6. Limits of Curatorial Care

The articulated propositions towards building caring infrastructures within the arts, despite the potentials I have identified through the various theoretical and practice-based underpinnings, are certainly not a magic recipe to abolish all social injustices. While I insist that it is imperative for contemporary curators to critically engage with the potentials, agencies, and dangers of coupling curating with care, it is also equally important to be aware of the limitations of this approach. Throughout this research project, I have aimed to deconstruct the seemingly rigid romantisation of care – as a maternal, domestic, feminised role, as a curatorial ideal. Now I wish to critically examine the risk that the concept of caring infrastructures could be romanticised as a societal "fix," as a recipe for social harmony, for conflict-free zones of social transformation.

Again taking a prismatic approach, this chapter homes in on the tensions, contradictions, and limitations of a curatorial practice of care – not in an all-encompassing way but rather a fragmentary one, much like a torchlight hovering over obstacles at night, brightly illuminating one, in a flash, then quickly moving on to the next, restless and uncertain about what shapes may surface and what forms and presences might remain forever obscured and unattended to. Yet, in a Harawayan tradition, this final chapter does not shy away from the critical questioning of previously established arguments, thereby bringing new questions to the surface and new perspectives to the fore – all in a search for how to address the urgency of caring infrastructures (or, in the case of Haraway, climate change): a pursuit "that must burn for staying with the trouble."[1]

6.1 The (Non-)Universal Expansion of Curatorial Care

Critical voices – at times including the one in a curator's own head – may enquire: Why didn't you spend more time engaging with the community? Why didn't you do

1 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 6.

more in-depth research on the invited artists and speakers? Why do I predominantly see White people in the documentation of your events?[2]

Potential critical questions regarding the limits of curatorial care are manifold, as are the possible answers to these questions. On the one hand, the possible answers point to the conundrum that the documentation used in critical arts spaces to judge the caring character of an exhibition or event provides only fragmentary insight into larger social processes. A snapshot of a past event can never be a stand-in for physically participating in the event. Images might evoke the sensation within the viewer of engaging with a given curatorial programme, yet these images are only fragmentary elements of a much more complex picture. For example, a person might feel inclined to judge the apparent diversity of participants based on a snapshot taken of the programming, yet these momentary glimpses do not convey the rather invisible layers of participants' backgrounds in regard to religion, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, accent, or histories of displacement and refuge. On the other hand, there are very real limitations to what curators can do to influence the presence of a multitude of voices at the events and exhibitions they produce. As laid out in detail in Proposition #3: "Provide 'Care for Presence'," practice-based support structures can be built, but curators still do not control the outcomes of these efforts. While my workshop series "Care for Caregivers" was explicitly open to everyone who provides care for others in their private or professional lives – independent of sexual orientation or gender identity – the audience in rural Hohenlockstedt predominantly consisted of White cis women along with some White cis men. In the context of the rural-urban cooperations with HFBK Hamburg and HKW Berlin, both the contributors and the audiences seemed to be more heterogenous.[3] As curators-who-care, we cannot know in advance whether our efforts of accessibility will have hit the right tone, the right mark, or have landed with the right people at the right time in their lives for them to take up the *offer* to be present. Hence, curatorial agency is limited by the autonomy of participants to choose for themselves. This reality might also include the takeaway that the key to providing care for the presence of so-called marginalised groups might not lie in a *general openness* but rather a *specificity of address*: in creating safe spaces for specific groups, exclusions can emerge for other perspectives – a conundrum that I want to further expand on in this section.[4]

2 These are questions I have been asked in Q&A sessions after my lectures and in workshops, as well as directly by artists, such as Johanna Hedva in their letter to Joan Tronto.

3 At no point during the curatorial programme were the participants or contributors asked to disclose details about their ethnic or religious background, gender, classed identity, or sexual orientation. Hence, there is no scientific basis upon which to make any further claims about the identity constitution of the audiences and contributors.

4 As previously cited in chapter 4 – "Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges," the tension between inclusion and exclusion became visible in the recent museum practice at the public LWL-Museum Zeche Zollern in Dortmund, Germany. They had an-

Oftentimes, care is regarded as a cure-all that can abolish hierarchies, mechanisms of exclusion, and neglect. However, care – as I have explained in previous sections – is always tied to power relations and dynamics of control.[5] Even if we might desire to include everyone, we, as curators with a focus on care, may have personal embodied experiences that might flag certain issues for us, but we might be oblivious to other experiences that are far from our own "view from the body," thus leading to unintentional exclusions. This "view from the body" is situated and immediately connected to the urgencies embedded in everyday lives; however, it is also a limited view, a partial vision, a potentially privileged perspective from which other lived realities go unnoticed.[6] In this research project I have argued for dialogue, transparency, and making an effort to think through the positions of other lived experiences and attend to those needs in order to establish caring infrastructures. Yet I argue that there are limits to how many perspectives one curator, or even a group of curators and artists, can in practice attend to, even if with the best of intentions. Inevitably there will be sensitivity gaps, biases, and privileges at play that will both reveal and obscure other lived realities; part of our curatorial responsibility is to be aware of these limitations, to make them transparent, rather than shying away from their existence. Chantal Mouffe argues that this moment of inclusion/exclusion is inevitable within political action (to which I subsume a curatorial practice of care):

> In order to think and act politically, we cannot escape the moment of decision and this requires establishing a frontier and determining a space of inclusion/exclusion. Any perspective that evades this moment renders itself incapable of

nounced "Safer Spaces" for their 2023 exhibition *Das ist kolonial* [This is colonial], where, once per week, for a few hours, the exhibition space was reserved for BIPOC visitors only. This created a public outcry, predominantly stirred up by ultra-right-wing populists (mainly around the party Alternative for Germany (AfD)). Their narrative was that now White people would be excluded from the museum and that the museum had introduced "apartheid" practices. These discursive defamations of the activist practice of safer spaces were taken up by mainstream media outlets, further fueling the outrage. This example showcases the difficulties that art organisations face when implementing activist practices, such as safer spaces for the marginalised few, and the populist backlash that potentially awaits them. For further information, see LWL-Museum Zeche Zollern, "Das ist kolonial," accessed September 26, 2023, https://zeche-zollern.lwl.org/de/ausstellungen/das-ist-kolonial/safer-space/; and Elke Buhr, "Ein Lehrstück im Anti-Wokeness-Kulturkampf," *Monopol*, September 1, 2023, https://www.monopol-magazin.de/museum-safer-space-kommentar.

