

4. Curating with Care

Contemporary Approaches and Challenges

Building from the historical negotiations between curating, care, relationality, care ethics, and the larger feminist project, I seek to now carve out the more contemporary conversations around these fields. The aim is to provide context via both discourse and practice for my own participatory curatorial programming – which I curated as artistic director at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung in 2019–20. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to a detailed description of that curatorial programme, its concepts, formats, successes, and shortcomings.¹

Before we embark on a discursive and practice-based exploration of curating, care, relationality, hospitality, participation, and situatedness, I want to reflect on the relationship of curating with feminist practice. While curating exhibitions of women artists is what has most commonly been labelled as “feminist curatorial practice,” the definition of the relationship between gendered identities, feminist curating, and (feminist) care ethics is much more complex. Katy Deepwell emphasises the necessity to distinguish carefully between the category of “women’s art” – referring to artistic works produced by women – and the category of “feminist perspectives” within the arts, including art history, curating, and criticism, as “[w]here the content of an exhibition is art made by women, this does not of itself make the exhibition a feminist one.”² Deepwell further elaborates that exhibitions of women artists exhibitions have also been curated by male curators as well as through the self-organisation of women artists through social clubs and societies since the mid-nineteenth century.³ Additionally, within the contemporary art scene, which has a preponderance of women-dominated galleries and museums, Deepwell does not observe a particular commitment to showcasing women artist or putting forth feminist curatorial

1 See section 4.2 – “Care for Caregivers: Case Study of a Participatory Curatorial Programme on Care.”

2 Katy Deepwell, “Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s,” in *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, ed. Janet Marstine (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 68–69.

3 Ibid.

frameworks.⁴ Simply because a show was organised by women or included women's artworks does not mean it has a feminist ethics, conception, or impact, nor does it mean it meets a certain qualitative level of exhibition curation, one dedicated to advancing aesthetic, political, or social arguments.⁵ Deepwell therefore makes a case to define the feminist curation of women artists' work along the lines of feminist theory and feminist art history, such as how they are negotiated within the planning of the project, their reception in relationship to wider political debates, and the questions of the women's movement that the project raises.⁶ From this standpoint, feminist curating aims at carving out alternatives to "traditional (patriarchal) models of authorship, production and community," and thereby actively uncovers and challenges deeply entrenched societal patterns, as Dorothee Richter articulates.⁷

Elke Krasny has likewise pondered on the relationship between feminism and curation: how – and if at all – such a feminist curatorial practice could be defined. She reminds us that early curating appeared to have been disengaged from politics and social movements, but that curatorial practice has always been part of "(critically addressing) the politics of how art and culture are produced, shown, mediated, analyzed, and made public."⁸ Krasny stresses that both feminist thought and curatorial practice and thought are inseparable from political and social questions:

It is specifically the feminist turn in curating that foregrounds how feminist thought needs to address the politics of curating. Feminist thought provides the methods of analysis in working out how curating is responding to specific historic conditions and how curating does or does not address the social changes wrought by feminism within these specific historic conditions. Curating as a social practice is part of the historic conditions which feminism seeks to change.⁹

While the question of feminist curating must remain an open one, requiring renegotiation for each specific context, these voices nonetheless suggest that the feminist quality of a curatorial undertaking does not come in the form of a disinterested ticking of boxes (e.g., quotas) but through a dedication in thought, practice, and methodology to wider feminist societal struggles.

4 Ibid., 65.

5 Ibid., 68–69.

6 Ibid.

7 Dorothee Richter, "Feministische Perspektiven des Kuratorischen/auf das Kuratieren," in *Zeichen/momente. Vergegenwärtigungen in Kunst Und Kulturanalyse*, ed. Sigrid Adorf and Kathrin Heinz (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019), 184.

8 Elke Krasny, "Feminist Thought and Curating: On Method," *OnCurating*, no. 26 (October 2015): 54.

9 Ibid.

I further argue that a curatorial practice's feminist spirit is closely aligned with its dedication to counter-hegemonic practices. Curator and writer Maura Reilly has thus coined the notion of "curatorial activism," as a form of feminist activism, as it is dedicated to establishing a "curatorial corrective" as a way to combat the "moral emergency in the art world."¹⁰ She demands a heightened representation of marginalised social groups, thereby addressing ongoing discrimination in gallery representation, auction price differentials, and inclusion in collections and exhibitions.¹¹ With her curatorial approach, Reilly aims to counter the hegemonic art system – including its histories, institutions, markets, and press – which continues to favour White male creativity over the exclusion of all others.¹² Curatorial activists thus actively go against the marginalisation of artists who are non-White, non-Euro-American, and non-male, including those who identify as women, feminist, and queer.¹³ By challenging the art system's status quo, its mechanisms and hierarchies, and by "promoting the margins over the centre," curatorial activists work towards a more inclusive art world, and society at large.¹⁴ For Reilly, her curatorial position is inseparable from her activism: "My driving force as a curator is therefore wholly activist; my aim is to be consistently counter-hegemonic."¹⁵

For myself as a practitioner who came to curating via an activist mission to enhance and connect caregivers through curating – as a caregiving practice – I connect with Reilly's social justice agenda. However, Reilly's approach is primarily conceptualised and applied within a rather traditional institutional art context. There, a shift towards diversification is certainly much needed; however, I believe it crucial to expand the notion of curatorial activism to include a much more situated and contextual practice – be it from within or outside museal spaces. Curatorial activism must embrace the ecosystem of the arts as a whole, including its workforce, its sociopolitical contexts, its collaborators, its contents, and its processes, in order to produce what I later present as "caring infrastructures."¹⁶

10 Maura Reilly, "What Is Curatorial Activism?," ARTnews, November 7, 2017, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/what-is-curatorial-activism-9271/>.

11 Ibid.

12 Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018), 21.

13 Ibid., 72.

14 Ibid., 21. For a critique of thinking along the lines of margins versus centre, see Angela Dimitrakaki, "From Space to Time: 'Situated Knowledges,' Critical Curating, and Social Truth," *OnCurating*, no. 53 (June 2022). For a more insurgent position towards rethinking the margins, see Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "From the Margins," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1994): 279–97.

15 Reilly, *Curatorial Activism*, 21.

16 See chapter 5 – "Caring Infrastructures: Roadmap for an Otherwise" for further elaboration of the concept.

The 2023 report of the newly formed US-based initiative Museums Moving Forward conveys a similar sentiment:

Art museums have experienced unprecedented strain and scrutiny in recent years. They have been called to reorient attention and resources toward diversity and equity, and museum workers have been calling for institutional interest in “social justice,” increasingly explored in museum programming, to be matched with commitments to changing internal practices and cultural legacies that prevent workers from doing their best work. Simply put, it is not enough to diversify the artists we are collecting or exhibiting; we must take better care of our people too.¹⁷

I thus argue that the “curatorial corrective” of curatorial activism needs to be an expansive counter-hegemonic practice that enacts curatorial care within a variety of facets – including the ethics, people, objects, processes, and infrastructures that form part of the given curatorial undertaking. Philosopher Meng-Shi Chen’s essay “Ethics of Curating” also builds from Reilly’s work, among that of other scholars of philosophy, art, and curating, and equates the question “What is the ethics of curating?” with asking not only “What is a curator?” but also “What kind of person do I want to be?” For curators, the definition of one’s own practice is thus very closely connected to the question of one’s personal ethics: “As in the case with other occupations, a professional ethic usually replaces personal ethics when an individual practices her profession; yet in curating, especially for independent curators, it is the personal ethic that becomes professionalized.”¹⁸

While curators within institutional employment follow predefined roles and duties that align with their work contracts, independent curators have nearly no formal prescription of conduct.¹⁹ Here, Chen emphasises the etymological origin of “curating” as “caring” or “care-taking practice” with its intersubjective and intimate relations that demand “an ethical interpellation and response.”²⁰ Also art historian Miguel Ángel Hernández-Navarro returns to curating’s original meaning to situate responsibility at the core of a curator’s professional role:

In a world where responsibility is questioned and has disappeared from the individual sphere, curators have the single duty of being responsible individuals. That is why curating is an ethical profession because, from the very etymology

17 Museums Moving Forward, “Report 2023: Workplace Equity and Organizational Culture in US Art Museums,” accessed February 24, 2024, <https://museumsmovingforward.com>.

18 Meng-Shi Chen, “Ethics of Curating,” *Curatography*, no. 5 (2021): <https://curatography.org/ethics-of-curating/>.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

of the term, its task is to take care and be in charge of things, “to be responsible for ‘things.’”²¹

As I showcase later on with more practice-based examples, artistic practices since the 1960s have become more and more ephemeral, socially engaged, and less object focused. Likewise, curatorial practice has become concerned with the responsibility not only for “things” but also for intersubjective relations within the wider ecosystem that span across artists, community and audience members, staff, founders, board members, the press, researchers, and many more. Following this thought, the historical emphasis on the “independence” of curators is taken *ad absurdum*, as the discipline at its core is interdependent and co-dependent – making the questions of curatorial ethics ever more pressing.

Due to these conceptual tensions, several feminist scholars have chosen to refer to themselves as “interdependent” or “co-dependent” curators rather than independent ones.²² This recognition is, ultimately, rooted within a feminist care ethics that advocates for the acknowledgement that all humans are interrelated and interdependent, all are vulnerable and fragile – and that all humans are caregivers and care-receivers at the same time.²³ These feminist ethical principles of care have become a central point of departure for a range of feminist, queer, and crip positions. Musician, performer, writer, and artist Johanna Hedva poetically proclaims in their letter to the political theorist Joan Tronto (as part of an editorial project by Rosario Talevi, Gilly Karjevsky, and myself in 2020), to which I return in the subsequent chapter:²⁴

I’m so tired, Joan. I am exhausted. I want to scream, “but independence does not exist!” and I want my voice to be the air. “We are by default interdependent! We are ontologically, always, forever dependent!” I want this little flame of an idea to creep into blood streams, get inside guts. People will breathe it in and feel their insides warm. The trick, of course, is that it’s already in there, we already know this, deep down, on a cellular level, that we are enmeshed, that a body is simply a thing that requires support, which means it requires support all the time. Behind our belly button, at the base of our skull, in the strings of our fascia, we know it: that care is simply another word for living. To be alive is to need care. To be alive is to give care and to take it, and the distinction between these two things is a shimmery, weightless boundary that easily disappears. But the

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- 21 Miguel A. Hernández-Navarro, “The Curator’s Demands: Towards an Ethics of Commitment,” *Manifesta*, no. 12 (2012): 7.
 - 22 For example see: Cité des Arts Paris, “Appointment: Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez Appointed Cultural Programmes Manager,” 2021, <https://www.citedesartsparis.net/en/news-appointment-natasa-petresin-bachelez-cultural-programmes-manager>.
 - 23 Joan Tronto, *Caring Democracy* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 30–31.
 - 24 Sascia Bailer, Gilly Karjevsky, and Rosario Talevi, eds. *Letters to Joan* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt; Hohenlockstedt: M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, 2020).

idea that we are sovereign, able agents of our own self-actualized telos holds us in its arms, with an embrace like a chokehold.²⁵

With their call for a recognition of our enmeshed being, Hedva hits the heart of what the ethics of care are commonly defined as:

Normatively, care ethics seeks to maintain relationships by contextualizing and promoting the well-being of care-givers and care-receivers in a network of social relations. Most often defined as a practice or virtue rather than a theory as such, “care” involves maintaining the world of, and meeting the needs of, ourself and others.²⁶

Tronto, the receiver of Hedva’s poetic declarations, argues for a feminist ethics of care as a central democratic principle, as any state is reliant on its citizens, who are “produced and reproduced through care.”²⁷ Since the 1980s, Tronto has offered ways to make the concepts, ethics, and practices of care more tangible and has proposed four phases of care, which she later amended with a fifth phase of “caring with.”²⁸ In this final phase, Tronto argues, the caring needs and the ways in which they are met need to be consistent with democratic commitments to justice, equality, and freedom for all.²⁹ She further elaborates: “The goal of such practices is to ensure that all of the members of the society can live as well as possible by making the society as democratic as possible. This is the essence of ‘caring with.’”³⁰ Feminist care ethics, within this account, are therefore understood as a specifically care-centred framework for processes of transformation within the arts and society.

