

Conclusion

This book, *Caring Infrastructures: Transforming the Arts through Feminist Curating*, has offered a multilayered analysis of the status quo of the arts, with a focus on Germany, filling an important gap within contemporary curatorial practices and simultaneously pointing to the missed opportunities for a more just cultural sector. This practice-based research project has taken the form of a (self-)critical account that complicates the relationship between curating, art-making, gender, and care by exploring their potential, agency, and associated dangers and limitations. In this light, the research has been unafraid to address difficult topics and to generate tangible propositions and methodologies. The provided tools can be adapted, expanded, and applied internationally in a variety of contexts by considering one's local cultures, geographies, legal systems, and funding structures. Thus, the newly presented framework for understanding and practising care as a central method in curatorial work can offer valuable insights and practical tools for fostering caring infrastructures in the arts across different contexts.

Contributions to Feminist Methods

This research project lends itself as an example of feminist research methodologies by inscribing the self into the research account. The research spans the tensions that extend between the situated view of a caregiver, from the practice-based experience of a curator-as-carer and from the anti-hegemonic perspective of a researcher who critically engages with the histories and ambivalences of care and social reproduction within the political economy as well as within the arts specifically. I have called this methodological setup the “triangle of care.” From this set of relations, the separation between theory and practice, between art and life, is questioned fundamentally and ultimately fused within the framework of Natalie Loveless’s notion of “makingthinking.”

Departing from this situated and entangled view, I develop the feminist citation politics of “foregrounding,” which, following Sara Ahmed, aims to counter the common assumption that the history of ideas is derived from White, male bod-

ies. To establish a counterbalance, I prioritised citing those who hold commonly marginalised positions within academia, *foregrounding* the voices of women, (single) mothers, queer people, and people of colour. With this effort, I aim to not only write *about* feminist theory but to exercise it as an academic and curatorial practice.

Positioning Care as a Transformative Framework for the Arts

The research critically analyses the ways in which capitalism as an oppressive system profits from exploitation, particularly that based on race, gender, and class, and how care work serves as an unpaid basis for capitalist accumulation. This unpaid condition of care work is perpetuated in the cemented ideal of the nuclear family, which, up until today, primarily puts women into the role of caregivers. The gendered idealisation of care work has lifelong effects on the lives of women, who sit on the disadvantaged side of not only the gender pay gap but also the gender care gap (including in regard to transnational care chains) and the gender pension gap. I therefore have argued that care should be regarded as a prism for understanding the wider issues and dynamics of social injustices.

The research specifically renegotiates the ways in which gendered norms and care are addressed within the arts; how feminist artists and activists have positioned their work to counter dominant narratives about domestic work, motherhood, and maintenance; and how caring responsibilities shape, or prevent, artistic careers.

This understanding of social reproduction as a prism or pivotal point of reference is crucial to the framework of this research project, as it has allowed me to consider a feminist, socially engaged curatorial practice as one that, by addressing urgent questions of care, holds a transformative potential to shift the perception, representation, and structural conditions of care within the arts. (Curatorial) care politics in this regard becomes a vehicle to challenge social norms and to initiate curatorial formats and platforms towards social transformation.

Contributions to Feminist Curating, in Thought and in Practice

This research account, moreover, provides a practice-based example of how a curatorial practice towards care can be perceived, what its challenges are, and what potentials it holds when engaging not only thematically but also infrastructurally with care. Through a sincere engagement with and practice-led expansion of feminist curatorial practice and thought, this account sought to make a meaningful contribution and advancement to the field of (feminist) curatorial studies and socially engaged artistic and curatorial practices. Its contribution to knowledge lies in expanding established discourses on feminist epistemologies, curating, gender, care,

and social transformation to develop new theoretical prospects and practical feminist curatorial methodologies. It advances the curatorial discourse on feminist approaches to care by, for example, establishing the notion of *Curaduría Útil* (useful curating) as a radically relational, situated, meaningful curatorial practice that creates frameworks of encounter, collaboration, and co-production for community members and artists alike. Another example is the notion of practising-with, a framework that helps to make one's sources of inspiration transparent and to acknowledge the ways in which we are practising in (spiritual) companionship with others.

