing entities with whom they collaborate. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the precarious status of freelancing art educators, artists, curators, and other related actors in relation to the institution.[145] While all these actors may at first appear to form part of the institution, their contractual details reveal their disposable status, which leaves them unprotected by the institution in times of crisis, illness, pregnancy or parenthood,

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lic Spreadsheet to Promote Salary Transparency, Reveal Pay Gaps," *Artforum*, May 31, 2019, https://www.artforum.com/news/art-workers-circulate-public-spreadsheet-to-promote-salary-transparency-reveal-pay-gaps-80010.

145 Says art educator Katja Zeidler: "Many actors found it very alarming how in the German, in the international – here especially US-American – context it became visible how important art and cultural education really is. As a first measure, several institutions have cut or even closed their education departments and thus sent their (female) employees, who are often freelancers anyway, into financial uncertainty. Due to the lockdown and the applicable sanitary regulations, the precarious working conditions for art mediators have thus enormously worsened. It has also become clear that there is a lack of safety nets, especially for self-employed art mediators, such as for loss of income, but also an independent interest group that advocates for the interests of the scene vis-à-vis the institutions." Gila Kolb, Konstanze Schütze, Katja Zeidler, and Duygu Örs, "Kunstvermittlung im Ausnahmezustand," KIWit, 2020, https://www.kiwit.org/kultur-oeffnet-welten/positionen/position_16384.html. My translation.

and so on. Curatorial care therefore needs to establish frameworks of (economic) responsibility that extend to everyone who contributes to the institution, whether formally employed or contracted as a freelancer. The infrastructural perspective therefore highlights the need for curators and cultural leaders to think beyond the "walls of the museum," aligning their actions with wider societal concerns – such as the labour conditions of practitioners who are not formally employed at the institution.

These labour aspects highlight the complexity of curatorial budgeting, which artists and activists Saskia Ackermann and Charlotte Perka take up in their letter exchange that expanded from my curatorial practice at M.1,[146] which served as a case study and to which they added their own open questions:

> I often ask myself what is enough and what is the consequence that is called for: When is it better not to do something instead of doing it and reproducing the existing norms in the process? For example, when do I decide that an event cannot take place because I do not have the resources to remove certain barriers? How can I work against my internalised performance thinking that strives for high visitor numbers?[147]

Freelancing practitioners (with or without a coordinating role in a project) may have to ask themselves further uncomfortable questions about whether they themselves are being properly paid, whether their fee rests primarily on self-exploitation, and whether they are perpetuating a toxic work environment by continuing to engage in underpaid cultural programming. Further, they must critically ask themselves whether they have accepted unpaid "chores" (emotional labour, digital labour) according to internalised neoliberal myths of self-exploitation for the greater good.[148]

These questions are intricately tied to questions of class, as practitioners without family wealth to fall back onto can rarely afford to compete in the neoliberal strug-

146 Perka and Ackermann, "Liebe Sascia."

147 Both authors participated in and reflected on my curatorial programming in their public letter to me, "Dear Sascia" (ibid., 196). The original quote reads: "Dabei frage ich mich häufig, was genug ist und welche Konsequenz gefragt ist: Wann ist es besser, etwas nicht zu tun, anstatt es zu tun und dabei die bestehenden Normen zu reproduzieren? Wann entscheide ich zum Beispiel, dass eine Veranstaltung nicht stattfinden kann, weil ich nicht die Ressourcen habe, bestimmte Barrieren zu beseitigen? Wie kann ich meinen internalisierten Leistungsdenken, welches nach hohen Besucher*innenzahlen strebt, entgegen arbeiten?"

148 For further reference on digital labour within the arts, see Sophie Lingg, "Caring Curatorial Practice in Digital Times," in *Radicalizing Care: Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating*, ed. Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg, Lena Fritsch, Brigit Bosold, and Vera Hofmann (London: Sternberg, 2021), 48–57.

gle for fair wages within the arts.[149] The renowned Leipzig Book Fair, in their 2023 edition, hosted an event under the rubric "Making Books: Who Can Afford It? About the Cultural Precariat & Classism."[150] Thinking about the curatorial agency of budgeting can thus address class in a dual manner: by contributing to fair wages that allow practitioners, independent of family wealth, to be active contributors within the arts, and by funnelling resources into the deconstruction of elitist barriers of access (which contribute to the construction of caring infrastructures).

However, the common response that I receive when speaking about the *politics of budgeting as a form of curating with care* is that this would demand enormous budgets, that such figures and demands would not be sustainable, and in fact that they are utopian.

Before I formulate my proposition, I want to return to a thought that I mentioned earlier: curatorial care – when conceived as a relational-ecological practice – does not exist as a layer added to a curatorial undertaking *ex-post*; rather every fibre of the curatorial fabric is immersed with the considerations of care.[151] Curatorial care is never an afterthought but the essence of the practice. With this understanding in mind, the common modus operandi, whereby the considerations of curatorial care are applied only at a later stage, if there should be budget enough to address them, becomes a recipe for failure (for example, where childcare is organised only because resources are freed up after a speaker cancels).