5 For more on this topic, see "Complicating Care" in the introduction to this publication, as well as section 3.2 – "Unsettling Curatorial Care: Histories, Theories, and Practices."

6 The notion of the "view from the body" stems from Donna Haraway's article "Situated Knowledges" from 1988; I first introduced it in chapter 1 – "Methods as Feminist Practices of Care."

> transforming the structure of power relations and of instituting a new hegemony.[7]

This notion is closely aligned with another dimension of curatorial care, where (the often unspoken) expectation reigns that the curator-as-carer should grant an incredible amount of care, time, and dedication to each participant and each facet of the project. Through my concept of caring infrastructures I, too, argue that it is in such details that the caring character of a project is articulated. Yet there are real-life limitations – defined by the specific context – to how much care a curator is able to grant, and there are also real-life limitations to an artist and curator's shared agreement as to what curatorial care should entail.

I cite a passage from artist and writer Johanna Hedva's letter to theorist Joan Tronto from the *Letters to Joan* project, in which they openly critique us three curators of the M.1 and Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) collaboration *CARING*:

> An astrologer once told me, "Your illness is more dignified than your life," and something inside me simultaneously triumphed and collapsed at this truth. It's true. It sometimes feels like a curse. This letter reminded me of it. When the curators for this project invited me to write you, they knew me only for "Sick Woman Theory." They'd not read my books, my other essays, they'd not even read all three of my essays on illness. They were not aware that I contained anything other than the sick woman. Over the phone, I had to insist on myself. Put another way: over these years, I've learned to care for myself pretty well.[8]

In the above-mentioned quote from Hedva, they share their perspective of our curatorial capacity to care for them as an artist in their multiple facets.[9] For Hedva, our approach to them was uncaring, or at least limited or unthoughtful. While I agree with the artist that it would have been desirable to read all of the publications of each invited speaker, it exceeded the capacities of our curatorial trio, especially during the rise of the Covid-19 pandemic – two of us as single parents with closed schools and day cares, two of us as freelancing artists with incredible income insecurity, and

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7 Chantal Mouffe, "Agonistic Democracy and Radical Politics," Pavilion – Journal for Politics and Culture, accessed September 25, 2023, https://www.pavilionmagazine.org/chantal-mouffe-agonistic-democracy-and-radical-politics/

8 Hedva, "Dear Joan," in *Letters to Joan*, ed. Sascia Bailer, Gilly Karjevsky, and Rosario Talevi (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt; Hohenlockstedt, Germany: M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, 2020), 69.

9 This passage was voiced in Hedva's letter to Joan Tronto in the *Letters to Joan* publication, which formed part of the collaboration between the HKW and M.1, co-curated by Rosario Talevi, Gilly Karjevsky, and myself. Not without discomfort did we publish this paragraph, but within this research project I consider it an important contribution to the misunderstandings and conflicts around curatorial care. See ibid.

all three of us who had to reschedule and reconceptualise, from on-site to online, a large, two-institution collaboration in a very short period of time (without receiving extra fees for the additional workload). The above can be read as an excuse, but I place it here with the intention to make transparent both the dynamics around how curatorial care is attributed or withdrawn within the arts as well as to reveal the invisible background dynamics that define, and limit, the capacities for curatorial care. To speak with Tronto herself: "within human existence and the larger global environment there are more needs for care than can be met." This above-mentioned example also highlights the mutually exclusive dimension of (curatorial) care: something deemed "caring" by an artist may be received as an "uncaring" demands if it stands in conflict with a curator's capacities to be well and the curators-as-carer's own need for care.

From this position I wish to turn to a notion of care as something to be increased, expanded, and in particular *universalised*, which is a common argument within leftist circles. During the pandemic, the political economist Amy Kapczynski and public health scholar Gregg Gonsalves, for example, wrote: "we've argued for a new politics of care, one organized around a commitment to universal provision for human needs; countervailing power for workers, people of color, and the vulnerable; and a rejection of carceral approaches to social problems."[10] A similar call is made by the London-based Care Collective in their "Care Manifesto," where they describe their multi-scalar model of care:

> This vision advances a model of "universal care": the ideal of a society in which care is placed front and centre on every scale of life. Universal care means that care – in all its various manifestations – is our priority not only in the domestic sphere but in all spheres: from our kinship groups and communities to our states and planet. Prioritising and working towards a sense of universal care – and making this common sense – is necessary for the cultivation of a caring politics, fulfilling lives, and a sustainable world.[11]

The arguments of this research project align with this proposition to infiltrate all scales of human and non-human relations with a feminist ethics of care. However, we need to be very precise on this occasion: an ethics of care, as a value set, could, in theory, be spread without limitations – and this is what possibly what the Care Collective refers to when they demand "care to be universalised"[12] – yet the *universal expansion of the practices of care* have bodily, time-based, financial, and logistical limits.

10 Amy Kapczynski, and Gregg Gonsalves, "The New Politics of Care," *Boston Review*, April 27, 2020, https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/gregg-gonsalves-amy-kapczynski-new-deal-public-health-we-need/.

11 Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2020), e-book.

12 Ibid.

On the back of whose bodies can we limitlessly expand care? With whose hands and minds? At what cost? At *whose* costs?

Along these lines, and with the above-mentioned examples from my curatorial practice, I argue that care-as-a-practice cannot be expanded infinitely, as the conditions of reproductive labour are scarce. Hence, the limit of curatorial care lies in the limits of the caring capacities of a given person, community, or other entity, or else the danger arises of replicating what Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese have called the "demons" of care: exploitation, coercion, inequity.[13] We need to acknowledge the oppressive and draining characteristics of care, which render an uncritical call for unlimited care a form of disrespecting the necessary boundaries that contain resources of care for the self. Within each given context, the different caring resources are limited in different ways and might be mutual exclusive of one another – further highlighting the ambivalent and contradictory dimensions of care.[14]

As a curator with an emphasis on care, the limits to the number and degree of caring infrastructures one is able to install are defined by one's personal caring resources and those of one's potential collaborators. Here, the curator's care for the self, for their private lives, for their own families and friends, might stand in direct competition with the care for the invited artists, the exhibition process, the funding applications, the building of caring infrastructures.

