Care and Curating
Discomfort with Human Specimens and Thinking with an Approach of Care

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Human remains – and in my research medical specimens – in museums and collections are at the heart of various frictions. These pertain to how objects, once they enter the museum space, are conceptualised – both intellectually and practically –, and how they are subsequently dealt with. Human specimens can be seen to consistently resist the spatial organisation and epistemic placement within museum space.[1] They hardly ever fit neatly into any category one makes up for them. Subsequently, they do not fit into epistemic categories – such as the binaries of subject/object, dead/alive or human/non-human. Instead, they are unreliable in terms of status and agency: They exist in a specific state of having once been individuals and of no longer being considered (living) persons. Hence, human specimens can be understood both as musealised objects and as more than mere objects.[2] As a result,

1 For medical exhibitions displaying human specimens, see for example Samuel Alberti: »Should We Display the Dead?«, in: *Museum and Society* 7 (2009) 3, pp. 133-149 and Karin Tybjerg: »Curating the Dead Body Between Medicine and Culture«, in: Malene Vest Hansen/Anne Folke Henningsen/Anne Gregersen (eds.): *Curatorial Challenges. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Contemporary Curating*, Abingdon, New York: Routledge 2019, pp. 35-50; for interdisciplinary and post-colonial perspectives, see Philipp Schorch/Conal McCarthy (eds.): *Curatopia. Museums and the Future of Curatorship*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 2019; for direct handling of human remains in collections in the German context, see Jakob Fuchs/Diana Gabler/Michael Markert/Christoph Herm/Sandra Mühlenberend: *Menschliche Überreste im Depot. Empfehlungen für Betreuung und Nutzung. 2. Fassung*, Koordinierungsstelle für wissenschaftliche Universitätssammlungen in Deutschland, Hermann von Helmholtz-Zentrum für Kulturtechnik, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin 2019.

2 Malin Wilckens and Jonatan Kurzwelly succinctly capture this variability in the status of human remains from the perspective of commodification in both historical and contem-

they challenge knowledge production processes within museum contexts by highlighting what resists categorisation. This paper takes its starting point from that ambiguity. By employing exemplary thoughts of a philosophy of care, it argues for a relational mode of thinking in curatorial research as well as in curatorial practice.

For some time now, the term *discomfort*[3] has increasingly been used to frame questions regarding human specimens in curatorial contexts. Discomfort expresses ethical aspiration, practical demand, institutional reflection, and epistemological shift at the same time. Numerous museums and collecting institutions are presently pondering how they might improve and implement ›good‹ practices to responsibly manage their sensitive collections, particularly those involving human specimens. An example within a public exhibition addressing such discomfort can be found on the ground floor of the Medical Museion in Copenhagen. Here, simple means are used to challenge visitors to concentrate on a single exhibit and consider their relation towards it. As a prologue to the permanent exhibition *The Body Collected*[4] on the first floor, the cabinet-style exhibition space assembles diverse medical exhibits, some of which engage current questions through a participation element involving Post-it voting. One question, labelled »dilemma three«, pertains to a fetus with placenta displayed at eye level: »Look at the fetus in the cabinet. Do you think it is okay to exhibit it here at the museum – without the parents' consent?«[5] Grasping discomfort around human specimens requires unconventional measures and a transdisciplinary approach. Questioning museological representation that tends to conceal ambiguous elements rather than confront them openly challenges not only curatorial practices, but also academic methodologies. I aim to show that an openness to conceptual

porary contexts: »Eine zentrale Beobachtung in Bezug auf die Inwertsetzung der menschlichen Überreste ist ihr Übergang vom Subjekt zum ›Objekt‹; in gegenwärtigen Debatten ist die gegenläufige Bewegung vom ›Objekt‹ zum Subjekt feststellbar.«, see Malin S. Wilckens/Jonatan Kurzwelly: »Wert und Verwendung menschlicher Überreste. Vergangene und gegenwärtige Perspektiven im interdisziplinären Dialog«, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 2022, pp. 329-349, see p. 330.

3 In German: *Unbehagen*.

4 See Karin Tybjerg (ed.): *The Body Collected*, Copenhagen: Medical Museion, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Copenhagen 2016.