While I fully recognise the budgetary constraints that exist within the cultural field, I nonetheless want to argue for a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between a given budget, institutional and peer responsibility, and the desired project outcome: do not adjust the pay of contributors to the limitations of the budget, but instead adjust the scope of the project: downscale it to the size that allows for the production of caring infrastructures and the fair pay of everyone involved. I propose to call this a "curatorial degrowth agenda," where downscaling the scope of a project frees up valuable resources that allow caring infrastructures to be implemented from the project's outset. For this approach one may have to ask: What can realistically be produced with the given budget while still doing justice to curatorial ethics of care? What scale becomes unsustainable from an ecological, social, financial, and feminist care perspective? What are the limits to one's own

149 The Berlin-based initiative Diversity Arts Culture hosted a series of events, videos, blog entries, and conversations about classisms in the arts. For further reference, see Nenad Čupić;, and Diversity Arts Culture, "Klassismus(kritik)," October 13, 2020, https://diversity-arts-culture.berlin/magazin/klassismuskritik.

150 Leipziger Buchmesse, "Podiumsdiskussion: Bücher machen: wer kann sich das leisten? Über Kulturprekariat & Klassismus," March 29, 2023, https://www.leipziger-buchmesse.de/pco/de/buchmesse/63ecad8c95eb82a9710e1996.

151 For my previous elaboration on this point, see section 5.1.3 – "Beyond the Symbolic: The Practice of Building Caring Infrastructures."

capacity to sustain the curatorial process without financial and emotional self-exploitation?

In the case of my curatorial cycle at M.1, this meant producing one large opening event ("Social Muscle Club" in April 2019) and six weekend-long workshops (one per month from May to November 2019) with the given budget for the first year. At first glance, each event might seem high in cost, but this is because the invisible infrastructures of care have now been factored in, such as free on-site childcare, shared meals, travel costs for partners and children, and so on. Under this approach of curatorial degrowth, less (programming) is more (care).

Within the neoliberal gig economy of the cultural sector, the silent downscaling of an institution's public programming arguably could lead to a competitive disadvantage in relation to other arts organisations, which might keep up a fast-pace programme. It can thus be of societal benefit to make the decision to downscale transparent for audiences, funding bodies, and fellow arts organisations – for example, to explicitly state that the institution will host two exhibitions less per year in order to be able to pay artists fairer exhibition fees and to conserve the team's time and emotional resources. Such transparency can contribute to wider awareness of the economic issues at stake within the cultural sector.

In general, increasing transparency in the cultural sector is of benefit for audience members and those working in the field. Currently, it is in most cases opaque whether an institution is addressing care only symbolically in their public programming or whether they institute caring infrastructures in the less visible sections of their organisation. We thus need to create a culture of transparency in relation to modes of production within the cultural terrain, including transparency around fair pay, sustainable cultural practices, the provision of support structures for audience members and collaborators, and the downscaling of projects for the sake of redistributing resources. More specifically, a culture of transparency can raise awareness of the practice of conscious curatorial budgeting, forming a pathway towards collective degrowth and fair(er) pay within the arts.

Building Block: Agency, Power, and Control

Proposition #6: Democratise Curatorial Agency

In the spirit of curatorial activism, seek out spaces of agency that allow you to "curate otherwise," for example in alignment with feminist care ethics. To avoid misusing curatorial agency as a form of control, intentionally share power and create democratic spaces of agency for your peers, audiences, and collaborators.

While institutional mechanisms often seem rigid, it is common for the trodden paths of cultural production to ignite comfort and ease for the ones in charge, and the working mechanisms of the arts may seem unquestionably familiar and reassuring to some. However, I want to stress the importance of combatting the "monologue of sameness," to speak with activist-curator Maura Reilly, and the dominant modes of operation that uphold a primarily male, White, and elitist art system.[152] It is within these rigid frameworks that one has to actively seek out one's own *curatorial agency* to identify wiggle room – the crack in an otherwise sealed modus operandi in order to *practise otherwise*, to find a space of micro-political agency within the given constraints.[153]

Throughout the curatorial programme at M.1, I aimed to practice in a spirit of curatorial activism and thereby enact my curatorial agency to practise a feminist care ethics.[154] As my focus was on caregivers as marginalised voices not only within the arts but also within society, I crafted roles for both artists and local residents who were also caregivers to take on expert roles. With this approach, I intended to counter the hegemonic construct of care as an invisible, valueless labour due to its feminisation and unpaid status within society.

In the context of the workshop on motherhood, two artists who were also mothers were invited as experts. Their experiences navigating the precarious fields of caregiving and art-making granted them credibility and provided a tangible basis of connection to these topics for the other participants. The artists, Liz Rech and Annika Scharm, practise from a situated, embodied knowledge, and they expanded the workshop from this position.

I also intentionally integrated caregivers into roles of expertise for the opening event of the "Social Muscle Club." Each of the ten moderators came from Hohenlockstedt and the surrounding area and performed care work either in their professional, private, or volunteer life, in fields spanning education, social work,

152 Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism*, 30.