From this position, feminist care ethics as a framework for social transformation allow for an understanding of curating with care as a political, democratising, activist activity – of “caring with” – that rests in the recognition of our interdependen-

25 Johanna Hedva, “Dear Joan,” in *ibid.*, 66.

26 Maureen Sander-Staudt, “Care Ethics,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (peer-reviewed), accessed May 11, 2023, <https://iep.utm.edu/care-ethics/>.

27 Joan Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 26.

28 The first four phases are: “1. Caring about: At this first phase of care, someone or some group notices unmet caring needs. 2. Caring for: Once needs are identified, someone or some group has to take responsibility to make certain that these needs are met. 3. Care-giving: The third phase of caring requires that the actual caregiving work be done. 4. Care-receiving: Once care work is done, there will be a response from the person, thing, group, animal, plant, or environment that has been cared for. Observing that response and making judgments about it [...] is the fourth phase of care.” *Ibid.*, 22–23.

29 *Ibid.*, 23.

30 Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 30.

cies and the need to co-constitute processes of solidarity and of commoning care.³¹ In an effort to care-with, relational curating serves as a critical practice of caring for support structures and artistic and sociopolitical processes that foster caring alliances – and thereby counters hegemonic patterns of relating to one another. Particularly within the intricate framework of socially engaged practices, care is a matter that feminist curators and artists cannot shy away from.

In building from both Tronto's ethics of care and Reilly's approach of curatorial activism, Elke Krasny proposes the notion of "caring activism," which interweaves curatorial activism with feminist care theory.³² This approach is concerned with the political dimension of public space and the ways in which the museum, as the shelter of (art) collections and the host of assemblies of people, can become truly public – where access is no longer bound to nation-states, gender, or class.³³ Basing her approach on a feminist ethics of care also allows Krasny to frame curating as always co-dependent; caring curating, then, is "a form of activism that works with the politics of such co-dependencies, and renders them legible."³⁴ Making curatorial decisions, to attend to the well-being of both the caregivers and the care-receivers, is what makes interdependent curating a simultaneously ethical and political practice. A curatorial practice that is rooted in care ethics thereby also shifts the boundaries of what is commonly considered a private concern and embraces those matters as

31 Manuela Zechner, *Commoning Care & Collective Power: Childcare Commons and the Micropolitics of Municipalism in Barcelona* (Linz, Austria: Transversal Texts, 2021). For further engagement with this notion of caring-with as a democratising and transformative vehicle for the arts, see chapter 5 – "Caring Infrastructures: Roadmap for an Otherwise."

32 When I speak of feminist care theory, I primarily refer to the approach laid out by Tronto, as established in the introduction. Further central voices of the feminist care ethics discourse include Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013); Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

33 Elke Krasny, "Caring Activism. Assembly, Collection, and the Museum," *Collecting in Time* (2017), 9, <https://collecting-in-time.gfzk.de/en>. Published in conjunction with the symposium of the same title, GfZK – Museum of Contemporary Art Leipzig, March 30–31, 2017.

34 Ibid., 3.

public ones.³⁵ Taking up Chen and Hernández-Navarro's formulation,³⁶ Tronto also regards concerns of care as intricately connected with concerns of responsibility:

The task of a democratic politics is to affix responsibility, and as we come to recognize the centrality of care for living a decent human life, then the task of democratic politics needs to be much more fully focused upon care responsibilities: their nature, their allocation, and their fulfilment.³⁷

As I explore in upcoming chapters, feminist care ethics can serve as a moral compass for transformation processes within artistic and curatorial practices; they point in *what direction* and *how* rearticulations of the status quo within the arts should occur – and thereby build the theoretical underpinning to the construction of caring infrastructures.³⁸

As the multiple discursive strands around feminist curating and care ethics have shown, the notion of “curating with care” does not stand for *one* particular approach to curating; rather, it serves as an umbrella term for a range of feminist, queer, activist, and socially engaged practices. Thus, taking serious Tronto's care ethical formulations, we, as feminist curators – who are cognizant of our professions etymological root in care – have to articulate in thought and practice, how we can attend responsibly to matters of care from our respective position of power.³⁹

35 Tronto argues that questions of care should not be considered private issues but rather acknowledge as a political concern of every democracy: “To take caring seriously as a kind of political concern upsets many of the starting premises of contemporary life in democratic societies. Because entrenched patterns of thought scripted care as a private matter, to include care as a public concern upsets the distinction between public and private life.” Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 143.

36 For Chen and Hernández-Navarro's formulation in regard to curating and responsibility, see chapter 4 – “Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges.”

37 Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 30.

38 For the role of feminist care ethics within transformation processes within the arts, see section 5.1 – “Thinking-with Joan Tronto: In Search of Caring Infrastructures.”

39 Moving forward, I present a selection of curatorial approaches engaging with care that serve as a theoretical and conceptual framing for my own curatorial practice, which I introduce in the subsequent chapter. Once I introduce the theoretical foundations and my practice-based curatorial project in section 4.2, I then formulate, in section 5.2.1 – “Practice-led Propositions towards Building Caring Infrastructures,” the notion of caring infrastructures, which I regard as an expansion of the presented feminist approaches to curating with care.

4.1 On Practising-With: Situating One's Practice in Relation to Others

As approaches to curatorial care are never fixed, granted, nor universally applicable, feminist curators have to articulate what “curating with care” means for their specific context, and they have to continuously renegotiate this understanding within its respective web of relations and power dynamics. I thus want to retrace this thought process for myself to contextualise my practice, thinking, and self-understanding as a curator and to explore how my approach of curatorial care relates to other practices in the field.

In February 2019, one month into my artistic directorship at M.1, I made a note to myself about how I aimed to situate myself as a curator both in the local community and in relation to rather traditional conceptualisations of curatorial practices. I regard this note as a writing exercise, in which I attempted to articulate what my approach to curating with care could entail in its specific context.

As a curator in Hohenlockstedt, I want to provide a platform which consists of a physical site of encounter but also to provide a social framework that allows different groups to gather, exchange ideas, and negotiate the current problematics around care work and to envision more just futures! My role is not to predetermine the content, the learning outcomes, or the event outcomes; I want to provide a social and in part physical architecture – a framework – that allows for these conversations to happen. In the literal sense, as a curator I also see myself as a caretaker of public and intimate discussions on care work and I want to find ways to foster, enhance, connect, and share these conversations and practices. In this, I draw a connection to the traditional role of a curator who sought to gather, (re)compose, and share objects/artworks; but I specifically focus on social processes. Objects, and therefore exhibitions with objects, are not my focus – they only become relevant when they speak to a social process out of which they emerged or to which they speak. In this setup, the social and political focus of an artwork or initiative is key, using artistic outlets as ways to communicate, engage, and politicise diverse audiences or to envision more just futures. This approach has an activist notion to it: it seeks to provoke, shine light on, and alter the current circumstances. The alliances between everyday practices of local residents, regional politics, and cultural institutions and cultural workers are what makes it a relevant vehicle for social transformation.

My curatorial approach is also highly research focused. It is embedded in a dense web of scholarly, artistic, and curatorial work, which makes my work reflective and responsive to historical and current discourses. It also means that I take time to listen to the local population, to test ideas, to make propositions, to gain trust, and to collectively build upon this. This also comes with the challenge to not only come up with a rather low-key programme in order to “welcome everyone” but also to develop a sensitivity for what works and what doesn't within a local context, and to choose the right moment of when to challenge the community with alternative concepts, aesthetics, and interventions.

In this whole process, I am absolutely dependent on others, on existing networks, on existing social groups and community, and on the goodwill of engaged individuals “to take me into

their community.” Without these “informants,” I wouldn’t be able to make the propositions that I aim to make. This dependence is very important, as it makes my practice humble and a genuine community practice. It is nothing I can do by myself – I can listen, converse, propose – but the community defines the process and eventually the outcomes, too. This requires quite a bit of flexibility in the programme, one has to stay flexible and open-minded enough to change the programme along the way if the community doesn’t seem to catch on to it. If the workshops are never fully booked, the responses are mediocre, then we have to find other solutions . . . it is an open-ended, radically relational process.⁴⁰

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of my academic pathway and my then recent entry into the curatorial field with a dedication to social processes, I experienced a sensation of feeling out of sync with, or even of rejecting, the term “curator” as a self-description. This hesitation to identify with the term “curator” was also echoed by the socially engaged artist collective ruangrupa, who were invited to curate documenta fifteen (June 18 to September 25, 2022) in Kassel: “We also had an uneasiness with calling ourselves curators and we avoided the term when we could.”⁴¹

To me, it seemed that “curator” served as a categorisation for the purpose of allowing an external person to understand what I was doing, but it didn’t align with my own understanding of my practice. Part of the process of becoming-a-feminist-curator, and identifying as such, included the acknowledgement that my approach of a socially engaged, relational practice was a legitimate curatorial practice, as it formed part of a wider movement in artistic and curatorial discourse and practice that allowed for an expansion of the understanding of a curator’s role. The process of becoming-a-feminist-curator thus needs to be traced and made transparent as a collaborative endeavour that is indebted to a range of influential practitioners and scholars. For this, I want us to recall Sara Ahmed’s notion of a “companion text,” which builds on Donna Haraway’s notion of “companion species.” For Ahmed, a companion text is “a text whose company enabled you to proceed on a path less trodden.”⁴² This notion creates a compelling image of intergenerational, affective, and relational support networks between the researcher and the thinking and writing of others – a metaphorical image that also speaks to feminist curatorial relations. This idea of companionship is closely aligned to the notion of thinking-with, also put forth by Haraway, which Maria Puig de la Bellacasa further developed into the notion of writing-with. For Puig de la Bellacasa, this concept creates collectivity through the process of thinking and knowing, thereby countering “the figure of a

40 Field note, January 25, 2019.

41 ruangrupa, in an interview by Kate Brown, “‘Risks Come with the Concept’: Documenta 15’s Curators Reflect on a Controversial, History-Making Show,” artnet, 2022, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/documenta-15-ruangrupa-2179250>.

42 Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 16.

lone thinker.”⁴³ She also describes the processes of thinking-with and writing-with as processes of care, where collective and accountable knowledge creation takes place, and where we can “explore ways of taking care for the unavoidably thorny relations that foster rich, collective, interdependent, albeit not seamless, thinking-with.”⁴⁴

As someone who now understands herself as a feminist curator, I am interested in shifting from the entangled spheres of thinking-with and writing-with that inform our discourses to an understanding of practising-with that highlights the multiple companionships, “the company one chooses to keep,”⁴⁵ the sources of inspirations, and the friendships that accompany, support, nourish, and co-shape our curatorial practices. The notion of practising-with allows for a fruitful engagement with other practitioners with whom we might entertain real-life or spiritual companionship, making transparent our sources of inspiration while not shying away from dissenting with and diverging from their positions or perspectives.