5 As observed during a visit on May 26, 2023, in the exhibition room *Tak* (English: Thanks) at the Medical Museion, Copenhagen.

frictions and fault lines could serve as a beneficial approach for addressing the outlined curatorial discomfort associated with specimens in museum institutions.[6]

I choose the *curatorial* as a frame of reference to specify the focus of reflection. The *curatorial* refers to Beatrice von Bismarck's notion of *The Curatorial Condition*,[7] which she understands as relational space or fabric where human and non-human actors, as well as their relations themselves, interact, creating what could otherwise be described as curatorial constellation.[8] Addressing that constellational fabric of interacting could offer valuable expansions of established forms of curating. If we recognise the bodily/embodied agency of ›not-just-things‹, that makes them neither (more) human nor (more) object. But asking about their and our situatedness sheds light on what causes discomfort and, subsequently, on what could be measures to address these relations – not to eliminate them, but to be aware of and capable of acting on them.

In the following, I draw on my doctoral research on human specimens in scientific collections to explore discomfort as a productive force that produces knowledge and induces curiosity in curatorial research. I then relate this discussion to conceptualisations of a caring analytical position derived from interdisciplinary readings. These conceptualisations are helpful for addressing the discomfort associated with human specimens in museums. The touchpoint of this paper is the relationship between material and immaterial agencies, which involves human specimens as neither solely subjective nor solely objective.[9] This line of argument leads me to recognise and discuss the

6 Discomfort around human specimens is found in many museum environments connected to postcolonial governance. This paper does not focus on provenance research or post-colonial critique. It does, however, recognise and start from the necessity to tell alternative stories. My interest, at least in this paper, concentrates on the epistemic problem that human specimens pose for curatorial research.

7 See Beatrice von Bismarck: *The Curatorial Condition*, London: Sternberg Press 2022.

8 The curatorial condition as agential fabric means the interplay of multiple curatorial positions (human as well as non-human) that come together in relations that are constantly articulated anew. Using the ›curatorial‹, Bismarck includes not only the exhibition space, but also its conditions and circumstances and the curatorial possibilities that result from such a constellation; see Beatrice von Bismarck: *Das Kuratorische*, Leipzig: Spector Books 2021, p. 37.

9 Certainly, the focus placed on immaterial knowledge, especially that which is emotion-related, is neither an exclusive approach nor an approach that uses care as its sole refe-

connected analytical potential of ›thinking with care‹[10] as well as a practical dimension associated with this approach. I will explore this along the lines of three questions: Firstly, how does discomfort around human remains affect curatorial research? Secondly, why should one care and how is the concept of care useful in terms of addressing discomfort as a curatorial friction? Thirdly, what does curatorial research stand to gain by applying a caring perspective?

Encountering Human Specimens

The following two examples illustrate how human remains undermine curatorial logics and their research. The first example focuses on material and immaterial interdependencies of human specimens. The second example concentrates on spatial organisation.

Unpacking

During my studies, I spent 14 months at the German Museum for the History of Medicine Ingolstadt. In Ingolstadt, I had the opportunity to examine a stock of human specimens more closely – hearts, to be precise.[11] The collec-

rence point. There are already countless concepts to decentralise the human subjective position in cultural object research and to analyse the transition from ›something‹ to data or immutable mobiles, as Bruno Latour exemplifies in a field report on earth samplings; see Bruno Latour: »Circulating Reference. Sampling the Soil in the Amazon Forest«, in: id.: *Pandora's Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1999, pp. 24-79. A comprehensive insight can be gleaned from Gustav Roßler, who pays special attention to things as hybrids, a concept closely aligned with this article's proposal; see Gustav Roßler: »Kleine Galerie neuer Dingbegriffe: Hybriden, Quasi-Objekte, Grenzobjekte, epistemische Dinge«, in: Georg Kneer/Markus Schroer/Erhard Schüttpelz (eds.): *Bruno Latours Kollektive*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2008, pp. 76-107.

10 In employing the phrase ›thinking with care‹, I would like to cover a certainly uncertain position of investigating medical specimens as a group of musealised objects that escape categories and reliable academic modes of representation.