The internalised neoliberal impulse to excel in each area of our lives is essentially *uncaring*, as it drains our resources and overrides our boundaries, and it furthermore defines self-exploitation in the name of care as a given.[15] I therefore want to make a case to understand (curatorial) care not as a limitless, universal resource that can be expected to emerge at every moment and every corner of our lives but rather as one of limits and boundaries, where the use and application of care itself is to be done with intention and should seek reciprocity.[16]

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

14 As previously elaborated in more depth in Proposition #8: "Care for the Self" in section 5.2.1 – "Practice-led Propositions towards Building Caring Infrastructures."

15 As I have laid out in more detail in Proposition #8: "Care for the Self" and in section 5.2 – "In Search of a Practice: Towards a Curatorial Methodology of Caring Infrastructures."

16 For further reading on reciprocity in curatorial care, consider the following text by Helena Reckitt, which includes this passage: "Of particular concern to Christine [Shaw] was the question of how might care with others, rather than imagining care in one-dimensional terms as something either given or received. This prompted discussions on how we might develop more reciprocal forms of care, based in friendship and shared resources, between curators and the artists, institutions, communities and publics with whom they work." Helena Reckitt, "Taking (Back) Care," in *On Care*, eds. Sharon Kivland and Rebecca Jagoe (London: ma bibliotheque, 2020), 196–202.

This resonates with Mouffe, who argues that "[p]roper political questions always involve decisions that require making a choice between conflicting alternatives."[17] The politics of curatorial care therefore become legible at its *boundaries*, at its demarcation lines, which render visible what conflicting option is prioritised over another alternative. It is precisely the demarcation lines, the boundaries, the limitations of care that render a curatorial practice of care as political.

I therefore want to return to the notion of a curatorial degrowth agenda as a (socially) sustainable path forward within curatorial practice. Curatorial care has limits; we need to downscale in size and speed in order to not exhaust our caring resources. This curatorial degrowth agenda needs to be a collective process, whereby not only a few curators and cultural organisations dedicate themselves to downscaling and deaccelerating the neoliberal gig economy, but many.[18] The power and potential of care lies in its limitations and its set *intentionality* – not in its romanticised universal expansion. Possibly, instead of the universal expansion of care (work), we should demand the *universalisation of the accountabilities and responsibilities towards care* – in order to alleviate the few who are socially conditioned and expected to care under the very real burden of its utopian omnipresence.

6.2 Zones of Care as Zones of Conflict

The limit of curatorial care is contained in the romantic idea that zones of care are zones without conflict. Yet initiatives of curatorial care are not conflict-free zones; instead they can foster conflicts and agonistic encounters – which Mouffe identifies as central principles of democratic politics – on various levels.[19] Conflicts therefore inevitably emerge during relational, discursive, socially engaged formats that involve a multitude of perspectives and positions, as they testify the democratic character of such formats.[20] To reflect on the relationships between curatorial practices of care and the engagement with audience members and the community, I return, in the spirit of anecdotal theory, to a situation from the curatorial cycle at M.1.

Over the course of the different workshops, the oldest registered participant was eighty-four and the youngest active participant (i.e., excluding participants' children) was fifteen years old. This range in age also meant a range of generations with contrasting conceptions of life, care, autonomy, and interdependence. One dispute

17 Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking The World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013), 3.

18 The curatorial degrowth agenda was previously established in Proposition #5: "Consider Curatorial Budgets as Political" in section 5.2 – "In Search of a Practice: Towards a Curatorial Methodology of Caring Infrastructures.

19 Ibid., 7ff.

20 For more on the inevitability of conflict, see Sarah Schulman, *Conflict Is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2016).

during the workshop on isolation stood out for me. The eighty-four-year-old woman with a walking disability – who lived by herself, seemingly without much support from her children – was appalled by the choices of another woman, who might have been around twenty-five years younger than her. This woman had chosen to become the main caregiver to her sick father, moved in with him, and was suffering from isolation due to her role as a primary carer. The elder women thought the younger woman's father's choice to allow her presence was utterly selfish, and that he should have let her "live her life." The younger woman feels a nursing home would have been an unethical choice for her father and defended her approach. In another instance, a workshop-facilitating artist shared her personal choice of becoming a solo mother – a term that describes mothers who conceive via a sperm donor – and she was confronted with harsh critique from some of the participants, for "intentionally depriving her child of a relationship with a father," and so on. Similar frictions occurred during the storytelling cafés, where contrasting – and, to some, offensive – positions were voiced.

Making these tensions and conflicts transparent is, for me, necessary, as they showcase how an encounter of curatorial care does not equate to a harmonious encounter without conflict. On the contrary, these open, arts-based frameworks on care allow for conversations that otherwise might not take place: cross-generational contacts can be rare, as can the urban-rural encounter between artists, who often reside in large cultural hubs, and local inhabitants, who do not have frequent access to certain societal discourses and artistic practices. Curatorial care might therefore intentionally enable conflictual situations, instead of seeking only harmonious, consensual encounters. In accordance with Mouffe, the political aspect of these encounters lies in their potential for agonism.[21]

In these instances, it is important to reconsider the role, and the limitations, of the curator-as-carer. While there are, as discussed, etymological associations between "curating" and the Latin "*-cura-*" (the linguistic root of not only "caring" but also "curing"), I argue that a literal understanding of curator-as-curer is problematic in socially engaged curatorial settings.[22] Trained curatorial professional will not necessarily have acquired the adequate tools to hold the emotions that may arise in the face of conflictual or emotional topics, as may happen when addressing motherhood, care work, and gender inequity – particularly when such discursive

21 Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 7ff. For an account on curating within conflictual entanglements see Maayan Sheleff, "Echoing with a Difference: Curating Voices and the Politics of Participation" (PhD diss., University of Reading and Zurich University of the Arts, June 2023).

22 For a detailed analysis of the notion of healing associated with the curatorial figure Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev in the context of her curatorship of dOCUMENTA (13), see Nanne Buurman, "From Prison Guard to Healer: Curatorial Authorships in the Context of Gendered Economies," *OnCurating*, no. 51 (September 2021).

encounters encourage vulnerability and openness. While one can identify a trend in contemporary art of engaging with healing and spiritual practices and Indigenous epistemologies, the position of the curator therein should not be conflated with the role of a curer, a healer, in a shamanistic sense.[23] Rather, the curator-as-carer's role should be to equip the conversational context with trained moderators, and possibly coaches or other skilled assistants, who can professionally guide the conversations and affective revelations. This line of thought is reflected in artist Tania Bruguera's claim that a socially engaged artist is "not a shaman, a magician, a healer, a saint, a mother; the role of the socially engaged artist is closer to that of teacher, negotiator, builder of conduct and social structures."[24] The role of a socially engaged practitioner, whether from the position of a curator or an artist, must engage with the construction of frameworks of encounter, where conflictual situations may arise but not escalate to the extent that they cause harm to the participants.