In the following section, I carve out intersecting thematic clusters central to contemporary feminist and socially engaged curatorial practices “with care,” such as relationality, ephemeral processes, and feminist and counter-hegemonic engagements. Each section, centring on the thematic foci of each cluster, contains a selection of practitioners, projects, and thinkers with whom my curatorial project shares a spirit of alignment and companionship, with whom I consider my curatorial work to be in practice-with. This contextual framing – with its situating in thought and in practice of my curatorial programming at M.1 – is followed by a description of the locality of Hohenlockstedt, the concepts and formats of the programming, its ambitions, and its possible shortcomings in the second half of the chapter.⁴⁶

4.1.1 On Situating, Radical Relations, and Useful Curating

Curator Megan Johnston’s notion of “slow curating” greatly influenced the development of my participatory curatorial work in Hohenlockstedt. For Johnston, the socially engaged curatorial approach of slow curating

43 Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, “‘Nothing Comes without Its World’: Thinking with Care,” *Sociological Review* 60 (2012): 203.

44 Ibid., 205.

45 Céline Condorelli builds from Hannah Arendt’s notion of “company” and complicates this idea for the field of art and architecture. See Céline Condorelli and Avery F. Gordon, “The Company We Keep: A Conversation with Céline Condorelli and Avery F. Gordon. Part One,” how to work together, 2013, <https://howtoworktogether.org/think-tank/celine-condorelli-the-company-we-keep-a-conversation-with-avery-f-gordon-part-one/>.

46 I introduce my curatorial practice in chapter 4 – “Care for Caregivers: A Case Study of a Participatory Curatorial Programming on Care.”

consciously and directly connects to the context and in particular to notions of the local, employs relational and collaborative processes, and in doing so reaches out to diverse communities. It is not necessarily about time, although it is temporal in terms of relationships. Rather, the process involves a meaningful and deep understanding of the immediate context, working with local experts to learn about the cultural politics and poetics of place, and exploring conscious and unconscious issues that affect everyday life.⁴⁷

In this scenario, it is important to allow for sufficient time to engage with place and people and to encourage “open-ended proposals and outcomes that can be decided by different people and at different times in the process.”⁴⁸ In doing so, the demarcations of curatorial and educational work are deliberately softened. At M.1, I too, carved out spaces of assembly that not only blurred the boundaries between educational, artistic, and curatorial frameworks but which also fostered open-ended processes and time periods in which no public programming would take place, where a meaningful engagement with the local community could unfold, in order to gain a sincere understanding of my immediate, everyday context. Such socially engaged approaches to curating contain the potential to challenge the boundaries between the art institution and its immediate environment. A relational, situated curatorial practice thereby transcends the merely art institutional realm by building relationships across communities and contexts. The relational webs that span between the involved artists, the participants, and the wider community create a social space that makes architectural boundaries fade into the background while foregrounding human relations and interactions.⁴⁹ According to the art theorist Nina Möntmann, arts-based social spaces function as partial publics which are dynamic, heterogeneous, and temporary, turning the museum’s walls into “porous membranes” and thereby squeezing artistic actions out into the local political and cultural space.⁵⁰

From this position, a relational and situated curatorial practice expands from the site of the museum (or art institution), producing a rippling effect that spills over into the sociopolitical realm of a given site. Elke Krasny proposes the figure of the “urban curator,” a contextualised practitioner whose work can “take on the form of art, of communication, of building, of discourse, of community organizing, of legal action, of supportive self-organization, of exhibition making, of protest, or of

47 Megan Johnston, “Slow Curating: Re-thinking and Extending Socially Engaged Art in the Context of Northern Ireland,” *OnCurating*, no. 24 (December 2014): 26.

48 Ibid.

49 Nina Möntmann, *Kunst als sozialer Raum: Andrea Fraser, Martha Rosler, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Renée Green* (Cologne: Walther König, 2002).

50 Ibid., 10.

any other form relevant to the case at hand.”⁵¹ Due to the contextual nature of urban curating, Krasny frames it as a radical relational practice. The idea of a “radically relational practice” that exceeds the realm of the art institution had become central to my practice; however, it was not situated in an urban but rather a rural context. For Krasny, urban curating is entrenched in “the aesthetic and political consciousness of solidarity” and is sincerely aligned with wider social justice struggles of the given context.⁵² In the context of my curatorial programme at M.1, the focus was not on “the mere representation of social relations.”⁵³ Instead, I sought to create a foundation for intervening in the social fabric and practising solidarity with existing social movements, as put forth by the art mediator and curator Nora Sternfeld in her approach of post-representational curating.

The need to respond and act in meaningful alliance with wider social struggles also resonates with artist’s Tania Bruguera’s proposition to regard art as a “useful tool,” as a device for exploring possibilities to transform society through and with the arts. In Bruguera’s approach of *Arte Útil* (useful art), which has spawned a collaborative platform of the same name (under the direction of Bruguera and curator Alistair Hudson), artistic practice should meet a number of criteria:

- 1) Propose new uses for art within society
- 2) Use artistic thinking to challenge the field within which it operates
- 3) Respond to current urgencies
- 4) Operate on a 1:1 scale
- 5) Replace authors with initiators and spectators with users
- 6) Have practical, beneficial outcomes for its users
- 7) Pursue sustainability
- 8) Re-establish aesthetics as a system of transformation.⁵⁴

51 Elke Krasny, “Urban Curators at Work – A Real-Imagined Historiography,” in *Planning Unplanned – Towards a New Positioning of Art in the Context of Urban Development*, ed. Barbara Holub and Christine Hohenbüchler (Vienna: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2015), 120.

52 Ibid.

53 Giulia Palladini and Nora Sternfeld, “Taking Time Together. A Posthumous Reflection on a Collaborative Project, and Polypragmatic Disobedience. A Dialogue between Giulia Palladini and Nora Sternfeld,” *CuMMA PAPERS #6* (Helsinki: CuMMA, 2014), 1–2. For further reading in relation to queer and feminist curating that is closely aligned with social movements, I recommend Krasny, Lingg, Fritsch, Bosold, and Hofmann, *Radicalizing Care*.

54 *Arte Útil* (platform), accessed March 10, 2023, <https://www.arte-util.org/about/colophon/>.



Image 14: Customers about to enter HOMEBAKED's communal bakery in Liverpool. Photo: Arte Útil Platform.

Part of the platform of “useful art” is the artist-led participatory project HOMEBAKED, spearheaded by Rotterdam-based artist Jeanne van Heeswijk. Her work involves a sincere dedication to eye-level collaboration with the community she is collaborating with, oftentimes with the goal of a self-determined continuation of the project by members of the community. The HOMEBAKED project, begun in 2010 as part of the Liverpool Biennale, is situated in an area of the city that had been labelled a “market failure” and became the subject of a government-backed renewal plan, which saw a large number of residential and commercial properties demolished to make way for new homes – a plan that stagnated in the economic recession of 2008, leaving the community in limbo.⁵⁵ The artist initiative asked “how the local community could take matters into their own hands regarding the development of their neighbourhood and a common future.”⁵⁶ In 2012, the Homebaked Community Land Trust was born with the goal of refurbishing an old bakery building to provide

55 Homebaked – Community Land Trust, “Story,” accessed February 24, 2024, <https://homebaked.org.uk/about-us/story/>.

56 Jeanne van Heeswijk, “Projects: Homebaked Bakery, Liverpool, Jan 2012,” accessed February 24, 2024, https://www.jeanneworks.net/projects/homebaked_bakery/.

a space for community, a workspace for social enterprise, and affordable housing (Image 14). Today, the bakery is a self-sustaining cooperative business “offering local jobs, great food, a place for many different communities to meet and exchange – as well as a way to invest into the local economy for community benefit.”⁵⁷ The challenge, which was achieved in this example, is to insert artistic and curatorial action into a community context and to make it self-sustaining, thereby going beyond the temporary framework of arts funding.



Image 15: Margit Czenki and Christoph Schäfer using the lockdown moment to restore the otherwise heavily used tulip-patterned tartan field Tulpenfeld by Nesrin Bigün in Park Fiction. © Park Fiction Archiv 2020.

Another long-term, locally situated, arts-based practice of resistance within a gentrifying neighbourhood is that of the Hamburg-based artist duo Margit Czenki and Christoph Schäfer. Similarly to Heeswijk’s dedication to shifting processes of depletion or gentrification, the two artists seek to strengthen the local community through radically participatory formats that inspire a different vision of the future – one that attends to the needs and desires of the community rather than the preferences and logics of investors and financial markets. Hence, their processes are preceded by sessions of active listening, of reaching into the communities at stake to gain an understanding of their desires. Czenki and Schäfer call this process *Kollek-*

57 Homebaked – Community Land Trust, “Story,” accessed February 24, 2024. <https://homebaked.org.uk/about-us/story/>.

tive Wunschproduktion (collective desiring production).⁵⁸ However, the artists seem to understand these processes of activation not as a diffuse “stimulus to participation” but rather as “an attempt to make private and subjective desires publicly expressible and negotiable as politically relevant statements,” as the art mediator and scholar Wanda Wieczorek elaborates.⁵⁹ *Kollektive Wunschproduktion* is therefore seen as an artistic method to translate a multitude of individual perspectives into a collectively designed form.

Czenki and Schäfer’s work, together with many actors from the arts as well as civil society, aggregates around the ongoing initiative Park Fiction (established 1994), in Hamburg’s heavily gentrified neighbourhood of St. Pauli. The park was collectively fought for and communalised as the area’s last public greenspace – after the city had already promised it to investors for a large-scale building project. The public park was collectively envisioned through the process of *Kollektive Wunschproduktion* and was successfully brought into existence through years of resistance.⁶⁰ In this process, the artists, however, do not consider themselves to be “service deliverers” to the community, whereby the members could expect their wants to be fulfilled by others. Rather, they created a framework – rooted in radical pedagogy and leftist research methods – that would enable the community members to collectively self-organise to strive to realise their desires. For example, due to the high degree of impoverished community members, a vacation spent under palm trees was not an option many had – and, so, a desire to include such an element in the park emerged in the collective process. Today, the park is known for its metal palm trees that overlook the Elbe river and harbour, inviting community members and guests to indulge in the sensation of hammocking under palm trees (Image 15), while lending itself to a constant reinterpretation of its symbols.

The Park Fiction initiative serves as an international example of grassroots activism that spans artistic and political methods to resist gentrification and to build a leisure space for the common good. In the spirit of practising-with, I have learned from Czenki and Schäfer’s approach to depart from and collectivise around everyday struggles and to use artistic methods to democratise public engagement and decision-making processes for the public good.

Another approach to these concepts is the curatorial, quasi-grassroots initiative is InSite/Casa Gallina (2013–18), which was similarly dedicated to long-term

58 Their notion of *Kollektive Wunschproduktion* references philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who favor the idea of *desire* as a productive force rather than as a responsiveness based on lack. For more, see Park Fiction, “Kollektive Wunschproduktion,” accessed February 24, 2024, <https://park-fiction.net/kollektive-wunschproduktion/>.