153 To recall the definition of "micro-politics," see the section "Activist Dimension to Research and Practice: Micro-politics for an Otherwise" in the introduction of this book.

154 For an introduction to this concept, return to chapter 4 – "Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges."

and birthing and hospice work. My curatorial choice to include these social actors from the region meant providing visibility and acknowledgement for these taken-for-granted caring roles that people perform within their communities. Valorising their caring activity as an expertise also equipped them well to moderate a group of strangers from a range of backgrounds. Out of these exchange rounds moderated by caregivers, a micro–social network was created which transcended the space of the art institution, as participants made arrangements for the near future – to take walks together, to mow someone else's lawn, or to practise Spanish together.

In alignment with the notion of curatorial activism as a counter-hegemonic practice, I propose to intentionally flip dominant mechanisms of power, representation, inclusion, and systemic (dis)valuation upside down – even though such democratising acts might occur only on a small, seemingly mundane scale (micropolitics). Curatorial care thus must include a proactive challenging of who gets invited, who receives which roles, and who speaks for whom, thereby counteracting dominant paradigms within the respective society, both in regard to care and in terms of racial, classed, religious, and gendered associations and disabilities.

In the specific context of working with caregivers, this may mean not prescribing rigid sets of caring infrastructures for the participants or contributors but rather providing increased flexibility. The collaborative manifesto "How Not to Exclude Artist Parents" makes an "introductory request: Be flexible."[155] Hettie Judah's further elaborates on this point, stating that these sought-after support structures do not need to be costly:

> [A] gallery that is flexible, loyal and communicative with artist mothers can make a big difference. Flexibility on the part of art institutions would include the assumption that an artist will need to bring a child with them on a residency, will need childcare while finishing work and installing an exhibition, and while being present at openings and exhibition events. If these requirements continue to be framed as a "choice," the burden of flexibility is placed on the artist herself, together with associated costs.[156]

This flexibility and openness require curators to intentionally carve out democratic spaces for conversation that allow participants to voice their needs and to hold a mindset that prioritises adapting to the needs of others rather than firmly insisting on prescribing default solutions. When I re-encountered Liz Rech years after our collaboration at M.1, she recalled that she had highly appreciated the agency to make

155 Artist Parents Network, "How Not to Exclude Artist Parents."

156 Judah, "Full, Messy and Beautiful," Unit London, 2023, https://unitlondon.com/2023-05-31/full-messy-and-beautiful/.

her own choice of whether to bring her child to the event or opt for home-based care support, not having to operate according to the scripts of the institution.[157]

Redistributing agency, democratising decision-making processes, and providing flexibility can come in the form of simple, genuine acts, but even these small acts are never without ambivalences. The power that allows one to change dominant narratives and protocols is the same power that provides the basis for domination, abuse of power, and the exercise of control. This line of thought returns us to the previously introduced notion of curator-as-police-commissioner by Joanna Warsza,[158] who during a conversation with fellow curator Nora Sternfeld, found an apt analogy for the ambivalent figure of the curator in the image of

> someone who is a policeman and an activist at the same time – who is deliberately in a conundrum of representing hegemony and needs to assume it, while often striving to be anti-hegemonic. Someone who creates forms and support structures, while introducing subversion, who embodies the electrifying impossibility of policing and being dissident at the same time.[159]

Caught in this ambivalent position, curatorial agency is never innocent nor uncontested. It is therefore not enough to seek out spaces of agency; rather, it becomes paramount to actively *share and redistribute power* by establishing democratic spaces of agency for one's peers, colleagues, collaborators, and audience members.

This curatorial proposition thus departs from the ambivalent understanding of curatorial agency as both one of transformation and one of control, which only highlights the necessity of aligning one's curatorial practice with a feminist ethics of care and its dedication to democratic processes and interdependency. To contribute to a more just art field from a curatorial position, one must seek out liminal spaces – wiggle room – that depart from the belief that "radical care provides a roadmap for an otherwise."[160] This approach is aligns with the understanding that the mundane, the everyday, and small, micro-political shifts contain the potential for social transformation, such that our personal and professional practices may trigger a ripple effect into other sociopolitical spheres (that is, the curatorial butterfly effect).

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157 For a detailed account of the workshop, see M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, "A Workshop on Motherhood with Liz Rech and Annika Scharm: The Mother of all Questions. Between Mother Breasts and Kissing Muses," May 2019, https://www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de/en/kalender/2019/5/19/die-mutter-aller-fragen-zwischen-mutterbrusten-und/.

158 See section 3.1.3 – "Independent Curating: The Curator-as-Author."

159 Joanna Warsza, "The Elephant Is Bigger than the Room: Documenta Trouble and Curatorial Responsibility," *Paletten*, July–August 2022, https://paletten.net/artiklar/the-elephant-is-bigger-than-the-room.

160 Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese. "Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times." *Social Text* 38 (2020): 13.