Establishing the Notion of Caring Infrastructures

The core contribution of knowledge made through this research project lies in the proposition to understand care as a curatorial method to construct caring infrastructures within the arts.¹ I turned to Joan Tronto in a practice of writing-with, in order to reflect on the central dynamics of curating, care, and instituting feminist practices, and to thereby establish a theoretical framework for caring infrastructures. I propose the concept of “relational curating” as essential to building infrastructures that are otherwise invisibilised, just like care work itself, and attribute to this concept a sense of agency, as it has the capacity to reproduce oppressive mechanisms but also to reproduce *otherwise*. Here, I posit that curatorial care, as an infrastructural activity, holds the power to initiate transformative processes within the cultural field.

Formulating Hands-On Propositions

Through identifying eight central nodes within curatorial practice, I formulated counter-hegemonic propositions towards caring infrastructures. These propositions do not attempt to be all-encompassing but rather offer the curatorial community a set of tools for a practice that not only thematically engages with care as a subject but aims to practice care infrastructurally. The underlying argument is that care – with its non-innocent histories, including its entanglements with sexism, racism, and classism – can be practised as a professional tool and is explicitly not dependent on those who are socially conditioned or naturalised to act as carers. This alleviates women, queer people, people of colour, and migrants of the roles of default caregiver and maintenance worker. If care is a central concern for everyone – since we all give and receive care (feminist care ethics) – then everyone also should be able to practice care within the arts, as a method.

1 As articulated in section 5.2 – “In Search of a Practice: Towards a Curatorial Methodology of Caring Infrastructures.”

The propositions of the “Soft Manifesto for Caring Infrastructures” respond to the glaring equity and representation gaps within the arts, a field in which care continues to trend as a theme but where uncaring conditions prevail. These conditions manifest as, for example, un- or underpaid staff, no or precarious honorariums for freelancing artists and curators, and a lack of support structures for creatives with caring responsibilities or caring needs or both.

To accommodate budgetary restraints within the art sector, the research proposes a “curatorial degrowth agenda” with more intentional, scaled-down approaches to curating. This scaling down in scope frees up valuable resources to establish caring infrastructures in the arts. The book thus makes a plea to fundamentally rethink the ways in which curatorial projects are carried out, so that care can be conceived as an integral part of each building block of the project, rather than appear as an afterthought. Achieving a curatorial degrowth agenda must be a collective endeavour, where several cultural organisations and initiatives join efforts to work against the dominant forms of cultural production. Together, in a bid towards “caring in concert,” art practitioners need to push the cultural field towards degrowth – as a way to ignite a broader shift in mindset and practices, and to move closer to the horizons of care.

Identifying the Limitations of Curatorial Care

After articulating the propositions towards caring infrastructures – and thereby learning from my curatorial experiences at M.1 – I critically reflected on the limitations of a curatorial practice of care. While the method of caring infrastructures is to be considered both a critical and yet generative methodology for the arts, it is not capable of eradicating all the contradictions and structural injustices within the field. I have therefore sketched out a range of limitations for the proposed concept of “curatorial care,” such as, for example, the limited agency that emerges from constructing caring infrastructures in a solitary manner; the inherent contradictions between curating, capital, and care; and the dangers of a notion of the universal expansion of care – which runs the risk of humans infinitely scaling care upwards without considering care for the self. I make a case to practice in alliance, to seek synergies, and to engage in collective struggles. With Chantal Mouffe, I argue for a shift from “acting in concert” to “caring in concert.” As this practice-based research emerged “in concert” with other social, artistic, curatorial, academic, and activist initiatives around care, it was produced from a position of heightened awareness of and sensitivity towards the ongoing discourses and emergent practices of the art field as well as the needs of the respective communities. This process recognises the need to create enough “peer pressure” within the artistic field to render institutions’ resistance to change unacceptable.

In sum, this research project has advanced the intersecting fields of curating, gender, and feminist care studies through developing alternative feminist research methods, presenting a theoretical conceptualisation of caring infrastructures within the arts, formulating practice-led propositions, creating a “Soft Manifesto for Caring Infrastructures,” and critically identifying the limitations of integrating care into curatorial practices. In this light, the book serves both as a source of collective, interdisciplinary knowledge regarding care and gender in the art world and as a prompt to inspire alternative approaches to curating with care – by carving out micro-political spaces of counter-practice for individuals and collective bodies towards an otherwise.