59 Wanda Wieczorek, in Park Fiction, “Kollektive Wunschproduktion.” My translation.

60 For an overview of the project and its development over time, see Park Fiction, “Park Fiction: An Introduction in English,” accessed February 24, 2024, <https://park-fiction.net/park-fiction-introduction-in-english/>.

community engagement and artistic collaboration. Under the artistic direction of Josefa Ortega and Osvaldo Sánchez, the five-year project focused on the traditional neighbourhood of Santa María la Ribera in Mexico City. While the project officially wrapped in 2018, it continues today in another form under the artistic direction of Ortega, but without the institutional affiliation with InSite, a public arts organisation. Since its inception, the Casa Gallina itself has lain at the heart of the project. Casa Gallina is a house that functions as a community centre, conceptualised and built for and with the communities in which it is located (Image 17). Still today, it also hosts a small chicken coop (Images 16).⁶¹



Image 16: Casa Gallina's community garden in Mexico City, with its name-giving chicken coop at the far end, 2022. Photo: Sascia Bailer.



Image 17: Casa Gallina's interior provides space for informal encounter, reading, workshops, and shared meals, 2022. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

The programme during their first five years had three conceptual pillars: through “Co-participations,” artists were commissioned to produce new works in the context of long-term residencies; “Saberes” [Knowledges] was an educational platform that included a community garden, workshops, and training for professional development; and “Synergies” intended to forge alliances between the different local

61 Pablo Lafuente, ed., *Experiences of the Common Good: InSite/Casa Gallina, a Project Immersed in a Neighborhood* (Mexico City: InSite/Casa Gallina, 2018).

and regional actors and artists.⁶² Art theorist Nina Möntmann describes Casa Gallina as an alternative infrastructure that “responds flexibly to specific local contexts and permits informal approaches and organizational processes that allow a maximum of participation.”⁶³ This notion is reflected in the way the project’s work processes are organised, which are non-hierarchical and operate without assistants. Many team members come from the *barrio* itself, resources are sourced locally, and shared lunches are prepared collectively. Möntmann concludes her observation: “Everyone is responsible for this, giving rise to a natural flow of attention, of taking care and looking after one another. At Casa Gallina, the ‘care of the self’ is extended to the communal ‘we.’”⁶⁴

InSite/Casa Gallina’s multifaceted approaches to collaboration between artists and community members, their collective food production and shared meals, and their sense of hospitality at the Casa Gallina, as a centre for non-hierarchical encounters, were all very influential to my own curatorial practice.⁶⁵ I took inspiration from the ways in which Ortega and Sanchez set the curatorial in service of the local community’s needs, thereby enabling long-term exchanges and alliances between local, regional, and international artists, researchers, residents, and other diverse agents. Reflecting on the conceptual principles they had to establish for the project and the difficulties that arose from countering the entrenched *modus operandi* of the art world, Sanchez in conversation with Ortega shares:

But we knew that the type of commitment that we aspired to would go through an emotional entanglement, through the complex requirements of an ethics of care, and that this is the proto-political framework *sine qua non* of any collective intention for change.⁶⁶

62 Nina Möntmann, “Withdrawal into the Public Sphere: InSite/Casa Gallina as a Model of Hospitality and Alternative Infrastructures,” in Lafuente, ed., *Experiences of the Common Good*, 238.

63 Ibid., 240.

64 Ibid.

65 After the first iteration of Casa Gallina (2013–18), the project continued independently from the arts organisation InSite Mexico, with the funding support of the German Schöpfung Stiftung. Today, Casa Gallina remains active and publicly accessible under the artistic directorship of Josefa Ortega. In February 2021, I was able to visit Casa Gallina and speak with Ortega in the framework of a research collaboration with InSite Mexico (funded by the South, West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council). Due to the ongoing pandemic, I was not able to witness any live programming but I visited the space and learned about the organisation’s new programming, which, in its second iteration, has a greater focus on environmental justice. For more information, see the project website of Casa Gallina at <https://casagallina.org.mx>.

66 Pablo Lafuente, in conversation with Josefa Ortega and Osvaldo Sánchez, “Network Imaginaries: Neighborhood, Affects and the Politics of Locality,” in Lafuente, ed., *Experiences of the Common Good*, 156.

The statement showcases that, even if the cited artistic and curatorial frameworks did not focus on care as a theme, they must unavoidably deal with the ethics of care as a mode of social engagement, hospitality, and collectivity – and must build lowered barriers of access and foreground activities that centre on the needs and desires of the community rather than institutional or external logics. The relational nature of these situated practices, which require a sincere engagement with one's immediate context, rely not only on prolonged commitment but also on emotional entanglements and openness to transformative processes, which require oneself to be affected, touched, as well.

These artistic and curatorial examples can thus be understood as radically relational practices within the rubric of urban curating, according to the notion put forth by Krasny. Yet, I argue, their geographic locality isn't the defining metric of their radical relationality; rather, it is their methodology of engagement, their sincere situatedness within their communities' everyday struggles, and their counter-hegemonic spirit that seeks to retain agency within the hands of the many. A socially engaged curatorial practice – whether situated within a rural, suburban, or urban context – requires conscious engagement with its immediate context and a heightened sensitivity to the communal and spatial environment of one's practice, and it must be in alignment with wider social movements. Hence, whether the sites of encounter are disenfranchised parts of London, Mexico City, or rural Germany, they can be summarised as, to borrow anthropologist Anna Tsing's phrase, "out-of-the-way places." Tsing's notion, presented in the text "From the Margins," thereby opens a way out of the rural/urban dichotomy, offering a way to reframe locally situated practices as a political act in reclaiming their "marginality."⁶⁷

Expanding from Tania Bruguera's notion of *Arte Útil* and the above-explored situated and radically relational artistic practices that aim to make useful contributions to the wider community, I want to suggest the notion of *Curaduría Útil* (useful curating). This relational curating approach can likewise respond to social urgencies by coming closer to the lived realities of the community; by challenging the working mechanisms of the arts through a critical curatorial activism; by turning audiences into users; and by imbuing curatorial practice with a sociopolitical purpose. *Curaduría Útil*, then, can be understood as a socially engaged curatorial practice that is sensitive to its immediate environment, that is committed to producing caring processes of co-creation with the community at stake, and which challenges the hierarchies of participation, seeking to co-produce its processes at eye-level and according to a feminist ethics of care. This effort aims to make curatorial practice *useful* for social struggles and movements and to remove it from the inaccessible spheres of the art market, high-end galleries, and elitist museums. Intentionally engaging

67 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "From the Margins," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1994): 280.

with the situated context in a useful manner is considered a form of curatorial care-taking for sociopolitical concerns that builds a foundation for the construction of caring infrastructures – a notion to which I will return later.⁶⁸ *Curaduría Útil* must be understood as a relational, contextual practice that is inseparable from wider social (justice) movements and which, through artist-led processes, fruitfully links local, situated experiences to wider sociopolitical matters.

A possible contrast between *Arte Útil* and *Curaduría Útil* might lie in the role of useful curating to establish support structures that not only enable community encounters and the addressing of societal issues but also provide the conditions for social practice artists to bring their works into being. In such a scenario, useful art and useful curating go hand in hand, as their incentive is rooted within care for the community's needs. Bruguera further elaborates: "useful art is about transforming people's lives, even on a small scale."⁶⁹ If this holds to be true, then useful curating creates the conditions for these transformative community- and arts-based processes to emerge and to be sustained. Useful curating assumes responsibility for the creation of support structures ("caring infrastructures") for both communities and arts to flourish in meaningful ways (meaningful here is not defined by the markets but rather by whatever enhances meaning within a community's own framework of reference). We thus arrive at an understanding of relational curating as a practice that unfolds its caring capacities in actualising its meaningful and useful responsiveness and support structures within its immediate environment – a notion, which I aimed to embrace as artistic director 2019–20 at M.1 in rural Northern Germany.⁷⁰

4.1.2 In Lieu of Art Objects: On Process, Ephemerality, and Improvisation

The larger turn toward relationality, assembly, and encounter within the arts has newly legitimised what were formerly alternative curatorial practices. The rise of community-oriented, relational approaches to art and curating as well as discursive and practical shifts within the curatorial field posit new challenges for curators, as their work often consists of process-based and ephemeral encounters that do not produce art objects in a traditional sense. To understand exhibitions, or public moments of display, as testimonials of social processes redirects the hegemonic focus on art objects historically maintained by art markets and traditional museums, galleries, and other exhibitionary platforms. In this shift, social encounters are moving more and more into the foreground of curatorial platforms, turning social relations

68 For the conceptual establishment of the notion of caring infrastructures see chapter 5 – "Caring Infrastructures: Roadmap for an Otherwise"

69 Tania Bruguera, quoted in "Art Term: Useful Art Association," Tate Britain, accessed on September 26, 2023, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/u/useful-art-association>.

70 See the upcoming case study in the second part of chapter 4.

into curatorial fabric. When process is given heightened attention, then the unruliness of collaborative processes can become central forces within curatorial projects that build affective ecosystems.

In this line of thinking, the curators of the 11th Berlin Biennale 11 (BB11) – María Berríos, Renata Cervetto, Lisette Lagnado, and Agustín Pérez Rubio – explicitly emphasised the importance of the social and participatory processes that led to the multisite exhibition project, which ran between September 5 and November 1, 2020. In several instances, the exhibition spaces of BB11 showed ephemera from performances, community engagements, and community assemblies rather than art objects in a traditional sense. For the curators, the exhibited objects seemed to point to participatory processes rather than serve as artworks in the sense of “singular objects.” This dedication to social processes was echoed in the collaborative, processual working methods of ruangrupa when curating documenta fifteen in Kassel. ruangrupa went as far as to declare the exhibition an “alibi” for the social processes that had preceded documenta’s public moment:

We use our festivals, our exhibitions, our events as an alibi. As an alibi to learn something together, to experience something together, and to build certain type of ecosystems. [...] Exhibitions in themselves, if they are only exhibitions, are not interesting for us. [...] But if it is useful in a bigger sense of things, if an exhibition hosts conversations for example or as a support structure for the whole process, then it is still an effective way of working.⁷¹

Within the artistic-curatorial complex that celebrates and idolises the format of the exhibition, it appears radical to challenge the role of exhibition in collaborative processual projects. At documenta fifteen, the Fridericianum building – commonly the nexus for exhibitions within the multi-site art event – was turned into “Fridskul” (Fridericianum as School). The central lobby space served as “a repository for shared resources, such as knowledge, stories, and experiences,”⁷² which was collectively activated and organised (Image 18).

71 ruangrupa, in an interview by Franz Thalmair, “Interview with ruangrupa: Our Exhibitions Are an Alibi,” Platform 6 – documenta fifteen, 2020, <https://www.documenta-platform6.de/ruangrupa-our-exhibitions-are-an-alibi/>.

72 documenta fifteen, “Fridskul – Fridericianum as School,” accessed February 24, 2024, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/fridskul/>.



Image 18: Fridskul assembly with visitors and members of different art and activist collectives, Kassel, 2022. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

These activities and mindset reframe exhibitions as the support structure – as the “thing underneath” – that allows for conversations and processes to flourish and to become public, rather than as the celebrated “outcome” that seemingly overwrites the (invisible) processes that occurred prior to its opening.