Building Block: Documentation and Archiving

Proposition #7: Document and Archive with Sensitivity

Because curatorial practices of care are often relational and ephemeral, they need to show heightened sensitivity towards documentation, as it may risk creating vulnerabilities and less intimate encounters. Carefully mediated documentation and interactive archival formats, which allow for retrospective engagement with ephemeral events of the past, must be considered from the outset of a given project. This contributes to the longevity of the curatorial project after it has come to a formal close ("aftercare").

Many (post-representational) feminist curatorial practices, including my own, are characterised by radical relationality, ephemerality, and participatory processes.[161] These temporal processes do not produce tangible, material outcomes that can be easily displayed or reaccessed at a later stage. They are characterised by the experiential, not so much the visual-representational. In these particular curatorial frameworks – which are commonly limited by time-based project funding within the neoliberal gig economy – curators are confronted with the questions of what happens to these social, ephemeral processes when the funding runs out and how the processes can be archived and made accessible to others.

Since the 1960s and 1970s, the visual arts have developed an almost fetish-like relationship with documentation, one that almost renders non-documented performances non-existent. Today, otherwise ephemeral blockbuster performances, such as Anne Imhof's *Sex* at Tate Modern in London in 2019, are often live-streamed on social media and media partners' platforms: "It's about how can we view things beyond the museum and think about digital as well as physical space – that's interesting to think about alongside the record or document. The global reach was extraordinary," says Isabella Maidment, curator of contemporary British art at Tate Britain.[162]

These historical and contemporary trajectories cause pressure for curators to document any sort of ephemeral process within the arts, including socially engaged, participatory processes, so as to obtain credit within the art system. However, many participatory processes are very intimate and a video, voice, or image recording (let alone a social media live stream) of the process may alter, and possibly limit, the audience's engagement, out of a fear of vulnerability and privacy infringement. Foregrounding feminist care ethics with its empathetic sensitivity – which values intimate processes over visibility credits – we decided not to document any of the work-

161 Which I have theoretically outlined in chapter 3 – "Histories of a Contested Terrain: Gender, Care, Art and Curating."

162 Isabella Maidment, quoted in Emily Gosling, "How Do You Present Performance Art Once It's All Over?," *Elephant*, June 13, 2019, https://elephant.art/present-performance-art/.

shops at M.1 in a traditional sense. Curatorial care in this instance meant building a safe space of encounter among the present participants, not prioritising an enthralling occasion for retrospective viewing. At most, I took snapshots during some of the exercises and informal lunchtime encounters, with consent of the participants.

While the considerations around documentation, archiving, and the creation of public moments around past events might become more pressing towards the end of a project or cycle, these questions need to be considered at its outset with as much intentionality and care as any other aspect of the programming. The way a project is to be documented and archived, along with the structures implemented to potentially lead to its self-organised and community-driven continuation, may change the overall concept of the project. If these questions are afterthoughts, it is often too late to lay the groundwork for such aspects to be properly carried out and to appear as sincere and credible conceptual columns of the project.

The notion of "conceiving the end from the beginning" becomes tangible in the example of the *Archive of Encounters* project with students from HFBK Hamburg, which was initiated at the beginning of my curatorial cycle.[163] The students' presence at each of the events formed the basis for their documentation and artistic interpretation of the shared experiences and, hence, created the conditions of the project's retrospective accessibility in the community library. I therefore propose that practitioners should curate not only the documentation but also "the end" of a given project or cycle with the same level of intentionality and sensitivity given to any other element of a project and from the very beginning, thereby building the conditions for possible future engagement with or self-organised continuation of the initiated processes. I consider this proposition as a form of aftercare that prevents an abrupt ending and disjointing of the public programming and the relation between the artists and community members, instead proving a basis for future engagements with the shared experiences of the past.[164]

163 Previously introduced in section 4.4.4.2 – "Archive of Encounters."

164 The notion of "aftercare" can unfold in many different ways and can potentially include a paid period after a project is officially done, in order to allow for recovery, wrap up, administrative tasks, feedback conversations, and securing funding for future iterations of the programme. Aftercare has not yet received enough attention in curatorial thought and practice and needs to be expanded further from feminist perspectives.

Building Block: Self-care

Proposition #8: Care for the Self

Care for the self must be prioritised as much as any other relation of care within a curatorial project. The self-care of art workers is not only crucial amid precarious working conditions but also particularly relevant for curators who understand themselves as carers and tend to drain their personal resources by directing care primarily to others. Setting boundaries and initiating collective actions may lead to less exploitative labour practices as part of an enhanced framework of care for the self.