Conflicts can emerge not only in regard to the participants but also in regard to the staff and artistic and curatorial collaborators. Feminist collaborations around care are often highly charged setups where (marginalised) people come together in an activist spirit, to collectivise towards social transformation – and, with their high aspirations around care, the participants can clash due to their conflicting understandings of what care entails, their different roles, their search for (individual) visibility, which often concretises in the form of (singular) authorship and credentials for projects and publications. As I wrote in my field notes:

As we are in constant fight mode against injustices, we then begin to fight our equals with the same harshness that we aim to eradicate other structures. And we fight from our respective positions, as freelancers against employees of institutions, as institutions against funding bodies, as collectives against individuals – we begin to forget that even the conceived enemy, the institution, consists of people, who often carry their own stories of precarity, hidden underneath the seemingly sleek surface of institutional walls.[25]

Collaborations do not exist in a vacuum devoid of personal agendas, neoliberal project logics, funding frameworks, institutional mechanisms, or internalised perceptions of roles that may (unintentionally) reproduce the precise hierarchical system which one had hoped to counteract. Possible conflicts around ownership, authorship, and credits within feminist collaborations reflect this tension: each con-

23 For example, the group exhibition *Remedios* features many Indigenous artistic positions on (shamanistic) healing, Indigenous knowledge production, and collective care. For more, see Centro de Creación Contemporánea de Andalucía and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, "Remedios: Where New Land Might Grow," TBA21, 2023, https://tba21.org/RemediosEN.

24 Tania Bruguera, "Reflexiones sobre el Arte Útil," in *ARTE ACTUAL: Lecturas para un espectador inquieto*, ed. Yayo Aznar and Pablo Martinez (Madrid: CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, 2012), 194–97. My translation.

25 Field notes, March 9, 2023.

tributor enters the project from a place of precarity and (economic, political, social, etc.) vulnerability, which is often opaque to others; simultaneously, some participants interact without fully understanding the place of privilege from which they act. Many who came together for the collaborations of the M.1 curatorial cycle were single parents, queer, freelancers, unemployed, or migrants who needed to not only feed themselves but also their dependents. In order to meet in this way, visibility was our only currency.

The above web of tensions might serve as an explanation as to why contention around credits is so common within artistic, curatorial, editorial, and other creative collaborations: credits are the currency in which the visibility operates, though often in disconnection with or in lieu of financial reward. Credits are the manifestation of public recognition of one's un- or underpaid labour; they are insurance against drowning in a field of invisibles – the dark matter of the arts.[26] If credits are dissociated from the curator- or artist-as-entrepreneur, then the work loses its value within the attention economy. Yet, claiming authorship within feminist discourses can be read in rather contrasting ways: either as a way to acknowledge the efforts and struggles and important work of others, or as a way to adhere to neoliberal conceptions of subjecthood that prioritise the individual over collective efforts (by subsuming the individuals' names under a shared authorship that "erases" the separate voices). Whichever position one follows – perceiving credits and citation either as a feminist method or as a hyper-individualisation of collective struggles – it is easy to frame the other side as "anti-feminist" (which is arguably the most offensive slur a self-identifying feminist could be confronted with).

In reflecting on a conversation I had post-conflict with a previous collaborator, I had written in my notes: *Despite our feminist efforts, our theoretical knowledge, and our engagement with counter-practices, we are also individuals who operate under the pressure "to make it" within a hostile, competitive, neoliberal framework*.[27] This notion highlights the ambivalent position of cultural producers as *reproducers* of cultural hegemony while attempting to *rearticulate* these relationships in a counter-hegemonic manner. This is formulated poignantly by the feminist art historians Angela Dimitrakaki and Nizan Shaked:

> This is the logic that presently informs all art institutions that are committed to equality and diversity but are forced to also honour the competition principle. It

26 "Greg Sholette's 'dark matter' analogy should suffice: an undifferentiated invisible mass is necessary for the few art-world 'stars' to shine. Sure, some of these stars can be women, or non-white people. And yet, looking deeper we see that recognition is anchored on the culture of meritocracy, which is immensely useful to liberalism, which sustains neoliberalism." Angela Dimitrakaki, "From Space to Time: 'Situated Knowledges,' Critical Curating, and Social Truth," *OnCurating*, no. 53 (June 2022): 12.

27 Field notes, March 2023.

> is the culture that strives for inclusivity, while it revels when a figure signifying difference scoops an award.[28]

This culture that rhetorically seeks equality and inclusivity but structurally promotes competition is a recipe for conflict, particularly within spheres of feminist care-related projects, as it brings out the systemic contradictions in a manner that is hard to ignore.[29]

To summarise, relational curatorial formats of care need to be recognised as zones of agonism and conflict, as manifestations of the political quality of the encounter. Collaborations within feminist care contexts contain highly complex dynamics, as they are imbued with the intention of caring interactions. Coercive external frameworks produce a system of operation that is incredibly precarious and fuels competition for financial care, visibility, and credits. I read these conflicts as manifestations of the contradictions of an oppressive system that ripple down into participants' personal lives, where they lead the practitioner to attempt to "solve" and counteract these tensions on an individual level, while failing to do so in many cases. Therefore, undertaking curatorial care evokes conflicts on at least three levels: firstly, as shown in this section, relational, curatorial projects around care enhance conflictual, agonistic encounters as democratic spheres of engagement; secondly, diverging understandings around care might spark conflict, as the direction of care towards the artist may result in a lack of care towards the curator, and vice versa; and, thirdly, the cultural field's implication within neoliberal logics demands competition – a fight for credits and visibility – while rhetorically adhering to equality and inclusivity. It is this last contradiction that I seek to delve further into in the next section.

6.3 Contradictions of Curating, Capital, and Care

To address the systemic frictions and contradictions between curating, capital, and care, I return to a line of thought of curator Joanna Warsza, in which she muses about the analogy between the role of a curator and that of a police officer:

> Fellow thinker and friend Nora Sternfeld and I amused ourselves some years ago with defining a curator as 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

28 Angela Dimitrakaki and Nizan Shaked, "Feminism, Instituting, and the Politics of Recognition in Global Capitalism," *OnCurating*, no. 52 (November 2021): 15.