11 See Johanna Lessing: »Die performative Dimension menschlicher Präparate: Zur autoethnographischen Beschreibung einer Begegnungssituation«, in: Ernst Seidl/Frank Steinheimer/Cornelia Weber (eds.): *Eine Frage der Perspektive. Objekte als Vermittler von Wissenschaft*, Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin 2021, pp. 114-124, https://doi.org/10.18452/23907 [accessed: 28.08.2023].

tion originates from the 1920s and is embedded in the context of university medicine, encompassing pathological insights across a broad range of heart and kidney diseases. The collection contains 16 human hearts or fragments thereof that have been paraffinised, i.e. fixed in wax. The specimens belong to the so-called *Volhard Collection*, named after their founder Franz Volhard. Volhard (1872-1950) worked, among other places, in Halle, Berlin and Mannheim, before he was appointed as the director of the university clinic in Frankfurt a.M. He was an internist, university lecturer and specialist in kidney and heart diseases.[12] The collection of heart specimens was his initiative and formed a part of both his research and his teaching activities. It is probable that the collection originally included more preparations. In 1999, the 16 pieces mentioned above were transferred to the German Museum of Medical History in Ingolstadt. During the months of my employment at the museum, I had access to the depot where the specimens were housed (Fig. 1). By visiting the specimen collection regularly and taking field notes, I became familiar with the specimens. Still, it struck me how they were housed in the same manner as all other objects in that neutral, white-doored depot and I was surprised by their fragility – material-wise as well as subjectively – when I chose to concentrate on our encounters.

In that manner, the human specimens became my allies in understanding curatorial logics of collecting and exhibiting. What exactly differentiates objects of human origin – in my case medical specimens – from other kinds of preparations, from other kinds of human remains, from medical and scientific devices? I came to realise that they constantly elude categories like objectification or personalisation. The only thing that remains consistent is the unreliability itself: Human specimens do not fit in. Therefore, in my inquiry, I understood the unreliability of human specimens within the *curatorial* to be crucial. Reading my field notes of encounters in Ingolstadt, I recognise a sense of discomfort and at times an incapability to speak – write – notice – and notate what I observed in the depot. It appears challenging to speak of the specimens in a way that both aligns with the requirements of scientific discourse and effectively captures implicit or imperceptible layers of knowledge.

12 Claudia Kronschwitz gives a historical overview in her biography of Franz Volhard: Claudia Kronschwitz: *Franz Volhard. Leben und Werk*, Frankfurt a.M.: Sinemis 1997.

Fig. 1: Approaching the collections storage, German Museum for the History of Medicine Ingolstadt, 2022 (photo: Johanna Lessing).

Back then, when taking field notes, I frequently turned from writing to sketching. Sketches turned out to be a better method of representing the fragile surfaces than words: They turned out to be more expressive in their ability to visualise and convey a meaningful connection between perception and manual execution. Another approach to address this deficiency of words – and conversely, to intentionally sidestep vocabulary that doesn't quite fit or might even be misleading – was through photography. Through the lens of photography, I could gradually approach my subjects of interest and capture – at least in architectural terms – their surroundings. That proved to be effective for re-tracing the various dimensions of approach – architectural, subjective, encompassing body movement and stillness, posture and perspective in relation to the specimens and their surroundings.

Taking notes, sketching, photographing all unveil a bodily dimension: Being situated in front of or possibly surrounded by specimens of human origin has an impact on me. Being in collections filled with bodies and body parts that were once alive, pulsating, and sentient affects me during my time with them. These entities were once part of a life and belonged to individuals of whom I possess limited or no knowledge. Selecting one specimen, focusing on it, perhaps touching it or delving into further research, results in a

relational constellation that in its concentration on a single counterpart differs from one that emerges from being surrounded by, and maybe looked upon by, many counterparts. When zooming in on the hearts' surfaces and intricate details, or while reading in archives about medical teaching, I have begun to question: Who is guiding whom during these encounters? Am I still the one choosing to look more closely at one single specimen, or is it more of a relational constellation taking shape? The specimen guides (me in) the exploration of the implications of its distinctive materiality, while I, as the visitor, enable this connection by positioning myself within this constellation.

Segmenting

Fig. 2: View into the exhibition room Cupboards within the core exhibition Spaces of Knowledge, Forum Wissen Göttingen, 2022 (photo: Martin Liebetruth).