For the curators of BB11, this conceptual dedication to social processes let the exhibition take the back seat while emphasising the project’s intricate connection to feminist care ethics:

The idea of process, that is at the core of our project for the Biennale, is also a way of understanding this kind of [feminine] voice. Also, by slowing down the machinery of the Biennale itself, in favour of more sustainable relationships with the locals and with the idea of care. All these are modes of trying to change our ways of doing and saying, which are based on feminist and queer accounts.⁷³

With a similar dedication to processual modes of working, Phila Bergmann and Thea Reifler, directors of the Zurich art space Shedhalle, created a curatorial plat-

73 Agustín Pérez Rubio, in conversation with Katerina Bruch, “11th Berlin Biennale: On the Human Condition,” *OnCurating*, no. 46 (June 2020).

form for process-based art called Protozone. This curated series of events and exhibitions forms a five-year curatorial cycle (2020–25) that oscillates between low- and high-intensity phases. The curators, who align their practice with queer-feminist discourses, play with traditional exhibition formats by laying bare the processes which are often obscured: “You can imagine it like an exhibition that opened one week too early. There are artworks installed, but some are in the making. Some of the artists are still present, and you can get in contact with them in different ways.”⁷⁴

Such experimental, temporal approaches to curating can also be regarded as a pathway to letting go of a certain sense of curatorial control, as it brings forth the unexpected, the unplanned, within the curatorial project. For BB11, Cervetto, one of the co-curators, shared how the negotiation of social and organisational process requires improvisational skills:

We bring different ways of doing things. [...] Improvisation comes into play, but also a different way of planning, in which things are not so regulated. We are always in this negotiation, between a less formal structure and an established institution, trying to generate more porous and fluctuating processes that adapt to the requirements of each situation.⁷⁵

In extension on their emphasis on improvisation, I regard these approaches – similar to the methodology of *bricolage*⁷⁶ – not only as a characteristic of feminist curating but also of feminism as such. Sara Ahmed declares improvisation to be a form of self-assembly: “Feminism is DIY.”⁷⁷ In the context of feminised care work, the reality of constant interruption, of having to put oneself together on a recurring basis, also becomes central.⁷⁸

For the purpose of my own curatorial process at M.1, a feminist reinterpretation of curatorial-process-as-*bricolage* aided me in recognising the constant interruption of the curatorial process due to private care work and the increased need to

74 Thea Reifler and Philipp Bergmann, in an interview by Myriam Boutry, Arianna Guidi, and Jose Cáceres Mardones, “Shedhalle Contaminated,” *OnCurating*, no. 48 (September 2020), 203.

75 Bruch, “11th Berlin Biennale.”

76 In alignment with Sara Ahmed, this curatorial process reminded me of the methodological approach of a bricoleur or bricoleuse – a tinkerer who improvises with what is at hand – following the methodological DIY approach that anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss puts forth. In an effort to follow Ahmed’s call to understand this tinkering, these DIY practices, as feminist practices, I also seek to reconceptualise the notion of *bricolage* (which etymologically refers to processes of the unexpected, of improvisation, detours, luck, and spontaneity – ultimately leaving the bricoleur with a different outcome than originally anticipated).

77 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 27.

78 Ibid.

improvise, to tinker, during the course of action as a lived reality to be accepted.⁷⁹ While this approach – in its masculine noun form of *bricoleur* – alludes to stereotypical images of a male tinkerer or craftsman, I aim to shift this connotation by reframing it as a feminist practice. That is to say, to give shape to the idea of the *bricoleuse*.⁸⁰ The *bricoleuse* instead of shying away from non-linearity, interruption, tensions, and do-it-yourself approaches, embraces them – which, I argue, following Ahmed, make these curatorial undertakings feminist ones. Hence, feminist relational curating carves out space for social processes with its detours, its necessary improvisation, its potential messiness, and its interruptions, whether due to the needs of children who form part of a curatorial setup, conflictual scenarios during group sessions, or other spontaneous interventions that one cannot pre-plan for. This paints a picture of a curatorial practice that is not primarily concerned with the politics of a polished display of traditional art objects but rather stays with the trouble of social engagement – and recognises the encounter on a 1:1 scale, and not its *ex-post* representation, as the “thing” worth striving for.

4.1.3 On Hospitality, Inclusion, and Affidamento

Another dimension of ephemeral, process-based curatorial and artistic initiatives is the notion of hospitality. While the curators and scholars Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer argue that a “curatorial situation is always one of hospitality,”⁸¹ I argue that the heightened shift towards relationality, encounter, and ephemeral processes increases the political nature of the matter. From this perspective, curating

79 According to psychosocial studies scholar Lisa Baraitser, interruption needs to be seen as a particularly maternal experience. I thus argue it is of feminist concern to embrace interruptions, as they may occur within relational curatorial encounters. For Baraitser these interruptions always contain an elusive moment that might bring out unforeseen possibilities. For further reading, see Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 74.

80 This aligns with the approach of the museum scholars Regina Wonisch and Roswitha Muttenthaler, who have reinterpreted the concept of bricolage as part of a feminist art historical analysis of exhibitions to bring together their key methodological approaches. They write: “In the sense of a bricolage, we have taken methodical approaches from the arsenal of already existing ones, converted them and combined them for a new application,” as museal representations often lack adequate discourses to do justice to the complexity of the research matter. See Roswitha Wonisch and Regina Muttenthaler, *Gesten des Zeigens. Zur Repräsentation von Gender und Race in Ausstellungen* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 62.

81 Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, eds., *Hospitality: Hosting Relations in Exhibitions* (London: Sternberg, 2016), 8.

implies invitations – to artists, artworks, curators, audiences, and institutions; it receives, welcomes, and temporarily brings people and objects together, some of which have left their habitual surroundings and find themselves in the process of relocation in the sense of being a guest. Thus the curatorial situation provides both the time and the space for encounter between entities unfamiliar with one another.⁸²

During my programming at M.1, we created welcoming atmospheres, as spheres of hospitality, to lower barriers of access and to draw people into the art institution, to engage with questions of care, and to connect with others. In the creation of these welcoming frameworks, the provision, or at times even the joint preparation, of shared meals was central.



Image 19: Britto Arts Trust invited food lovers to join their artistic food cooking and sharing project at PAKGHOR – the social kitchen during the one hundred days of documenta fifteen in Kassel, 2022. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

Food is not only a basic human need but also holds a crucial social function – one that many artists have explored, particularly since the 1960s, when art became

82 Ibid.

more socially engaged, ephemeral, and experimental. One of the more prominent examples is how the international Fluxus collective engaged with food in the form of curated feasts, collaborative cooking experiments, and interactive and edible art multiples.⁸³ However, Fluxus was not the first artistic movement to use food as a material. In the 1930s, the Futurists used real food as an artistic medium to launch their “attack on cultural decadence, habituated ritual, and institutionalized culture.”⁸⁴ In the 1990s, particularly with the artistic positions of practitioners such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, food became not only an artistic material but a means to produce art-based social situations.⁸⁵ Through his cooking and serving of Thai curries in New York art galleries, Tiravanija aimed to create micro-utopian spaces of togetherness.⁸⁶ These kinds of approaches have become very common in the contemporary art scene, for example during documenta fifteen, where Britto Arts Trust created the PAKGHOR social kitchen, which served free food during the one hundred days of the arts festival, freshly prepared each day by a range of artistic collectives (Image 19).⁸⁷ Though not all forms of arts-based togetherness have been recognised as political in a transformative sense,⁸⁸ yet some of these food-based practices within the arts take an overtly political stance, such as in the approaches of Michael Rakowitz’s “Enemy Kitchen” workshop,⁸⁹ Jon Rubin and Dawn Weleski’s Conflict Kitchen restaurant,⁹⁰

83 Hannah Higgins, “Food: The Raw and the Fluxed,” in *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life*, ed. Jacquelyn Baas (Hanover, MA: Hood Museum of Art, 2011), 13.

84 Ibid.

85 Bailer, “Sozialer (T)raum? Über Das Politische Potenzial Der Kunst Von Joseph Beuys Und Rirkrit Tiravanija. Ein Kunsttheoretischer Vergleich” (bachelor thesis, Zeppelin University, 2012).

86 In my undergraduate thesis, I contrasted Rirkrit Tiravanija’s and Joseph Beuys’ concepts of art as a means of transformation: *ibid.*

87 documenta fifteen, “PAKGHOR – the social kitchen by Britto Arts Trust,” accessed February 24, 2024. <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/calendar/pakghor-the-social-kitchen/>.

88 For the curator Nora Sternfeld, participatory formats need to include the possibility to challenge and renegotiate the “rules of the game,” not just to partake in the game. See Nora Sternfeld, “Um die Spielregeln spielen! Partizipation im post-repräsentativen Museum,” in *Das partizipative Museum: Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen*, ed. Susanne Gesser et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012). Arguably softer formats, such as the situations created by artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, do not contain the transformative moments to alter the *modus operandi* of the arts but rather obscure or novelise them.

89 Michael Rakowitz, “Enemy Kitchen,” artist’s website, accessed July 13, 2023, www.michaelrakowitz.com/enemykitchen.

90 Conflict Kitchen, initiated by Jon Rubin and Dawn Weleski, artist website, accessed September 25, 2023, <http://www.conflict-kitchen.org/about/>. In 2014, as the first graduate student fellow for art and social justice at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics in New York, I organised a student event with Conflict Kitchen.

and Daniel Fernandez Pascual and Alon Schwabe's Cooking Sections project,⁹¹ to name a few.⁹²

Building from these histories of collective cooking as artistic and curatorial methods of community engagement and political practice, the programming at M.1 used reoccurring shared meals for assembly and informal exchange. The presence of food (be it shared lunches or simply coffee and cake) thereby served to create a framework of hospitality and trust-building, while simultaneously attending to the bodily needs of the participants. The provision of food further needs to be seen in alignment with social reproduction theories, where care is a much more encompassing notion that includes everything needed to reproduce one's livelihood, including the nourishing of one's body.

However, curatorial gestures of hospitality – whether through the medium of food or otherwise – are never neutral acts that inherently “include everyone.” Curatorial hospitality as a networking activity between a variety of actors thus operates “between an unconditional welcoming and acceptance of the other on the one hand [...] and, on the other, the marginalizations and exclusions legitimized through various rules and regulations in the field.”⁹³ Even a decidedly relational, situated curatorial practice with an explicitly welcoming gesture cannot avoid the conundrum between providing care and hospitality for some while rendering that care inaccessible to others.

The dual character, the tension between inclusion and exclusion while crafting spaces of hospitality for a specific group, became visible in a recent museum practice: the public LWL-Museum Zeche Zollern in Dortmund, Germany, announced “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 fuelling the outrage.⁹⁴ This example showcases the difficulties that art organisations face when creating spaces of hospitality, care, and accessibility for the so-called marginalised

91 Cooking Sections, initiated by the artists Daniel Fernandez Pascual and Alon Schwabe, artist website, accessed July 23, 2023, <https://cooking-sections.com>.

92 For further references, see Dani Burrows and Aaron Cezar, eds. *Politics of Food* (London: Sternberg, 2019).

93 Von Bismarck and Meyer-Krahmer, eds., *Hospitality*, 8.

94 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>.

few. These gestures must be recognised as a counter-practice, as they challenge institutional structures commonly geared towards audiences with White privilege, which thereby often end up being unwelcoming and unsupportive for non-White audiences.

In the context of inevitable hierarchies, power dynamics, potentially conflictual encounters, mechanisms of exclusion, neoliberal co-option, and institutional tokenism, curatorial care needs to be a practice of responsibility: “To claim responsibility in recourse to the term *curare*, reconfirms an authority that offers protection, respect, and recognition on the one hand, but at the same time also determines the status and say or lack of say given those taken responsibility for.”⁹⁵ As in the case of LWL-Museum Zeche Zollern, curatorial-care-as-responsibility can take the form of crafting spaces for encounters that pay specific attention to the lowering of barriers for audiences that are often structurally neglected within the arts.



Image 20: Andrea Francke's workshop area during the exhibition (in)visible, at the Showroom, London, 2012. Courtesy of the Showroom.