29 Ibid., 12.

> who creates forms and support structures, while introducing subversion, who embodies the electrifying impossibility of policing and being dissident at the same time.[30]

As cultural producers, we are thus caught in a double-bind, a dual role, acting both as the (feminist) anti-hegemonic agent of rearticulating the common sense and as the perpetuator of the common sense by upholding it through one's engagement in the creative field.

Dimitrakaki and Shaked further stress the complexity of practitioners' relationship to the arts and the art market, which affects not only curators but also the positioning of artists and is further complicated especially within the realm of feminism(s):

> You can enact whatever critique as a feminist artist, but you also need to make your critique available through obtaining an income in the art labour market, of which the market for selling artworks is just a part, and where one can possibly make a living through teaching art, through competing for a grant, through securing a residency, and generally, through making some "cultural capital" transfer into income.[31]

This arrangement puts feminist curators in the uncomfortable position of seeking to critique while simultaneously complying with the speculations and mechanisms of the free market.[32] Not only do they need to translate their feminist forms of critique into self-sustaining income but they also run the danger of (needing to) profit as *individuals* from these collective struggles, in order to self-sustain. This may in turn create a situation where feminist curators provide a discursive platform for critique that includes the effect of increasing visibility for themselves as professionals within the attention economy, while the voiced critique becomes co-opted by the institutional realm, where it loses its anti-hegemonic potential. This process also occurs within collective artistic practices, as Dorothee Richter argues: "In the arts, of course, the art market is in place and will also buy and sell some of the communal outcomes of mega-exhibitions like documenta."[33] The art market has a tendency

30 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.

31 Dimitrakaki and Shaked, "Feminism, Instituting, and the Politics of Recognition in Global Capitalism," 11.

32 Dorothee Richter, Curating: 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), 396.

33 Ibid., 396, 433.

to render works that stem from collective processes into supposed autonomous artworks-as-commodities, thereby conferring career-enhancing fame to singular artistic or curatorial figures while invisiblising the collective social movements out of which such works emerged.[34]

Dimitrakaki and Shaked come to the conclusion that this contradiction cannot be resolved within the given parameters of institutional critique as artistic practice – and, I may add, as curatorial practice: "for the conflict between artistic autonomy and the artist's dependency on the art labour market [. . .] never leads to a synthesis that moves us forward."[35] The two authors definitively locate the irresolvable dimension of this conundrum in the "overwhelming problem of capitalism."[36]

Capitalism has the built-in tendency to integrate the contradictions that it produces. According to the sociologist Emma Dowling, capitalism encounters itself in a constant search for a "fix," displacing "a crisis through the restructuring of the relations of production – spatially, technologically or organizationally, financially, digitally or in terms of production."[37] Capitalism's attempt at a "care fix" becomes legible in various finance and business models through its adherence to rhetorics of care, social responsibility, and compassion.[38] Dowling points to the contradiction wherein capitalism aims to "address an ongoing care crisis using private capital and

34 In the case of the curatorial approach of ruangrupa during documenta fifteen in Kassel in 2022, the collective intended to challenge the dominant art market mechanisms by launching a cooperative gallery, the Lumbung Gallery. The online presence of the platform states the following mechanism of operation: "The pricing of the artworks is going to be based on the collective's basic needs and artists' basic income in addition to production costs and other material condition variables rather than speculative market prices. There will also be non-monetary exchange, as well as affordable artworks. The artists and collectives will receive 70% of the return, they will then divide this amongst themselves and the extended needs of their ecosystems and communities. 30% will go to the running cost of the gallery and the common pot of all members of the lumbung." For further information, see their mission statement: Lumbung Gallery, accessed September 25, 2023, https://www.lumbunggallery.theartists.net/mission. However, little information can be found about the actual successes, or failures, of the Lumbung Gallery. The website makes no mention of how long and in which ways this cooperative gallery operated. It currently has no works listed. It only speaks in future voice about a past project. Due to the lack of information, I do not cite this as a best-practice example; however, I nonetheless wish to showcase that alternative models of art dealing have been tested.

35 Dimitrakaki and Shaked, "Feminism, Instituting, and the Politics of Recognition in Global Capitalism," 11.

36 Ibid., 15.

37 Emma Dowling, "Confronting Capital's Care Fix: Care Through the Lens of Democracy," Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 37 (2018): 334.

38 Ibid.

market mechanisms while relying on unpaid reproductive and caring labour to do so."[39]

The cultural sector, with its increased dedication to matters of care, can also run the danger of being *instrumentalised* and co-opted by neoliberal policies as a "fix": the arts – and socially engaged practices in particular – are sought to fill the gaps of neoliberalism's market-oriented (and not people-oriented) operations. Wherever neoliberal economies fail to build the foundation for neighbourhood-level dialogue because investors' interests reign, community artists are welcomed to ignite an apparent process of dialogue and mutual understanding.[40] Wherever politics, due to neoliberal disinvestment in the public sector, fails to provide support structures for disenfranchised communities, socially engaged art projects – such as, potentially, the storytelling cafés – are encouraged to fill the void through producing dialogic encounters. Curatorial care is thus in the contradictory position of orienting itself towards the needs of its context (*Curaduría Útil*) while remaining independent from governmental or institutional instrumentalisation to close gaps in sociopolitical support networks, and thereby seeming to alleviate the government's or the institution's social responsibility towards the common good.[41]

Regarding instrumentalisation "in the name of care," we also have to address tokenism as a fault within the art sector. The predominantly White art sector, with its impetus to diversify, tends to invite practitioners from diverse backgrounds, in relation to their ethnic background, bodily abilities, or gender or sexual identity, to testify to an art institution's political correctness. However, these are most often symbolic acts that do not substantially alter the power relations within the organisation (but rather extract from the time and energy resources of a given community) and are commonly more concerned with propagating a certain public image than

39 Ibid., 333.

40 The 2017 Dietenbach Festspiele serves as an example. This initiative by the City Theater of Freiburg was intended to foster dialogue with the local communities, as a way to negotiate the tensions that arose between investors wanting to rebuild parts of what is currently a park, and the desire to have non-commercial green spaces throughout the city, and the pressures to build housing, as rents have become unaffordable for many inhabitants. I was invited to work on the project, responsible for the communication and publications. For more, see Theater Freiburg, "Dietenbach Festspiele," 2017, https://dietenbachfestspiele.wordpress.com/.