The interplay between spatial organisation und modes of knowledge production in academic history is illustrated by the following brief example: The image provides a glimpse into the exhibition room *Cupboards* within the permanent exhibition *Spaces of Knowledge*, Forum Wissen, Göttingen, during its opening event in June 2022 (Fig. 2). The shelves, designed to compartmentalise objects and structure object-related knowledge, stack from floor

to ceiling.[13] Former furniture from Göttingen academic collections is piled high, illustrating both the epistemic and spatial organisation of knowledge. Another German university museum adopted this relation as early as 2007 for its opening exhibition. In *auf/zu. Der Schrank in den Wissenschaften*, Anke te Heesen and Anette Michels emphasised the partitioning function of cupboards in academic contexts.

> A closet always constitutes a room within a room. Its very shape marks its borders, therefore the closet exists of its own right, which constantly provokes either respect or challenge. A full definition of all past and contemporary variants of the closet's functions could be the following: A closet is a material construct, which presents rules to which we position ourselves; that proposes actions that we follow.[14]

Organising a depot and installing showcases involves adhering to the boundary-establishing nature a depot entails. In the curatorial framework, as Beatrice von Bismarck puts it, these actions of organising, representing and putting into boxes are practices that shape and form the curatorial process, which encompasses both collection and exhibition work.

Care – Analytical Potential

Care as a museological practice is nothing new. It is inherent in the etymology of curating. The Cambridge Dictionary defines »curate« as follows: »selecting and caring for objects to be shown in a museum or to form part of a

13 Another example for such a partitioning is to be seen in the pictures showing the Koloniaal Museum Haarlem, Netherlands, in Johanna Strunge's paper in this book.

14 Anke te Heesen/Anette Michels: »Der Schrank als wissenschaftlicher Apparat«, in: id. (eds.): *auf/zu. Der Schrank in den Wissenschaften*. Berlin: Akad.-Verl. 2007, pp. 8-18, see p. 10 [translated by Johanna Lessing]. In the German edition, the text reads: »Ein Schrank ist immer ein Raum im Raum. Durch seine grenzmarkierende Gestalt genießt er ein eigenes Existenzrecht, das Erfüllung oder Überschreitung einklagt. Damit ist die Funktion des Schrankes in seiner Geschichte wie in seinen zeitgenössischen Varianten bestens umschrieben: Bei einem Schrank handelt es sich um ein materielles Gefüge, das Regeln vorgibt, auf die wir reagieren, das zu Praktiken herausfordert, die wir erfüllen.«, ibid.

collection.«[15] The etymology of the Latin *curare* (English: ›care‹) is frequently brought forward as a museum's core mission. Since the formation of the modern museum in the 19th century, the term has been narrowed down to a sense of owning and preserving.[16] Current discourses already start to broaden that understanding towards museological care. In 2020, The Hunterian Museum in Glasgow appointed Zandra Yeaman as Curator of Discomfort. With a focus on postcolonial exhibits and structural blind spots since then, the Hunterian has launched several projects to raise the staff's, as well as the public's, awareness and implement structural changes within the institution.[17] Another example involves the revisions of ethical guidelines currently undertaken on an international level.[18]

In her essay *Love's Labor,*[19] the philosopher Eva Feder-Kittay addresses care with a focus on issues of inequality and gender. She aims to install an ethics of (inter-)dependency that considers the involvement of both the recipient and the caregiver (dependent and dependency worker) in the caregiving process. *Ethics of care* developed in the 1970s as a feministic critique in social philosophy and it stressed gender inequalities in care work. Highlighting emotional agencies within the context of women's work has received critical responses for reifying the link between a focus on emotions and femininity. Even so, I consider Feder-Kittay's *Love's Labor* to be genuinely helpful in terms of thinking through the relational quality of encountering. This is precise-

15 See the definition of *curate* in: Cambridge Dictionary Online, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/curate [accessed: 08.06.2023].

16 For an exploration of the subtle distinctions between custodian and curator, see Anke te Heesen: »Exhibit, Exhibit, Exhibit«, in: Petra Reichensperger (ed.): *Terms of Exhibiting*, Berlin: Sternberg Press 2013, pp. 48-53. For a reflection regarding human remains, see also Regina Bendix/Jonatan Kurzwelly: »Custody and Custodianship: A Reflection on Collection Terminology through the Lens of Human Remains«, in: *Anthropology Today* 37 (2021) 5, pp. 21-24.