A further example of challenging structural exclusions in the arts is the project *Invisible Spaces of Parenthood* (2012) by the artist Andrea Francke (Image 20). Part of the Communal Knowledge programming at the Showroom in London, the project

95 Von Bismarck and Meyer-Krahmer, eds., *Hospitality*, 8.

aimed at not only visibilising everyday caring labour but also providing support structures for audience members with caring responsibilities to be present in the space.⁹⁶ Francke's experience of becoming a mother while an art student at the city's Chelsea College of Art and Design shifted her attention to the lack of public concern and conversation around childcare as well as the provision of childcare as a prerequisite for cultural participation for the caregiver.⁹⁷ Francke's project at the Showroom directly continued a project she first set up during her master's exhibition, which included a temporary childcare space that was co-designed and co-run by other parents and nursery workers. The artists used old manuals from the 1960s and '70s to build unbranded, DIY toys to populate the space (Image 20). "The toys worked in a very similar way to adventure playground sites. We had very simple starting points, children and parents would build toys that would then be re-appropriated by the next visitors," the artist shares in retrospect.⁹⁸ Ultimately, the project was rooted in her personal experience as an art student who became a parent, yet we must acknowledge that her experience wasn't an isolated one but the product of structural deficiency in the arts and society at large. Francke explains:

What really bothered me was that whenever I brought the subject up with the other students their reaction was that they didn't have children so they didn't care. Suddenly I was part of a different group called "parents" and I couldn't make them see us. We were invisible and our struggles would remain invisible.⁹⁹

The *Invisible Spaces of Parenthood* project, despite its temporariness, ought to remind us how we, as feminist curators, need to pay attention to a variety of social groups, even if we do not belong to those groups, and must craft accessible, relational, and

96 The Showroom's Communal Knowledge program was a locally situated curatorial initiative that focused on London's culturally diverse Church Street area. Curated by Louise Shelley from its inception in 2010 until 2018, long-lasting relationships built between residents, artists, community groups, and organisations were enhanced through collective projects, such as gardening and zine-making, thereby regarding "each and every person involved in them as a collaborator." The artist-led project *One of My Kind* took place in 2017 and established collaborations with, among others, the self-organised migrant union Justice for Domestic Workers to develop pamphlets on education and survival. The different formats of Communal Knowledge were aimed at "finding ways to re-think or 'unlearn' established norms, values, codes, roles and relations, to create visibility, and to produce an alternative body of knowledge gained through communal activity and experience." See the Showroom, "Communal Knowledge," accessed February 24, 2024, <https://www.theshowroom.org/programmes/communal-knowledge>.

97 Andrea Francke, *Invisible Spaces of Parenthood: A Collection of Pragmatic Propositions for a Better Future* (London: The Showroom, 2012), 6.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

structural support structures that allow for their presence in the arts. This understanding of curatorial-care-as-a-support-structure, particularly for caregivers, became a central method within my curatorial practice at M.1.

The understanding of curating as a supportive and affective relationship is also in close alliance with the notion of *affidamento* (entrustment), a concept and feminist practice that emerged from the Italian Milan Women's Bookstore Collective in the 1970s. As the feminist literary scholar Teresa de Lauretis describes it: "The relationship of entrustment is one in which one woman gives her trust or entrusts herself symbolically to another woman, who thus becomes her guide, mentor or point of reference – in short, the figure of symbolic mediation between her and the world."¹⁰⁰ However, this relationship of entrustment acknowledges disparities and is not merely built on similarities: "Both women engage in the relationship [...] not in spite but rather because and in full recognition of the disparity that may exist between them in class or social position, age, level of education, professional status, income, etc."¹⁰¹ The friendships among women that may emerge from relationships of entrustment can thus be seen as affective frameworks of learning, empowerment, and solidarity.

Curator and art historian Gabrielle Moser transfers this activist concept to the gallery space and argues that *affidamento*, as a curatorial methodology, "has the capacity to transform galleries into spaces where the generative potential of social differences is foregrounded – rather than repressed – and where intergenerational knowledge, and its attendant affects, can be shared."¹⁰² Intergenerational encounter, across differences of class, gender, and ethnic origins, also characterised the encounters at M.1, where participants ranged from toddler age to eighty-four years old, some with a background in arts, academia, or pedagogy, and others in farming, military service, or nursing. Their differences were not levelled but rather formed points of departure for debate, mutual learning, support, and, at times, the fostering of new friendships.

Approaches such as those of Francke and the praxis of *affidamento* were essential companions-in-spirit during my curatorial programming at M.1, as they provided legitimacy to depart from individual experiences and to set them in conversation with structural frameworks of discrimination – which need to be counteracted collectively. These artistic and curatorial methods also serve as examples to further scrutinise where curatorial care in the arts is directed, which social groups are the recipients of one's curatorial hospitality, and how to ensure the presence of those

100 Teresa de Lauretis, quoted in Gabrielle Moser, "Affidamento as Curatorial Methodology: Feminist Approaches to Pedagogy and Curating in the work of EMILIA-AMALIA," *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 12, no. 2 (2023): 266.

101 De Lauretis, quoted in *ibid.*

102 De Lauretis, quoted in *ibid.*, 266.

who are often left unseen or unrecognised. Similar to Francke, I aimed to counter the structural invisibilisation, isolation, and lack of support structures for caregivers within the arts by providing care for caregivers through my curatorial programming.

In an effort of practising-with, the first section of the chapter introduced central practitioners from whom I have learned as a curator and a scholar, and with whom I regard my practice to be in alliance, in a spirit of companionship. The processual nature of relational curating made it such that the act of searching for companionship was ongoing and continued throughout the programming at M.1, and beyond. Still today, these approaches provide a rich array of inspirational sources and tools that have greatly co-shaped my curatorial practice and those of others in the field. They form part of a framework of companions in thought and in practice who have tested and advanced artistic and curatorial approaches and methodologies in regard to care, hospitality, democratic principles, social processes, ephemerality, self-organisation, and feminist counter-practices – and who have countered the co-option of these by art institutions who adhere to these methods only to boost their image and institutional prestige.¹⁰³

As indicated at the beginning of the chapter, my identification with the term “curator” was not a given and required an active process of rearticulating, both in thought and in practice, what a curatorial practice of care could look like in the specific instance of my artistic directorship at M.1 in 2019–20. Building from the above theoretical and practice-based companions has allowed me to reframe what curating entails: curating with care as a relational, useful, affective activity and ethicopolitical practice goes beyond the historically grown focus on the curatorial care for objects; rather, it shifts its intention towards curatorial care for artists, participants, collaborators, audience and community members, and fellow curators – a process that is enmeshed with physical-material manifestations of the related social and artistic processes. This dedication to networks, assemblies, and encounters turns the social sphere into the fabric of a radically relational curatorial practice for which and from which it builds support structures for artistic production and communal growth.

The next part of the chapter provides a detailed introduction to the geographical context as well as the concept and formats of the curatorial programming that emerged from these relational webs of companionship. This introduction is followed by a critical reflection on the programme’s successes and limitations as part of a relational curatorial practice with care.

103 Von Bismarck and Meyer-Krahmer, eds., *Hospitality*, 11.

4.2 Care for Caregivers: A Case Study of a Participatory Curatorial Programme on Care

For this practice-based doctoral research, my curatorial cycle as the artistic director 2019–20 of M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung in rural Northern Germany served as a case study to further investigate the prospects and challenges of a curatorial practice dedicated to care and to retrieve useful knowledge for the curatorial and research community. In parallel to entering my PhD programme at the Zurich University of the Arts and University of Reading in late 2018, I began my twenty-month curatorial position at M.1, which ran from January 2019 to October 2021 – and therefore was struck, midway, by the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁰⁴

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the background of the curatorial programme and the curatorial concept, and I also introduce central formats of the curatorial cycle through outlining several examples. As established in the previous chapters, I sought to explore the potential of curating as a relational practice of care towards artistic and sociopolitical processes in the framework of the curatorial cycle at M.1 – and thereby I aimed to foster caring alliances, and to counter-hegemonic patterns of relating to one another.

Together, the contextual, conceptual, and practice-based sections of this chapter form the basis for the subsequent chapter, in which I explore the notions, shapes, and agencies of caring infrastructures. While the term “caring infrastructure” was already present as a conceptual notion (and a title) for the curatorial formats at M.1 and Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, it came to be a central thought vehicle throughout my research as well as in my ongoing curatorial practice, through which I aim to mobilise curatorial care as an infrastructural, political practice. Within that framework, the case study serves as in-depth analysis of curatorial methodologies of care, which I derived from this situated practice. I then formulate propositions on *how* to practise curatorial care – with the aim of highlighting the value of the case study as a knowledge-producing curatorial process.¹⁰⁵

4.2.1 Notes on Locality

For the participatory, site-specific curatorial programme I developed at M.1, the municipality of Hohenlockstedt, with its six thousand residents, constituted the social,

104 The curatorial cycle was originally intended to last eighteen months. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was extended for another two months, which we had hoped would provide us with enough time to repeat the closing programming on site after the first lockdown.

105 The reflective knowledge derived from the case study is laid out in section 5.2 – “In Search of a Practice: Towards a Curatorial Methodology of Caring Infrastructures.”

political, and spatial context. In the 1950s, the former army camp Lockstedter Lager acquired a civilian name – Hohenlockstedt (Holo, for short) – but it continues to be characterised by its military past both architecturally and in terms of its social order. While rurally located, Holo is located in a central axis between urban hubs: the distance to both Kiel to the north and Hamburg to the south is around eighty kilometres. In a sense, Holo lies in the geographic heart of the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein, yet it is rather remote from central infrastructural nodes, requiring car or bus connections from the closest train stations. Politically, the region shows a mix of social-democratic and conservative forces, as 31 percent of the votes in the most recent local elections went to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and 24 percent to the Social Democratic Party (SPD).¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, the local grassroots initiative Bürger für Hohenlockstedt (Citizens for Hohenlockstedt; BFH Holo)¹⁰⁷ received almost 42 percent of votes in 2023, more than the two established national parties. BFH Holo seeks to strengthen local clubs and networks and to invest in the maintenance of public pools, sports centres, the youth centre, and the night taxi that connects the town with the surrounding villages and train stations. This emphasis on communal infrastructures, get-togethers, exchange, and the celebration of “village life” was also a central experience upon my arrival to Holo as a newcomer.

However, upon my arrival, I had several informal conversations with town residents and learned from Hohenlockstedters that, unlike the other surrounding villages, Holo did not have a town hall, and that generally there was a lack of meeting spaces where community would be able to come together without restrictive costs or logistics associated with it.¹⁰⁸ The highly active associations and clubs as well as various church groups usually had their own established spaces. But smaller clubs – especially those unaffiliated with religion or established trans-regional associations – had difficulty finding meeting spaces, particularly since more and more pubs and restaurants in the village were shuttering. It was therefore important to me to deeply consider the possibilities for curating as a relational praxis that, in Holo, would attempt to create non-hierarchical spaces for encounter, to make support structures in the social sphere visible, and to strengthen and expand these. The idea was to open up alternative collective pathways of action that would counteract the societal marginalisation of care work and to propose a platform for solidarity and collective care that could live on even after my curatorial cycle had ended. In the later section

106 Der Landeswahlleiter des Landes Schleswig-Holstein, “Amtliches Endergebnis: Gemeinde Hohenlockstedt,” Wahlen SH, May 2023, https://www.wahlen-sh.de/grw/gemeindegewahlen_gemeinde_010615189042.html.