41 While the platform *ArteÚtil* has been conceived "to deal with issues that were once the domain of the state" (as is written on the online platform), I would caution *Curaduría Útil* against the seamless provision of support structures that fall within the realms of political and economic entities. The provision of support structures thus needs to be coupled with an activist mission of reminding – and holding accountable – public entities to fulfil their beneficial roles for the common good. For further reference, see Arte Ùtil (platform), accessed March 10, 2023, https://www.arte-util.org/about/colophon/.

about sincere infrastructural transformations towards diversity, equity, and inclusion. Such institutional practices of "care-washing" or "diversity washing" all too often in fact perpetuate the dominant power dynamics of predominantly White institutions, by presenting so-called marginalised voices as the exception to the norm.[42]

In light of institutional co-option, instrumentalisation, and tokenism, pursuing true infrastructural transformation – as compared to a symbolic, superficial, and self-congratulatory change – is critically important. While I argue that we have to address systemic issues with a systemic approach, and I defend the method of caring infrastructures as one such approach, we also have to take seriously the limits of such an understanding. The agency that individual or small-scale collective practices can derive will not be in a position to substantially alter the systemic inequalities and contradictions inherent to the capitalist economy or how care and the drive for a more just art sector is organised. Furthermore, the contradictions between the capitalist framework and the arts, in conjunction with the dominant conceptions around care, are amplified within the arts. Curatorial care can thus never be a societal fix.

At most, we can think of curating with care as producing micro-utopian spaces, as a *pre-enactments* of an otherwise, that sketch out alternative futures and build the relational foundation for it – but, paradoxically, only within the hegemonic parameters of the art field.[43] Artist Tania Bruguera's proposition of *Arte Útil* (useful art) can be seen as such a preliminary enactment of an otherwise that must yet find its permanent form:

> Although Useful Art may be like a pilot or beta program, where participants may experience how it feels to live in the world that is being proposed, it must be launched as something real. It should be shown/shared with those who may make it work in a long-term format, that is, the people who derive benefits from the proposal and who may take it to a more permanent state or existence.[44]

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42 For a foundational essay in relation to representation, power, and tokenism, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

43 As a performative practice, "pre-enactment" is about negotiating hypothetical future scenarios and possible realities in the context of performances. For further reading, see Adam Czirak, Sophie Nikoleit, Friederike Oberkrome, Verena Straub, Robert Walter-Jochum, and Michael Wetzels, eds., *Performance zwischen den Zeiten: Reenactments und Preenactments in Kunst und Wissenschaft* (Bielefeld. Germany: transcript, 2019).

44 Tania Bruguera, "Reflexiones sobre el Arte Útil," in *ARTE ACTUAL: Lecturas para un espectador inquieto*, edited by Yayo Aznar and Pablo Martinez (Madrid: CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, 2012), 194–97. My translation.

In light of the contradictions of curating, care, and the capitalist framework, curating with care as a feminist and queer vision may have to be regarded as a *project*, to speak in Sara Ahmed's words, who argues that feminism, and the negotiation of the relationship between women is, indeed, a project – "because we are not there yet."[45] This notion of not-there-yet is also found in the writings of queer cultural theorist José Esteban Muñoz, who articulates that "queerness is always in the horizon" as a way to inspire imaginations towards queer futurity.[46] A curatorial practice that truly enacts care in all its facets remains visible on the horizon, but we have not yet arrived. The glimpses of its vision are the driving motor of the quest for an art sector that not only speaks about care but that actualises it through its infrastructures.

6.4 Caring in Concert

Striving towards the horizons of curating with care as a lived practice, constructing caring infrastructures within the arts, must be a collective process. I therefore argue that one of the limits of building caring infrastructures is rooted in the solitary form it often takes. A solitary practice of curating with care is very likely to be confronted with resistance to change from institutions, funding bodies, museum boards, and decision-makers, as it entails challenging their positions of power and often their leadership teams' class privilege.[47] As an essentially relational approach, implementing caring infrastructures thus needs to be a collective process, one that is carried out in solidarity and alliance with other engaged practitioners, social networks, and movements in order to generate a truly transformative force. With this consideration in mind, I return to Mouffe's proposition of "acting in concert," whereby marginalised and disadvantaged groups will have to assemble their political strategies in order to undo the current hegemony. Through "chains of equivalence," Mouffe argues, allied democratic initiatives can collectively struggle against different forms of subordination and seek broader transformations of existing power relations.[48] This metaphor of chains resembles the infrastructural proposition of my research, as the assembly of small elements forms part of a larger process of transformation. Thereby, each individual element is of importance, but it is only in their alliance towards the goals of wider social struggles that the potential

45 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 14.

46 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 11.

47 Dimitrakaki and Shaked, "Feminism, Instituting, and the Politics of Recognition in Global Capitalism," 11.

48 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1985), xviii.

for radical political transformation can come to fruition.[49] Thinking along the lines of infrastructures and chains allows for a reframing of curatorial practice as one element of a larger mosaic which is dedicated to a counter-hegemonic rearticulation of the social sphere – and so one individual, one group, or one project alone can never be a sufficient force to do so. The success of this process therefore rests upon the ability to generate the necessary "peer pressure" within the artistic field to render institutional resistance to change unacceptable.

During my artistic directorship at M.1, I was already dedicated to practising in alliance with my colleagues, my curatorial and artistic collaborators, central figures from the community, and other institutions open to these kinds of dialogue, such as HKW in Berlin and HFBK Hamburg, yet I wasn't able to steadily position the project with a dense web of allied struggles. A possible reason for the programme's discontinuation in a strict sense may have stemmed from insufficient ties to other local and transregional allied initiatives, which could not be fostered in such a short period of time, particularly during a pandemic with social-distancing measures.[50] The wide range of possibilities for alliance – which has now reappeared – wasn't available to me when I began my curatorial initiative on care at M.1.