17 See the project's website: https://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/about/achangingmuseum/curatingdiscomfort/ [accessed: 28.08.2023].

18 The International Council of Museums (ICOM) is currently revising its *Code of Ethics for Museums* through a participatory process, aligning with evolving standards and the newly adopted ICOM museum definition in 2022; see ICOM Committee on Ethics (ETHCOM): *Participate in the Revision of ICOM's Code of Ethics for Museums!*, https://icom.museum/en/news/participate-in-the-revision-of-icoms-code-of-ethics-for-museums/ [accessed: 03.09.2023].

19 Eva Feder-Kittay: *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, New York: Routledge 1999.

ly because she puts her interest into developing a reciprocal constellation.[20] Feder-Kittay criticises the ideal of democratic equality from the perspective of dependency. She accomplishes this by analysing the philosophical and exemplary aspects of the caregiver-dependent relationship within the context of care. Feder-Kittay presents narratives of dependency relationships that consistently undermine familiar conceptions of the self and its alleged independence. Care therefore operates within a matrix of dependency while aiming to acknowledge and even enhance the agency of the dependent:

> Certainly someone could give Sesha [a person highly dependent on care] perfunctory custodial »care«, that is, attend to her bodily needs but without ever seeing the person whose body it is, without tapping into her desires, without engaging her potential, without responding to and returning her affection – her affection which is her most effective means of connecting with others, in the absence of speech and most other capacities required for interpersonal activities.[21]

Sesha's desires, her potential, her affection cannot be fully understood solely by talking to her or attending to her body. According to Feder-Kittay, to engage with Sesha, it is essential to encounter her personally. Theorising at the conclusion of the study, Feder-Kittay generalises from Sesha's case: Appropriate care means letting affection do its work and letting the dependent affect you. As »she [Sesha] meets the needs of another«,[22] the relationship of dependency is formed. From Feder-Kittay's perspective, this implies acknowledging the dependency and – still, regardless – considering the agency of the dependent. Subsequently, to care for someone means to be involved. That seems obvious

20 Notwithstanding, in »care ethics, domination by the caregivers always looms large«, as Claudia Wiesemann points out; see Claudia Wiesemann: *Moral Equality, Bioethics, and the Child*, Cham: Springer International Publishing 2016, p. 10 (in her case, with an emphasis on autonomy, we delve into another expansive realm within the *philosophy of care*). There is a risk of telling stories and taking positions which are not mine to tell and to take, simply because I can. ›Thinking with care‹ therefore also applies for such reflective work like writing scientific texts about care issues. Thinking with care means considering the other's possibilities and looking for the other's impact within the constellation and being transparent about (my) own limitations.

21 Feder-Kittay: *Love's Labor* (footnote 19), p. 155.

22 Ibid, p. 181.

in caring for (other) human beings – even if the politics and economics of care, as Feder-Kittay also points out, may suggest otherwise.

I argue that this conceptualisation of being involved in caring for the needs of another who is not equally equipped is one that could be transferred to non-human individuals that possess an ambiguous and demanding agency, like specimens. Following Feder-Kittay's thinking on the dependent's bodily and emotional agency when one encounters specimens involves a certain affective connection and relational positioning. While Feder-Kittay's focus is on human relationships, her interest lies in those relationships that involve highly unequal participants in terms of ›being able to do something‹. She seeks equality within dependency and sees agency in a physical and emotional context as not necessarily reliant on words or any other kind of intellectual activity. What is required instead is an awareness and recognition of non-verbal, bodily involvement and the agency inherent within it.

Such a bodily involvement means care is strictly conceptualised in a situated setting. Following philosopher of science Donna Haraway, this situatedness requires one to be transparent about one's own involvement and participation. In her influential essay »Situated Knowledges«, Haraway outlines a vision of science that is accountable for its epistemic production: »Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcending, and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to be answerable for what we learn how to see.«[23] To grasp Haraway's polemic, it is important to recognise that she uses »situated and embodied knowledges«[24] and »feminist objectivity«[25] as increasingly synonymous to each other.

> Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or ground of resource, never finally as a slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of ›objective‹ knowledge.[26]

23 Donna Haraway: »Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective«, in: *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988) 3, pp. 575-599, see p. 583.