"[W]orking to the point of burn out was almost a badge of honour amongst myself and other gallery colleagues. As the director of a small US art centre where I had previously worked liked to claim, 'we punch way above our weight'," shares Helena Reckitt.[165] Being "busy" and stressed has become a social status marker, evoking associations of importance and indispensability.[166] Within the cultural field, however, this highly intense level of occupational engagement does not lead to comfortable levels of income – rather, to the contrary. The arts pair enormous income insecurity with hyper-availability, impeccable professional performance, infringement of personal relationships, and chronic levels of burnout – which need to be obscured for the sake of upholding the "image of unflappable poise."[167] Reckitt, who shifted from the gallery sector to academia, admits in a retrospective reflection: "Close to exhaustion, battling insomnia, I nonetheless continued to project the persona of the coping curator."[168]

Audre Lorde's much-cited formulation that we should conceive of self-care not as "self-indulgence" but as "self-preservation" highlights the political potential of this practice. Sara Ahmed, who extends Lorde's thinking, argues: "Some have to look after themselves because the[y] are not looked after: their being is not cared for, supported, protected."[169] Curator and writer Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, in his essay "Every Straw Is a Straw Too Much: On the Psychological Burden of Being Racialized While Doing Art," asserts that the discussion of racism within the arts is an invisiblised subject:

165 Helena Reckitt, "From Coping to Curious: Unlearning and Reimagining Curatorial Habits of Care," in *Curating with Care*, ed. Elke Krasny and Lara Perry, (London: Routledge, 2023), 169.

166 Teresa Bücker, *Alle_Zeit: Eine Frage von Macht und Freiheit. Wie eine radikal neue, sozial gerechtere Zeitkultur aussehen kann* (Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlag, 2022), 32.

167 Reckitt, "From Coping to Curious," 169.

168 "Coping curator" is a term coined by curator and writer Jenny Richards, which Reckitt builds upon in: ibid., 171.

169 Sara Ahmed, "Selfcare as Warfare," *Feminist Killjoys* (blog), August 25, 2014. https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/.

> The so-called art world is not a vacuum or an island. It is connected to the world and reflects exactly what happens in the world. But as a space where people expect progressive discourse, avant-garde politics, and liberal institutions, it comes as a surprise to some when racism is mentioned in the context of the art world. For this reason, racism is rarely thematized in the art world.[170]

While Ahmed, Lorde, and Ndikung speak specifically about racism and White supremacy from their situated experiences as writers of colour, a similar structural neglect also holds true for precariously positioned cultural producers, caregivers, and those who are both – and who, additionally, encounter even more institutional violence when set in conjunction with racialised discrimination. As the art world is interested in keeping up its progressive image, such conversations are often swept under the rug, which makes it non-negotiable for marginalised social groups to prioritise their care for themselves. However, in taming and co-opting the mechanisms of profit-driven economies, Lorde claims that self-care can also serve as an obscurant that may lead away from political struggle by focusing on an individualised search for happiness.[171] It is from this angle that the insistence on self-care not as *self-indulgence* but as *self-preservation* is crucial: "Self-care becomes warfare. This kind of self-care is not about one's own happiness. It is about finding ways to exist in a world that is diminishing."[172]

While mindfulness and "slow" movements of all sorts have been on the rise for several years, it is important to not use these methods as strategies to keep up with one's internalised sense of neoliberal hyperproductivity. Self-care, over and over again, must be resituated as a political practice and removed from commercialised contexts.[173] Self-care is not a means to an end (e.g., productivity) but rather an end in itself.[174] It needs to be practised collectively, as demonstrated by GRAND BEAUTY in their contribution to the M.1 programming.[175]

Curators, and cultural practitioners at large, have to address self-care-as-self-preservation on two different levels: once as the ones who are subjected to hostile work environments, and once as the enactors of frameworks of practice for ourselves

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170 Soh Bejeng Ndikung. "Every Straw Is a Straw Too Much: On the Psychological Burden of Being Racialized While Doing Art." *e-flux Notes*, June 29, 2023. https://www.e-flux.com/notes/548186/every-straw-is-a-straw-too-much-on-the-psychological-burden-of-being-racialized-while-doing-art.

171 Sara Ahmed, "Selfcare as Warfare."

172 Ibid.

173 Ibid.

174 Sascia Bailer and Laura Mahnke, "#5 Care: See U th3re," podcast, 35:02, HFBK Hamburg, January 29, 2021, https://mediathek.hfbk.net/l2go/-/get/v/248.

175 M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, "A Workshop on Self-Care by GRAND BEAUTY," October 2019, https://www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de/en/kalender/2019/10/26/ein-workshop-zum-thema-selbstfuersorge/.

and others. In the first instance, curators are required to practise self-care within toxic work environments that are diminishing, having negative effects on practitioners' physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as their economic stability or growth. The second instance accounts for curators' production of work environments directed towards curatorial care for themselves and others – and which, seemingly paradoxically, leads curators to bleed out their personal resources, endangering their own capacity for self-preservation.