Since I began this research-creation project, central publications within the German-language realm have come to the fore, such as the anthology *Wirtschaft neu ausrichten. Care-Initiativen in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz* (Reorienting the Economy: Care Initiatives in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland), released in the spring of 2023, which maps the various established and new initiatives founded around care in German-speaking countries.[51] Together, the explored initiatives manifest what could easily be understood as "action in concert." While an anthology mapping such caring initiatives within the arts specifically is yet to be produced, publications and initiatives sitting at the intersection of art and care have upsurged in the recent years – in parallel to my academic research and curatorial practice. Of these, I wish to name a few central ones, as they point towards future directions of the field.

In 2021, the collective manifesto "How Not to Exclude Artist Parents" was published online in fifteen languages, articulating for a wide audience the needs of artists who are also caregivers.[52] The "Instituting Feminism" issue of *OnCurating*, from 2021, edited by Helena Reckitt and Dorothee Richter, brought special attention

49 Ibid., xiii.

50 For a discussion on the self-organised dis/continuation of the curatorial programme at M.1, see section 4.4 – "Dis/continuities."

51 Uta Meier-Gräwe, Ina Praetorius, and Feline Tecklenburg, eds. *Wirtschaft neu ausrichten: Care-Initiativen in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz* (Leverkusen-Opladen, Germany: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2023).

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

to feminists' demands for arts institution. This line of thinking is echoed in *Curating as Feminist Organising* from 2022, edited by Lara Perry and Elke Krasny.[53] The publication complements the anthology *Curating with Care* from 2023 (by the same editors), to which I was honoured to contribute one of twenty essays that shine light on the complex relationships among curating and care while situating it as a prominent discourse of contemporary art and curating.[54] Another central publication, released in late 2022, is Hettie Judah's book *How to Not Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*.[55] Despite being available only in an English edition so far, it created a moment of coming together for a range of care-interested cultural practitioners and existing initiatives as well as aided in forming new initiatives within Germany and Switzerland. During Judah's European book tour, representatives from several such initiatives met, learned about each other's existence, and networked. In the course of one of these events, I also learned about structural adjustments happening within arts funding in Switzerland, where Pro Helvetia (the Swiss arts council) has recently launched a research and funding scheme for art institutions interested in becoming more accessible to artists with caring responsibilities.[56] It was in this same period that I learned about the newly emerging platform kuk! (short for "kind und kunst," which translates to "kids and art") within the German-speaking realm.[57] Graphic designer and visual communicator Lucia Schmuck, as part of her MFA degree show, built this digital platform, which brings together fifteen art- and care-related initiatives from the visual artists, creative writing, theatre and the performing arts, among them Mehr Mütter für die Kunst (Hamburg), kind+kunst Berlin, k&k – Bündnis Kind und Kunst München, MATERNAL FANTASIES (Berlin), Other Writers Need to Concentrate e.V. (Leipzig), Bühnenmütter e.V. (Stage Moms, Berlin), Mothers*, Warriors, and Poets (Stuttgart), and Maternal Artistic Research Studio (Freiburg).[58] As part of the process of gaining attention for the issues around art and care, and tightened exchange and networking among care- and art-related initiatives and actors, I was invited to partake in curatorial and mentor positions for the Stuttgart- and Freiburg-based groups, where we respectively birthed the (almost parallel) exhibitions *Mothers*, Warriors, and Poets: Fürsorge als Widerstand* (Mothers*, Warriors, and Poets: Care as Resistance, StadtPalais Stuttgart, May

53 Elke Krasny and Lara Perry, eds. *Curating as Feminist Organizing* (London: Routledge, 2022).

54 Elke Krasny and Lara Perry, eds. *Curating with Care* (London: Routledge, 2023).

55 Hettie Judah, *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)* (London: Lund Humphries, 2022). Another relevant book, which was published in September 2023, is Bojana Kunst, *Das Leben der Kunst. Transversale Linien der Sorge* (Linz, Austria: Transversal Texts, 2023).

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

57 kuk! Kind und Kunst, initiated by Lucia Schmuck, accessed July 26, 2023, https://www.kindundkunst.org.

58 For a selection of art- and care-related networks, see the appendix.

18–July, 2023) and *Mythen von Müttern und anderen Monstern* (Myths of Mothers and Other Monsters, Kunstraum L6 Freiburg, May 6–July 2, 2023).[59] As an invited speaker to a variety of conferences and encounters – such as the symposia *Curating through Conflict with Care*, held at Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin, and *Art + Care. Care as Opportunity and Risk in the Contemporary Art Sector*," organised by Frauenkulturbüro NRW and the Landesverband Bildende Kunst of North Rhine-Westphalia, as well as the networking event "Art with Care," run by the Performing Arts Programme Berlin – I have been in the privileged position to witness firsthand the art field's current push towards feminist and care-centred approaches.[60]

The aforementioned kuk! platform also includes a collaborative initiative that I launched together with actors from existing art and care networks across Germany: the CARING CULTURE LAB. With this platform, we hope to contribute to the embracing and enacting of feminist care ethics and practices within the arts. Through it, we aim to bring together various cultural practitioners to consult, mentor, and accompany cultural institutions in their process of building caring infrastructures.[61] A mid-term goal for this initiative is to create a CARING CULTURE certificate (after a model established by the US-based organisation W.A.G.E., which seeks fair pay in the arts), which seeks to establish a new standard of caring accessibility for cultural institutions, particularly their residency programmes.[62] Thereby, we hope to

59 *Mothers*, Warriors, and Poets: Care as Resistance* featured artistic works by Anna Gohmert, Renate Liebel, Marie Lienhard, Anna Schiefer, and Julia Wirsching. See the art collective's website, accessed July 14, 2023, https://mothers-warriors-and-poets.net. *Myths of Mothers and Other Monsters* featured works by Hannah Kindler, Milena Naef, Sara-Lena Möllenkamp, and Sylvia Gaßner and was organised in curatorial collaboration by the artists Maternal Artistic Research Studio and the curator Hannah E. Weber and myself. See the art initiative's website, accessed July 14, 2023, http://mars-space.net.

60 Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, "Research Project and Symposium: Curating through Conflict with Care," curated by Maithu Bùi, Sophya Frohberg, Ayasha Guerin, Moshtari Hilal, and Duygu Örs, August 4–6, 2023, https://ngbk.de/de/programm/programm/curating-through-conflict-with-care; Performing Arts Programme Berlin, "Art with Care: A discussion and Networking Format," at Alte Feuerwache, Berlin, on October 9, 2023, https://pap-berlin.de/en/event/art-with-care; Landesverband Bildende Kunst of North Rhine-Westphalia, "Symposium: Kunst + Care. Fürsorge als Chance und Risiko im aktuellen Kunstbetrieb" (Art + Care. Care as Opportunity and Risk in the Contemporary Art Sector), June 6, 2023, https://www.labk.nrw/symposium-kunst-care-fuersorge-als-chance-und-risiko-im-aktuellen-kunstbetrieb/. Another relevant conference and networking event for independent initiatives around gender justice and care work within the (performing) arts was M2ACT × BURNING ISSUES, "Conference and Networking: Performing Arts & Action," September 15–17, 2023, https://m2act-x-burningissues-2023.events.migros-kulturprozent.ch/?lang=de.