24 Ibid., p. 583.

25 Ibid., p. 581.

26 Ibid., p. 592.

Haraway is interested in the production of scientific reality. Instead of a »god trick«,[27] she advocates for a shared authorship between humans and non-humans, emphasising the acknowledgement that no single entity exclusively shapes history. Haraway employs her terminology in opposition to a patriarchal, male-dominated scientific reality, introducing *feminist* as a non-patriarchal, critical term. The term *feminist* represents a tool through which Haraway engages critically with relational and embodied ways of knowing. Feder-Kittay's exploration does not stop at »mothering«[28] as a women's task but interrogates a philosophy of dependency. Haraway identifies patriarchal mechanisms within science production and argues for a transparent knowledge production process that is conscious of and transparent about its political as well as embodied conditions.

The notion of responsibility has grown stronger in Haraway's more recent works: Seeking connections between species and narrating a reality that goes beyond the human, she expands the scope of participation even further. What is interesting about reading Haraway is her intensifying argumentation towards co-constituting reality in a co-inhabited environment and the connected claim for ethical responsibility.[29] As objects of knowledge gain agency and our surroundings become kin, not only does (scientific) authorship get shared, but responsibility for humanity's (non-human) kin also increases. On an epistemic level, that implies a responsibility to be transparent about objective limitations. On a political level, that means acting for change. On an ethical level, it means considering the other's needs and demands. Following the thought of co-constitution, Karen Barad, theorist of science, gets to the heart of it: »Practices of knowing and being are not isolatable, but rather they are mutually implicated.«[30] Consequently, following Haraway's focus on situatedness and Barad's subsequent mutual implicatedness, a reflective shift in thinking with human specimens becomes necessary. Insisting on specimens as isolated entities will get us nowhere in trying to grasp

27 Ibid., p. 581.

28 Feder-Kittay: *Love's Labor* (footnote 19), p. xiv.

29 See Donna Haraway: *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press 2008.

30 Karen Barad: »Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter«, in: *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (2003) 3, pp. 801-831, see p. 829.

the discomfort they evoke. Instead, acknowledging that they are integral in constituting curatorial encounters – in exhibition space as well as collection environments – allows the possibility to enter, recognise, and handle the emerging onto-epistemological[31] relationality.

Back in the collections storage, I no longer stop at the heart's otherness and my own discomfort within the given setting. Acknowledging the relationality of being and knowing, (my) discomfort around human specimens does not simply vanish. In fact, the specimens' affecting potential within their curatorial environment, which I am part of as well, turns us into characters in the same story. We are not equals in terms of actions or doings. But I as a visitor and researcher decentre myself from a single subjective position. That goes in two directions: As Feder-Kittay illustrates, body-based knowledge is not a surplus. Rather, it is essential in meeting the dependent's potential. That means my senses are required as epistemic tools to grasp our shared reality. It also means that active (emotional) positioning towards the specimens is part of a shared knowledge production process; I am a part of this process, but perhaps not the most important part. A practical consequence for conducting research could be to attempt to change the curatorial narrative I am producing toward a (more) sensitive tone of representation in writing. This would take place not by ›giving‹ the hearts any kind of voice, which would inevitably echo my own, but rather by being transparent about the actors and circumstances shaping mine.

A Caring Perspective

The example of encountering human heart specimens illustrates that a failure to fit in is not merely an impression or a feeling but also presents a methodological challenge. The specimens consistently escape fixed settings. The philosophy of care addresses the onto-epistemological unreliability that surfaces as curatorial discomfort. Human specimens, along with human remains, can thus be taken seriously in their multi-faceted states of being. Not fitting in becomes a quality, rather than a shortcoming, in rethinking

31 »*Onto-epistem-ology* – the study of practices of knowing in being – is probably a better way to think about the kind of understandings that are needed to come to terms with how specific intra-actions matter.«, ibid.

museum measures and the curatorial tasks involved. Interdependency and relational world-making is foregrounded, intervening into regimes of boxes and binary settings. Within the specimen's unreliability lies a force of resistance – and with that a possibility of change. For specimens like the paraffined hearts, that could mean enhancing their subjective position within the given infrastructure. In turn, that necessarily questions the subjective position curators and museum staff usually hold. Curating practices are thus required to adapt to shared positions of knowledge production, which might result in deliberate attempts to integrate such shared positions, in collection space as well as in public exhibition.