107 BfH – Bürger für Hohenlockstedt, “Dafür steht die BfH,” 2023, <https://bfh-holo.de/ueber-uns/dafuer-steht-die-bfh/>.

108 For more information on the informal conversations, see the upcoming section 4.2.2 – “Notes on Community Building.”

“Dis/continuities” (4.4), I reflect on the potential reasons why this plan did not occur as intended.

4.2.2 Notes on Community Building

The curatorial programming followed the immanent urgencies, attachments, and necessities that unfolded throughout the process and also explored the intersections where I sensed that my own personal experience in regard to care work was in resonance with that of the local participants. It was important to me that the programme speak to the people – above all, to those who were performing care work in a wide variety of forms – and that their themes be heard, meaning that the questions of exploration should not be far removed from the participants’ day-to-day lives, instead finding their origin therein.¹⁰⁹ Even if the conception and organisation of the events were to be designed institutionally, the programme arose from togetherness: exchange, assembly, and participation were central from the beginning. Hence, without the participants’ regular attendance, without their contributions in both action and thought, the programme would have missed its mark.¹¹⁰

In order to let the programme emerge from the community rather than imposing it from the outside, I moved to Hohenlockstedt for four months when my official appointment began – with my then three-year-old son and with my almost eighty-year-old grandfather as support – to investigate: *What does care mean in Hohenlockstedt? Who looks after whom, and in what form?*

I began by setting up informal interviews with residents from Holo and the wider region. First, the M.1 team pointed me to regular visitors who also performed different kinds of care – as parents, as community organisers, as volunteers. Through active listening to their stories and their backgrounds, I slowly established a better sense of the place and its people in relation to care. Through these conversations, I was also introduced into a relational web of community carers, as one conversation partners would often point me to other relevant figures in town. These conversations weren’t academic or formalised in any way; they were rather an open invitation to enter into conversation with a newcomer to town who was interested in establishing a participatory framework. The conversations also weren’t limited to a specific time period but rather were an ongoing part of the curatorial process. I sat in the schoolmasters’ office to learn about local youth engagement; I sat in a farmer’s kitchen to discuss how she and I would collaborate on homemade food for one of our events; I sat on an elderly woman’s veranda eating a dessert which she had made from herbs and flowers from her garden, learning about her life as

109 I first presented this passage in Sascia Bailer, *Curating, Care, and Corona*, Kuratieren #6 (Hohenlockstedt, Germany: Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, 2020).

110 This also comes from *ibid.*

a teacher, as a community organiser, as a mother of five, and as a herbal expert; and I sat at a table with a group of retirees during a women's-only brunch, which was organised by a church. I also attended mother-and-baby group meetings and *Kontakt Cafés* (conversation cafés) for migrant women; I visited other art-, care-, and disability-related projects in the wider region; and I joined traditional public events around town.

These conversations allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the local context that I was immersing myself – and my curatorial project – in. However, it did not lead to an immediate audience for my curatorial programming. The building of trust with individual members of the audience, and the removal of barriers to access, required substantial time resources, which became a central part of my curatorial work. In my notes, I remarked:

Generally, I think it's really beautiful to see that after half a year of my job there, I actually managed to establish a sense of community, a sense of belonging and a platform for exchange, learning and community organising. This is a really rewarding experience.¹¹¹

However, the path up until that moment had been tiring and often felt very dire. The following excerpt from my field notes traces the difficulties in establishing a community of local caregivers who were open to connecting and engaging with these subjects within an arts context:

The last few days before the workshop with Shira Richter [the second workshop in the programme]¹¹² were quite nerve-wracking: for a long time, we only had four registrations. And, of course, I had done quite some financial stretching to get an international artist from Israel to Hohenlockstedt. I felt like I had done everything I could to get more registrations: I posted it in many different Facebook groups, had gone to intercultural women's meetings, had personally reached out to the attendants of the last workshop, had sent out 1,000 flyers to regional organisations, had specifically researched and contacted academic institutes with a gender focus, had distributed the flyers to strangers on playgrounds. It was only last minute that a few more registrations came in. In the end, we were around ten participants with a wide background in age, culture, and experiences. One elderly couple from Holo had joined who weren't always easy in their approach and their specific needs, but throughout the course of the workshop I really began to value their presence. They were really open about their disabilities, which created a safe space where people would be allowed to make themselves vulnerable; one of them was also the only man who attended the entire workshop. About an hour into the workshop, another Jewish male from Israel joined; he was the main caregivers of his two children. He then actually had to leave quite early – because of his care duties at home. One other female attendant had already been there for the motherhood workshop, and it was great to see her again in this workshop. Two other women were students from the Hamburg-based art school [HFBK University

111 Field notes, August 29, 2019.

112 A full overview of the curatorial programming is presented in section 4.3 – “Evolution of a Curatorial Conception.”

of Fine Arts Hamburg] and came for our joint archival project.¹¹³ One woman had travelled eight hours by train to join our workshop – she is a single mother and brought her five-year-old daughter. Their vacation had been cancelled, so they used their vacation time and budget to join this workshop.

[...] The next day, two participants from the previous day couldn't join anymore, but three new participants showed up. [...] After the workshop, some participants stayed longer and had more in-depth conversations with Shira and with other group members, some already signed up for the next workshop ... all in all, it all went really well and it was a great, emotionally engaging, and intellectually stimulating workshop!¹¹⁴



Image 21: Participants share lunch during the “Workshop on Trust” with Myriam Lefkowitz, from the series “Care for Caregivers,” M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

This excerpt above shows the anxiety, the affective effort, the invisible labour, and the ongoing uncertainty that sustains a curatorial labour of care. Every upcoming workshop required me to re-engage with potential audiences that were specific to the focus of the artist’s workshop (as a workshop on isolation might attract a different audience than a workshop on motherhood). This labour – curating the potential

113 This project was called *Archive of Encounters*, upon which I elaborate in section 4.3.5 – “ART: Discourse & Artistic Production on Care.”

114 Field notes, July 9, 2019.

audience for each event – was tiring and time-consuming, but it formed the basis of the relational curatorial programming itself and hence was nothing to compromise on. The social engagement of a situated curatorial practice is to be honoured and cannot be detached from framing one's curatorial practice as one of hospitality.¹¹⁵

Over the course of the curatorial cycle at M.1, a steady group of “regulars” was built, which also brought in new members through word of mouth. This group provided consistency over the different formats (e.g., the workshop series and the storytelling cafés) without becoming a closed group lacking malleability to incorporate new participants and perspectives.

4.2.3 Notes on Retelling the Process

Since it is not possible to reconstruct – and make fully accessible – two years of ephemeral events, conversations, and exhibitions, this account must take a fragmentary form. However, these retrospective fragments are intentional and rooted in honesty – a methodological approach for artistic research that has been articulated by the cultural studies scholar Anke Haarmann. She suggests an understanding of the methodological demands placed on artistic research as being similar to those placed on philosophy: “both do not follow a pre-set canon of rules and a catalogue of methods, but rather develop their respective methodology from the researching question and practice itself, but with the claim of the highest consistency.”¹¹⁶ Haarmann emphasises the importance of making the research-creation process accessible. For this, she uses the German term *Nachvollziehbarkeit*, which could translate to “transparency” or “comprehensibility,” a notion that seems to resonate with Natalie Loveless's conceptualisations of curiosity-driven research, which should embrace the “premise of and promise of radical (emergent) honesty.”¹¹⁷

Not only was my research process driven by curiosity, as well as the erotic (in Audre Lorde's sense), the necessities of the moment, the circumstances of the pandemic, and intuitive and improvised actions, as I elaborated in my methodology section – but my curatorial process also followed these approaches. I therefore deem it necessary to make this process transparent and comprehensive through an

115 For further discussion on the ambivalences of hospitality within curatorial practice, refer to section 4.1.3 – “On Hospitality, Inclusion, and Affidamento.” Further, I suggest the publication by Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, eds., *Hospitality: Hosting Relations in Exhibitions* (London: Sternberg, 2016).

116 Anke Haarmann, “Künstlerische Praxis als methodische Forschung? Zur kunsthistorischen Ermöglichung einer künstlerischen Forschung,” *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ästhetik*, September 2011, <http://www.dgae.de/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Haarmann.pdf>.

117 Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 64.

honest rapport, rather than forcing it into “remarkably unreflective methodological corsets”¹¹⁸ for the sake of the institutionalisation of curatorial and artistic research.

This approach challenges long-standing traditions within artistic production, which historically has relied on the “incomprehensibility of its genesis” to make it “mysterious and mystical,” as Haarmann argues.¹¹⁹ According to her research, it was particularly the conceptual art of the twentieth century that began to incorporate the process of production into the artistic work itself, making it perceptible and comprehensible to the viewer.¹²⁰ She therefore argues for “individual, concrete, artistic, conceptual works, to work out their methodological strategies in terms of production aesthetics, not prescriptively but *retrospectively*, and at the same time to examine them critically in terms of their immanent stringency.”¹²¹

I want to stress the importance of reconfiguring the narrative of research-creation *retrospectively*, rather than following the pretence of a predefined, rigid lineage that one can simply put into action. It is precisely this retrospective investigation of the curatorial process – grounded in “radical honesty” – which I aim for in this practice-based research project, and thereby a refusal to shy away from difficult topics, conflicts, or tensions.

The curatorial cycle at M.1 included seventeen workshops, seven newly produced artworks (including film, performance, and audio pieces), four publication launches, six conversations and talks, four performances, two exhibitions or displays of artworks, and three screenings of artists films. As mentioned, attempting to discuss and reflect on each programme point individually would exhaust the format of this research project. Thus, I return to Jane Gallop’s “anecdotal theory” as a way to shift focus onto key moments, which I will examine more closely and set into conjunction with other highlighted moments as a way to provide a sense of the theoretical and knowledge-producing value that derives from these encounters. This approach also grants legitimacy to retell “the story of the curatorial programming” from my own lived experience, from the “view of the body,” to return to Donna Haraway. This element is crucial, as it rejects the implicit claim that there exists an objective perspective through which to narrate past events. The retelling of the story of the curatorial cycle is, rather, rooted within personal lived experience,¹²² it is retrospective, it is fragmentary, it is anecdotal, and yet it is honest in its refusal to shy away from difficult aspects.

By shedding light on specific aspects, situations, and perspectives of and around the curatorial programming at M.1, I aim to fuse the *anecdotal* character of the nar-

118 Haarmann, “Künstlerische Praxis als methodische Forschung?,” 7. My translation.

119 Ibid., 5.

120 Ibid., 7.

121 Ibid., 5. My emphasis.

122 As elaborated in the first chapter of this book, “Methods as Feminist Practices of Care.”

rative with a reflective and critical impetus, in order to turn the process into a series of knowledge-producing acts.¹²³ My curatorial practice allowed me to work through difficult curatorial questions – in practice – which gave way to a reflective abstraction and possible theorising around curatorial practices of care. I share the learnings from this curatorial process in the upcoming sections.¹²⁴

4.3 Evolution of a Curatorial Concept

My appointment as artistic director at M.1 during 2019–20 was preceded by an open call, to which I responded with a two-page concept of what I envisioned for my eighteenth-month curatorial residency (due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the term was extended by two months). To begin, I want to share the initial curatorial concept (originally written in German), as it builds the foundation for the curatorial programming, which I introduce in later sections.

4.3.1 Initial Curatorial Concept

Who Cares?