61 See CARING CULTURE LAB, project website, accessed February 24, 2024, https://caringculturelab.org.

62 W.A.G.E., accessed July 10, 2023, https://wageforwork.com/wagency. Lucia Schmuck, as part of kuk! Kind und Kunst, designed a logo for the "caring culture certificate." Even though the

contribute to the creation of peer pressure among cultural institutions to join this movement and assume their caring responsibilities, including rendering their resistance to change unacceptable.

The path forward for a feminist curatorial practice towards care must continue the formation of coalitions that network art, care, and social justice. This can be achieved through, for example, regular networked exchanges and assemblies of feminist curators; closely knit exchanges between care- and art-related groups across regions and countries and language borders; and the further collaborative development of codes of conducts or manifestos – in line with the propositions for caring infrastructures.[63] This process could contribute to a more widespread acceptance of feminist curatorial methodologies for instituting otherwise – so that uncaring codes of conduct become widely unacceptable. While it is important to acknowledge regional differences when it comes to the cultural and legal frameworks that enable or hinder the creation of a more just art sector, it is of equal importance to connect with international initiatives so that we can learn from another and establish international standards for caring infrastructures within the arts.[64]

Such forms of exchange and networking can occur informally, too. Since many practitioners involved in care-based initiatives are caregivers and precariously positioned arts workers, it is important to acknowledge the limited capacity for unpaid activism and advocacy labour. The beginning of these networks might then be something as simple as informal group chats on messenger providers.[65] At first glance, these small gestures might lend themselves to the critique that they are "too soft," "not militant enough," and possibly "not radical enough" – critiques that I have also received in the past about my own curatorial programming as well as the artistic practices I have worked with (Image 62). It is true that many contemporary artistic and curatorial practices around care do not always aesthetically align with the

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certificate is not yet officially launched, its *pre-enactment* through its mere existence aids the political momentum to move the conversation towards care. See the kuk! Kind und Kunst website for further information, accessed July 20, 2023, https://www.kindundkunst.org.

63 See section 5.3 for the "Soft Manifesto for Caring Infrastructures."

64 An example of a regional network of caregivers in the arts is the UK-based network Art Working Parents Alliance. The national network formed to lobby in relation the legal frameworks under which they specifically operate, but they are open and connected with other regional groups, such as the CARING CULTURE LAB. For further information, see Art Working Parents Alliance, accessed July 26, 2023, https://artworkingparents.wordpress.com.

65 The Art Working Parents Alliance hosts an informal WhatsApp group chat; the Swiss network Kunst und Care hosts a Signal group chat; and the CARING CULTURE LAB launched a Telegram group chat for the German cultural landscape to connect cultural producers with and without caring responsibility in a space of solidarity towards collective action. For more information, see the websites of kuk! Kind und Kunst and Art Working Parents Alliance.

mediated images of the marching feminists of the 1970s who were taking domestic concerns to the streets, their fists raised to power. In contrast, contemporary art and care practices may appear colourful, joyful, welcoming, at times even humorous or maybe stubborn and defiant in their aesthetics. However, I argue that there is power in being subtly subversive, that there is power within informality and softness, with their possibility to touch and connect with others. Being consistent in demanding and building caring infrastructures and insistent regarding the ways in which we hold one another and our collaborating institutions accountable can be seen as a rhizomatic alliance that expands underground and tightens and surges up in unforeseen moments, with the aim to instil collective care.

Image 62: Collective exercise as part of the "Workshop on Time," facilitated by Myriam Lefkowitz, from the series "Care for Caregivers," M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

I argue that it is these defiant practices around care in all their variations – the soft, the unapologetic, the loud, the angry, the formal, and the informal – that can join in a transformative political alliance. The philosopher Nancy Fraser, in a very similar manner to Mouffe, makes the plea that "the dominated must construct a new, more persuasive common sense, or *counterhegemony*, a new more powerful po-

litical alliance."[66] For although a ubiquitous aim of activism is improving the conditions for caregiving, and therefore for social reproduction, the daily solutions, or workarounds, usually stay at the level of scattered individual concerns that do not attain "the level of a counter-hegemonic project to change the organisation of social reproduction."[67] Fraser analyses how some people speak out in favour of a shorter workweek while others advocate for universal basic income, for public childcare, for employees' rights in the profit-driven health sector. Some align in struggles around clean water, housing, and the environment. Ultimately, according to Fraser, all these concerns are wrestling to maintain and improve the foundations for care, for social reproduction. However, she critiques that these struggles are not yet aligned: "If it came to pass that these struggles did understand themselves in this way, there would be a powerful basis for linking them together in a broad movement for social transformation."[68]

Through the lens of this quotation, it again becomes evident how paramount care is as a vehicle for social transformation – not as a singular, diffracted activity but as a democratising, solidarity-driven "caring with." This research project has shown the manifold theoretical and practice-based strands within the arts, social science and arts and humanities research, and civil society that are struggling for the recognition of care in their respective fields, that advocate for structural justice for caregivers and care-receivers, that seek to de-romanticise and humanise care, as well as to de-capitalise and commonise it. I therefore want to describe our allied activities within the arts, research, and civil society as not only acting in concert but also *caring in concert*. This process of caring in concert encompasses the manifold collective efforts that centre care – making a chorus of the voices who not only advocate for care for themselves but also, in joining forces, enter into a relationship of care and solidarity towards one another. In this way, they collectively carry the responsibilities, burdens, and joys of caring for the movement. Here, care is simultaneously the point of departure, the path, and the goal of the transformative struggle.

66 Nancy Fraser, *The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born: From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump and Beyond* (London: Verso, 2019), 10.

67 Nancy Fraser, "Capitalism's Crisis of Care," *Dissent*, 2016, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/nancy-fraser-interview-capitalism-crisis-of-care.

68 Ibid.