Museological research and practice stand to gain four distinct advantages by employing a caring perspective. Firstly, it allows for the capture of tacit[32] and embodied knowledge: There is an emotional as well as an ethical and ontological dimension to medical specimens. A notion of care encompasses such immaterial as well as material dimensions. This could help not only to understand, but to ›un-mute‹, for example, emotional knowledge connected to human specimens. By doing so, this knowledge leaves the realm of discomfort and enters the curatorial narrative (including its academic manifestation), where it takes up a prominent position. Secondly, it promotes reflections on situated methodology: A caring perspective offers a reflexive frame for developing curatorial research. It provides an open approach and might therefore be particularly applicable to questions concerning complex or diverse objects, to the curatorial settings of such objects and to issues involving immaterial forms of knowledge. The approach's openness may represent a methodological difficulty at first. At second glance, it bears the advantage of being able to integrate practices and approaches from other fields and to experiment with them. For example, employing Feder-Kittay's situated emotional connectedness allows one to navigate elusiveness without simply dissolving it. Staying with such ambiguity crosses ›theory-practice oppositions‹ by involving multiple layers of being involved with someone/something. Thirdly, it promotes curatorial critique: A caring perspective makes frictions in the handling of human specimens accessible to critical

32 The use of »tacit« here refers to the process-oriented understanding of (implicitly) knowing something without forcibly being able to verbalise it. Prominently, Michael Polanyi introduced that *Tacit Dimension* into cultural theory in 1966; see Michael Polanyi: *The Tacit Dimension*, Garden City/New York: Doubleday & Company 1966.

reflection. On the one hand, it is connected to the museum's core mission. On the other hand, when employed as an analytical tool, it responds to an equally fundamental critique by disclosing museological ›box-thinking‹. The latter can be seen as an effect of the history of museums as powerful institutions of knowledge production. Human specimens do not fit into that, making them paradigmatically promising for revisiting the segmentation that is inherent in how museums are constituted.[33] The focus of care on unequally equipped participants and their connectedness through body and emotions emphasises the unreliable onto-epistemological status of human specimens. Addressing emotional sensitivities inevitably de-objectifies museum narratives. Consequently, care could help to identify rationalities which might no longer be adequate to meet future research on curatorial practices.[34] Lastly, it carries implications for implementation: Care, as both situated practice and reflexive framing, requires institutional implementation. It is simultaneously analytical and hands-on. Subsequently, it can contribute to handling discomfort in curatorial contexts not only from an analytical perspective but also very tangibly in terms of practices and facilities.

To conclude: Looking into the philosophy of care might provide a foundation for tackling multi-layered discomfort surrounding human specimens, potentially facilitating a transformative shift in curatorial practices. Thinking with care directs attention towards relationality, ignoring theoretical demarcations most of us have learnt to think in or are accustomed to. Consequently, in alignment with the book's central theme, which navigates the frictions between exhibition theory and practice, care can be understood as both a practical approach and an analytical perspective. Care as used in this article stresses a sense of accountability for events that might be invisible, or even imperceptible, but that are still present when dealing with curated

33 See Tony Bennett: »Der Ausstellungskomplex«, in: Quinn v. Latimer/Adam Szymczyk (eds.): *Der documenta 14 Reader*, München: Prestel 2017, pp. 353-400; for a critique and outline of the museum's idea and institution, see Nora Sternfeld: *Das radikaldemokratische Museum*, Berlin: De Gruyter 2018; for a historical perspective, see the chapter on »Museumskritik« in Anke te Hessen: *Theorien des Museums*, Hamburg: Junius 2012, pp. 105-111.

34 Still, European museums must therefore question their purpose and the role of their subjects/objects; see for example: Wayne Modest: »Things are a Changing or Perpetual Return. Horizons of Hope and Justice or of Anxiety«, in: Barbara Plankensteiner (ed.): *The Art of Being a World Culture Museum. Futures and Life Ways of Ethnographic Museums in Contemporary Europe*, Wien: Kerber 2018, pp. 117-120.

things. Moreover, the philosophy of care provides a reflective framework that encompasses curatorial aspects, such as spatial, institutional, and discursive circumstances. Thus, by engaging with the philosophy of care, curatorial practices could evolve into caring practices themselves.