In regard to the first level of address, it is important to recognise the parallels between toxic personal or intimate relationships and toxic work environments, which are equally characterised by uneven power dynamics, affective or structural co-dependency, exploitative (economic) mechanisms, and a lack of truthfulness, security, and reliability. Cultural theorists Lara García Díaz and Pascal Gielen argue that the working conditions of repressive liberalism lead to precarisation on at least four levels: economic, social, mental, and political.[176] I want to expand on these intersecting tensions by quoting the Ghanaian curator Nana Oforiatta Ayim, who, in conversation with the journalist Christine Ajudua, makes tangible the contradictions of working within violent cultural institutional setups, particularly as a Black person:

> And we talked so much [among us] about how we preserve our mental health, our physical well-being, our own selves within this work, which is so taxing – not just in terms of the actual work, but also, you know, when you are going into these institutions, which are majority white and to a large extent still steeped in violence, how do you take care of yourself? How do you protect yourself?[177]

The path forward, at least for García Díaz and Gielen, is to call for forms of commoning, unionising, mutual solidarity, and collective action to organise in a way that is consequential in terms of legislation and politics:

> In order to build an effective counter-hegemony – i.e., one that can really overturn the present neoliberal hegemony of precarization – alternative models must be distributed and, especially, shared. This is what we call the process of "commoning." Alternative economies and forms of self-organization must demonstrate their effectiveness to others if they are to generate structural effects.[178]

176 García Díaz and Gielen, "Precarity as an Artistic Laboratory," 45.

177 Nana Oforiatta Ayim, "Ghanaian Curator Nana Oforiatta Ayim on Why the Future of the Museum Must Exist beyond the Art World's Boundaries," interview by Christine Ajudua, Artnet, July 27, 2022, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/nana-oforiatta-ayim-interview-2148667.

178 García Díaz and Gielen, "Precarity as an Artistic Laboratory," 53.

They argue that artists and cultural practitioners can form part of this anti-hegemonic resistance to the status quo by proposing "new forms [of ideological principles] capable of inaugurating a new 'common sense.'"[179] In this light, it becomes thrown into sharp relief that the commercialised, neoliberal narrative of self-care (e.g. the sort found under the hashtag #selfcaresunday, featuring spa visits, face masks, and yoga retreats) can never be a remedy for precarious working environments and much rather acts as an obscurant, as articulated by Lorde.

However, the proposed path forward of collectivised commoning actions is heavily based on unpaid labour, on tiring collective conversations in search of consensus, on emotional labour to enact conflict resolution – on top of the cultural practitioners' paid labour. To follow Ahmed's line of questioning:

> Perhaps we need to ask: who has enough resources not to have to become resourceful? When you have less resources you might have to become more resourceful. Of course: the requirement to become more resourceful is part of the injustice of a system that distributes resources unequally.[180]

This puts curators and cultural practitioners, whether freelancers or institutional employees, in a precarity double-bind. From their vulnerable position they have to formulate and demand structural changes, thereby – at least temporarily – diminishing their means of self-preservation for the sake of commoning towards caring infrastructures.

This complex set of tensions leads us to the second crucial level at which curators must practise self-care. In this instance, curators – possibly with a drive to challenge the status quo of the arts – drain their energy resources and, as a consequence, lose the basis for their own self-preservation. To listen, to engage, to host, to coordinate, to share, to hold space, to empathise, to include, to sustain, to worry, to adapt – all these tasks form a curatorial practice that centres on care. Like other forms of caring labour, the directedness towards others and the normalisation of self-less dedication to the healing, growing, and well-being of others can lead to exhaustion, anxiety, and even burnout. The preservation of others stands in competition with the preservation of the self. Different forms of care need to be recognised as mutually exclusive, including curatorial care for others and the curator's care for the self. One might, therefore, publicly accrue the status of a "caring curator" by being sensitive to the diverse mechanisms of exclusion, by endlessly trying to establish caring infrastructures, by going the extra mile to reach alternate communities, by applying for additional funding late at night, by creating an atmosphere of hospitality for the audiences, by making seemingly small but repeated gestures of care towards artists

179 Ibid., 52.

180 Ahmed, "Selfcare as Warfare."

and audience members – all while one's own state of being long ago morphed into that of a "coping curator."[181]

In such dynamics, neglecting self-preservation comes under the disguise of curatorial care. Here curators may need to combat external pressures of professionalism, hypervisibility, and hyperproductivity as much as their own internalised notions of gendered care, hospitality, devotion, and people pleasing, through which they self-create conditions that require them to perpetuate the modus operandi of the "coping but oh so caring" curator. This already normalised condition of the coping curator must be set in conjunction not only with the care labour of their (poorly) paid position but also with the unpaid care labour of their personal lives as well as the aforementioned unpaid labour of political action towards anti-hegemonic frameworks of commoning for a more just future. Indigenous scholar Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and media scholar Tamara Kneese aptly articulate the contextual constraints of self-preservation: "care does not happen in a vacuum; rather, care of the self promised to sustain the social and personal costs of caregiving."[182] Self-preservation, from this perspective, forms the basis for care for oneself, others, and sociopolitical and ecological transformation, which makes it a highly charged terrain. This field of intersecting tensions and contradictions leads curators to act as a central crux, requiring us to articulate how we can enact a curatorial practice of care while also taking care of ourselves.[183]

By no means do I claim to have mastered these tensions, despite my privileges of being White, university educated, able-bodied, family supported, and scholarship funded. On the contrary, the lived reality of these unreconcilable tensions enables me to point to the tender spots of a curatorial practice within the framework of a feminist care ethics: as a single parent, as an artistic director or a freelancing curator, as a doctoral researcher, and as an educator, the task of self-preservation is a risky balancing act, destined to fail. The question that arises as the most pressing is: How to exist and continue to exist in such unhealthy working conditions? This final proposition thus focuses on recognising that self-care as self-preservation needs to be recognised as just as important as any of the other needs of a curatorial project.

There cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution or proposition, but healthy boundaries, disengagement, and refusal represent possible pathways forward. In the web of structural violences, neoliberal work ethics, and personal limitations and preferences, a shift occurs which Reckitt describes as a process of "cooling": art workers stop accepting the lip service paid to care if the art sector continues to only pro-

181 Reckitt, "From Coping to Curious."

182 Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese, "Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times," *Social Text* 38 (2020): 6.

183 Bailer and Mahnke, "#5 Care: See U th3re."

vide care for a limited, privileged minority.[184] Part of "cooling" includes a critical introspection of neoliberal notions of self-worth, work ethics, productivity, flexibility, mobility, availability, performance, and success. This examination then allows one to challenge these notions – and to spark a moment of emotional disengagement and boundary setting.

While setting boundaries does not fix structural violences at stake, it protects the given resources of a cultural worker. The internalised "fear of missing out" (a.k.a. FOMO) is tied to real consequences within the arts, where absence and invisibility led to fewer invitations and hence less income. I thus make a case that curators should not simply withdraw but rather make the withdrawing, the setting of boundaries, transparent and thereby contribute to the normalisation of limited availability. I once again turn to queer-feminist writer and musician Johanna Hedva's letter to Joan Tronto, in which they share their personal journey of limiting their availability in light of exhaustion:

> I put an auto-response on my email that said, *Sorry, I probably won't ever respond to you*, and I left it there for two years. I said no to invitations to write or speak about illness, which meant I said no to many opportunities. Who knows the price of that refusal. I turned down book contracts with publishers I'd dreamed of working with. *We'd love to know your thoughts*, the invitation would say, but in my head, there was a vein of bitterness, of exhaustion.[185]

Hedva is not alone in limiting one's personal availability, especially within the context of chronic illness and disability. Robert McRuer likewise shares how his academic career demands constant mobility and long-distance travel, which as a disabled person he began to decline, as less frequent travel translates into less frequent and less intense pains: "when I slow down, redefine 'able,' and turn down the invitation to speak or visit[,] I am not unable to travel; I am frequently *unwilling*."[186]

McRuer's statement represents part of a culture shift in academia whereby its freelancers and employees are no longer willing to uphold the status quo. In their brilliant, collectively written article "Slow Scholarship," ten or so scholars put forth

184 Reckitt, "From Coping to Curious," 179. The full quote is: "Akin to how I have described my efforts to distance myself from naturalised forms of cultural subjectivity and labour, economist and historian Kate Barclay explores how some contemporary academics are involved in a process of 'cooling off' from the vocational self that academia calls for and the power systems it reproduces. She argues that such a cooling, accompanied by 'learning to sit in discomfort,' can be an important step in efforts to build more ethical institutions. Signs of 'cooling' are also visible in the today's cultural sector. Arts workers are more regularly voicing their discomfort with perpetuating a system in which notions of care are often spoken, but care rarely extends beyond a limited, privileged few."

185 Johanna Hedva, "Dear Joan," in Bailer, Karjevsky, and Talevi, *Letters to Joan*, 68.

186 Johnson and McRuer, "Cripistemologies," 136. My emphasis.

strategies for circumventing, challenging, and resisting the neoliberal pressures within academia. Among their ten strategies, which might be of equal relevance for the cultural field, they include the suggestion to send fewer emails or to turn email off all together during certain times; to learn how to say no; and to begin to work towards the minimum: "good enough is the new perfect."[187] Another group, the arts-based bare minimum collective, produced a manifesto that follows similar lines of thinking:

> The bare minimum collective believes in doing nothing or at the very least, as little as is required of us. We work smart, not hard. We're a bunch of last minuters, a "can I copy your answers?," "let's share notes" and "did you do the reading?" kind of collective.[188]

This tendency to perform the bare minimum at work has also recently received attention on social media under the rubric of "quiet quitting."[189] Quiet quitting is not quitting one's job as such but rather "quitting the idea of going above and beyond," states the TikTok influencer Zaiad Khan.[190] Khan elaborates, "You are still performing your duties, but you are no longer subscribing to the hustle culture mentally that work has to be our life." The term sparked a global outburst on social media regarding work ethics, internalised employer expectations, and work-life balance, highlighting the absurdity that "simply doing your job" is considered to resemble quitting – once more making clear how necessary it is to set healthy boundaries and continually question internalised neoliberal expectations around labour.

The above examples from scholars, writers, and activists show how, in Western, capitalist societies at least, our sense of self-care and one's self-given permission to slow down and take time off are relationally constructed. To initiate a change in a culture of work relations, we need to become the many – those who choose to act differently, who co-construct caring support structures for one another, and who make their boundaries transparent.[191] The making transparent of boundaries helps

187 Alison Mountz, Anne Bonds, Becky Mansfield, Jenna Loyd, Jennifer Hyndman, Margaret Walton-Roberts, Ranu Basu, Risa Whitson, Roberta Hawkins, Trina Hamilton, and Winifred Curran, "For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University," Acme 14 (2015): 1,253.

188 The Bare Minimum Collective, "The Bare Minimum Manifesto," Medium, 2020, https://medium.com/@bareminimum/the-bare-minimum-manifesto-bfedbbc9dd71.

189 Alyson Krueger, "Who Is Quiet Quitting For?," *New York Times*, August 23, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/23/style/quiet-quitting-tiktok.html.

190 Ibid.

191 In this search to work and relate differently, art workers are certainly not alone; especially in the movement of "new work" many organisations have put forth alternative economic models. The German "new work" magazine Neue Narrative has dedicated an issue to "health in a work context" and has formulated strategies on, for example, how to communicate, in-

to manage internal and external expectations, including of peers, colleagues, collaborators, bosses, clients, family, and friends.

In light of structural violences, setting out-of-office responses and writing cautioning email signatures may seem like a laughable path forward. However, such micro-political acts could be considered in alignment with Ahmed:

> Even if it's system change we need, that we fight for, when the system does not change, when the walls come up, those hardenings of history into physical barriers in the present, you have to manage; to cope. Your choices are compromised when a world is compromised.[192]

I therefore advocate for realistic, incremental, micro-acts of agency that do not solemnly rely on multi-year collaborative activism for structural transformation (even if utterly desirable). Put another way: until the revolution takes place, we have to get by somehow. At times, curatorial care (with healthy boundaries) might contribute to constructing micro-utopian enclaves of care in an otherwise diminishing structure. Until then, I leave on this hopeful note from Ahmed: "We reassemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; looking after each other. This is why when we have to insist, I matter, we matter, we are transforming what matters."[193]

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corporate, and encompass chronic diseases and menstruation in a work place. Their issues include case studies and easy tools towards organisational change. See Neue Narrative, accessed July 14, 2023, https://www.neuenarrative.de.

192 Ahmed, "Selfcare as Warfare."

193 Ibid.

5.3 Soft Manifesto for Caring Infrastructures

Building Block: Situating

Proposition #1: Gain a Sincere Understanding of the Context

When embarking on a new curatorial project, hold space and time for observation of the context and for deep listening to the community before developing public programming. This allows the project to emerge from the context rather than become an external imposition.

Building Block: Visibility & Representation

Proposition #2: Create the Conditions of Visibility for Underrepresented Perspectives

The agency of curators lies in the power to challenge canons and patterns of representation. Curating with care needs to create the conditions that bring underrepresented themes, perspectives, and social groups to the fore of public visibility and discourse, in tandem with structural changes.

Building Block: Accessibility

Proposition #3: Provide "Care for Presence"

As a curator, create "conditions for presence" for a range of audiences, artists, and collaborators by considering which curatorial choices and prerequisites allow for their presences. These prerequisites may include free on-site childcare, shared meals, physical considerations for inclusion and rest, and inclusive temporalities and communication.

Building Block: Networks

Proposition #4: Foster Networks and Alliances

Curatorial care recognises the relational quality of its practice, actively connects and acknowledges existing social webs, and integrates itself into the social fabric of its site to foster alliances between art and non-art or community practices.

Building Block: Budgets

Proposition #5: Consider Curatorial Budgeting to Be Political

Consider curatorial budgets as a key field of agency to enact caring infrastructures, including fair pay and support structures for caregivers and care-receivers. Acknowledge the capitalist framework under which art and curating are subsumed, and take seriously the need for fair working conditions for all contributors, avoiding the exploitative narrative of "a labour of love." For restrained budgets, consider a "curatorial degrowth agenda," where reducing the scope of a project frees up resources for fair pay and caring infrastructures. Make your decisions to downscale transparent to inspire collective change across cultural organisations.

Building Block: Agency, Power, and Control

Proposition #6: Democratise Curatorial Agency

In the spirit of curatorial activism, seek out spaces of agency that allow you to "curate otherwise," for example in alignment with feminist care ethics. To avoid misusing curatorial agency as a form of control, intentionally share power and create democratic spaces of agency for your peers, audiences, and collaborators.

Building Block: Documentation and Archiving

Proposition #7: Document and Archive with Sensitivity

Because curatorial practices of care are often relational and ephemeral, they need to show heightened sensitivity towards documentation, as it may risk creating vulnerabilities and less intimate encounters. Carefully mediated documentation and interactive archival formats, which allow for retrospective engagement with ephemeral events of the past, must be considered from the outset of a given project. This contributes to the longevity of the curatorial project after it has come to a formal close ("aftercare").

Building Block: Self-care

Proposition #8: Care for the Self

Care for the self must be prioritised as much as any other relation of care within a curatorial project. The self-care of art workers is not only crucial amid precarious working conditions but also particularly relevant for curators who understand themselves as carers and tend to drain their personal resources by directing care primarily to others. Setting boundaries and initiating collective actions may lead to less exploitative labour practices as part of an enhanced framework of care for the self.