Visibility and Networking for Caregivers in Hohenlockstedt

Poverty among the elderly and children, a shortage of trained workers, a lack of day care spaces, abuse of caregivers, burnout among single parents, neglected nursing home residents – in short, care is in a deep crisis that is not necessarily new. In contrast to the German language, there is the succinct term “care/to care” in English, which encompasses all caregivers who give their care and nurture others: parents, relative caregivers, kindergarten teachers, and so on. Care work – whether within an institution or as “domestic work” – often remains invisible in the public sphere, creating social and economic precarity in the process. A new study by the Bertelsmann Foundation shows: “The situation is particularly drastic for single parents. If

123 This can be seen in section 5.2 – “In Search of a Practice: Towards a Curatorial Methodology of Caring Infrastructures” and chapter 6 – “Limits of Curatorial Care.”

124 The presented approaches to curatorial-process-as-method can be regarded as reflective, retrospective considerations that aid in shaping and making transparent and comprehensible to the reader the curatorial-artistic processes that laid the ground for the programme. I have used the introductory sections of this chapter to provide a contextual sense of the setting in which the curatorial practice took place, and in the subsequent sections I share an overview of the curatorial formats, followed by a detailed reflection on the curatorial methodologies in section 5.2 – “In Search of a Practice: Towards a Curatorial Methodology of Caring Infrastructures,” which entails propositions for how to enact a curatorial practice of care.

their poverty risk rate was 46 percent according to earlier calculations – and thus already very high – it is 68 percent based on the new method.”¹²⁵ In view of this social emergency, relatively little has been stirred up in politics and among the public. One would almost like to ask: Who cares?

It is possibly the art context that can develop new strategies for approaching this complex topic. Interestingly enough, the term “care” has increasingly appeared in this context in recent years, which relates to the etymological origins of the word “curate” (*curare* (Lat.) = to take care of, to nurture). The Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist outlines this change in an interview with the *Guardian* (2014): “In Roman times, it [curation] meant to take care of the bath houses. In medieval times, it designated the priest who cared for souls. Later, in the 18th century, it meant looking after collections of art and artifacts.”¹²⁶ Contemporary curatorial practice has increasingly opened up to sociopolitical themes that explore the boundaries between art and society. Viennese curator Elke Krasny describes curating as a “radical relational practice” that addresses social, political, and economic issues from the inside and participates in and drives processes of change.¹²⁷ The New York-based curator Maura Reilly even speaks of the need for a “curatorial activism” by which social injustices can be settled through critical curating that focuses on diversity and equality.¹²⁸

As a single mother and interdisciplinary cultural practitioner working at the intersections of art, social justice, and urban space, I am interested in this very tension between care as a social activity and care as activist curating. How can curatorial practice relate to the crisis of care; make visible the invisibility of care, whether that of single parents, relatives, or paid caregivers; and weave new patterns of relationships that counteract the marginality and isolation of caregivers? It is in this context that curation, as a radical relational practice, has the opportunity to test its activist potential by producing care for caregivers – creating relationships, networks, exchanges, alliances, and visibilities.

As Mexican curator Osvaldo Sánchez said in one of his recent lectures, the political lies in the specific.¹²⁹ So what might such a curatorial practice as care look like in the context of Hohenlockstedt? Who are the caregivers in this community of six thousand inhabitants? What is the status of care in the public life of Hohenlockstedt, and what synergies, platforms and alliances are still necessary to support caregivers in their work and possibly also to enable transregional associations?

What stories are hidden behind the 13 percent of single parents, or behind the nearly 60 percent who represent the ageing portion of the community? And who are the 3 percent of people who came to Hohenlockstedt from abroad?¹³⁰ Who is involved in the lively club life of the Housewives' Union, the Old and Young Leisure Association, the Hohenlockstedt Rural Women's Association? Who is part of the Association for the Hard of Hearing, the Kellinghusen/Hohenlockstedt Social Associa-

tion, or the Senior Citizens' Advisory Council? And who feels excluded – whose needs are perhaps not represented? Is there any exchange between the individual associations?

To nourish these questions, I would like to take M.1 LOKAL [M.1's community engagement programme] as a starting point for my research-based curatorial practice. With its already existing social structures, it offers space to get to know the residents, their stories, and their already existing engagements and to build on it through joint activities. From here, new social webs can emerge, allowing me to participate in the community's associational life, for example. The institution's curatorial programme would build on this participatory, relational process, developing formats that address local needs – and create visibilities for them.

This participatory process will be supported by bringing in relevant artistic-curatorial actors through lectures and workshops to exchange ideas with Hohenlockstedt residents. Possible guests could be, for example, the Hamburg urban artist Christoph Schäfer, the socially engaged curator Elke Krasny, or the founders of the initiative Radical Practices of Collective Care.¹³¹

Since the process is – and must be – an open one, the outcome cannot be predicted. It may be a workshop series, a multigenerational house, a mutually supportive programme for single parents, a platform for new work formats around the county, an intergenerational language club, or a cultural programme compatible with caregiver hours. Whether these processes are made visible in a final symposium, a summer festival, an online platform, or a (travelling) exhibition is ultimately dictated by the process that precedes them. In this sense, curating is taken seriously as a relational practice that aims to make care tangible and visible for caregivers.

POSSIBLE SCHEDULE:

1st semester (January–June 2019): Research & Exchange

Getting to know each other

At events that are part of M.1 LOKAL (esp. cooking club, film club, and village magazine). Based on this, contacts can be made through the club and in the public space of the community. The premises of M.1 are used for this purpose.

Research & exchange

In parallel, I would like to undertake international research on artistic-curatorial positions that deal with the topic of caregiving. I would like to make this research publicly available and, based on it, initiate a series of events that will bring the project-makers into exchange with Hohenlockstedt residents.

Articulating wishes together

From the phase of getting to know each other and exchanging ideas, a solid basis of

trust is to be created in the first few months. Needs, wishes, and public failures in the care sector may be articulated and alternatives thought about together.

2nd semester (July–December 2019): Planning & Implementation

From needs to concrete actions

From the ideas collected, joint approaches to solutions are forged, leading to concrete project planning, including time and budget planning. Subsequently, the joint implementation of the project(s) begins.

3rd semester (January–June 2020): Sharing Experiences & Creating Visibilities

Create continuity & visibilities for projects

The process will be published on the website and possibly in a small publication. At the end, an exhibition with symposium and/or closing festival that shows the experiences of the past year and at the same time can act as a networking opportunity with other actors. The public formats will be developed participatively in the course of the project. Projects must be solidified by then so that they can be carried forward by the community itself.

In retrospect, the key questions and topics which I laid out in my initial concept (written in February 2018) remained more or less the same in the actual programming, and would also become central to my doctoral research. As I unfolded my curatorial position at M.1, I had to recalibrate this initial concept and test its feasibility – and value – for the respective context.

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- 125 Anette Stein, and Antje Funcke, "Viele Familien ärmer als bislang gedacht," Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018, <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/themen/aktuelle-meldungen/2018/februar/viele-familien-aermer-als-bislang-gedacht>.
 - 126 Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Hans Ulrich Obrist: The Art of Curation," interview by Stuart Jeffries and Nancy Groves, *Guardian*, March 23, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/mar/23/hans-ulrich-obrist-art-curator>.
 - 127 Elke Krasny, Urban Curators at Work – A Real-Imagined Historiography," in *Planning Unplanned – Towards a New Positioning of Art in the Context of Urban Development*, ed. Barbara Holub and Christine Hohenbüchler (Vienna: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2015), 119–32.
 - 128 Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018).
 - 129 FABRIC für Schöpflin Stiftung, "Event: Talk with Osvaldo Sanchez about Casa Gallina in Mexico City," February 10, 2018. <https://fabric.place/fabric-talks-february-8-to-10-park-fiction-e-xrota-print-casa-gallina-sak-loerrach/>.
 - 130 Zensus Datenbank, "Zensus 2011: Hohenlockstedt," accessed July 14, 2023, https://ergebnis.se2011.zensus2022.de/datenbank/online?operation=find&suchanweisung_language=de&query=Hohenlockstedt#abreadcrumb.
 - 131 Radical Collective of Care, "Building Power in a Crisis of Social Reproduction," 2016, <http://radicalcollectivecare.blogspot.de>.



Image 22: Sascia Bailer, "Artistic Direction 2019/20: CARE," overview of curatorial concept for M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt (screenshot from M.1's website).

4.3.2 Scales of Care: Overview of the Curatorial Cycle

I may have already arrived to Hohenlockstedt with a heightened sensitivity towards locality, relations across scales, and networked infrastructures in relation to the position of artistic director.¹³² However, the decision on the specific formats, events, invited artists, and temporalities of the curatorial programming remained open. In this initial phase of conceptualisation, I conceived of “scale” as an organising principle of the programming, moving from the immediate and the local, via the regional, and towards more transregional networks and support structures. This approach regarded the local as the space of agency from which to connect to a wider range of actors, networks, and discourses. It also countered the hegemonic logic by which the rural is perceived as “inferior” to urban cultural hubs – whereby the rural realm is not considered to be a producer of knowledge or cultural practice but rather, at most, the receiver.¹³³

For the twenty-month curatorial cycle, I developed three conceptual programming streams under which I organised the different formats: I. LOCAL: Care for Caregivers, II. ART: Discourse & Artistic Production on *Care*, and III. FUTURE: Collectively Building Future Support Structures (Image 22). The different programme streams were not detached from one another; rather, there were interrelations among the artists and audiences involved and the themes negotiated. In the following sections, I present curatorial examples of each of the programming streams.

4.3.3 LOCAL: Care for Caregivers

“Who cares for caregivers?” was written in bold letters on large yellow banners that hung in the front windows of M.1, inviting passers-by to reflect on this question (Image 23). This question was central to the overall curatorial cycle, but particularly to the first section of the programme, which departed from the dilemma that care-workers suffer from chronic overload, lack of self-care, and increased isolation – issues that were equally present in Hohenlockstedt and the surrounding area. In a series of six workshops led by national and international artists, these issues were foregrounded on a monthly basis. The aim was to provide the participants – all of whom performed care work in their private or professional lives – with tools and knowledge that they could integrate into their everyday lives. The intention was to foster the recognition, exchange, and networking of local caregivers and to provide a sense of care for those people who primarily cared for others.

132 For a contextual introduction to relational artistic and curatorial practices, see the first part of chapter 4 – “Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges.”

133 For further discussion on the rural and the margins, see Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, “From the Margins,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1994): 279–97.



Image 23: A local resident passes by M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, featuring large banners that ask: “Who cares for caregivers?,” 2019. Drawing: Katharina Bruderhofer. Graphic design: Michael Pfisterer.

Part of this programme stream was the opening event “Social Muscle Club” (April 2019), which invited the residents of Hohenlockstedt to come together in a celebratory and easygoing atmosphere to train one’s skills of giving and taking (a.k.a. their “social muscles”) (Images 24–28). Jill Emerson, an artist and co-founder of this initiative, ran this first “Social Muscle Club” – whose motto is “Training our social muscles: Practising giving and taking” – in Hohenlockstedt. At this opening event for the curatorial programme, over one hundred people formed several small exchange groups as part of moderated roundtable discussions. Gestures, assistance, and objects were offered and accepted as part of an activity where participants wrote their wishes, as well as what they were able and willing to give, on slips of paper. Thus a micro-social network was constructed that transcended the space of the art institution, thanks to the appointments made between people – to take walks together, play chess, mow the lawn, or practice Spanish. Some months after the “Social Muscle Club,” I met two older women whom I had sat next to at a table. I was delighted to see them again. They explained to me that they had become friends at the event and now took walks together regularly. This outcome makes clear how this experiment served as an invitation to strengthen actions of solidarity in everyday life at a local

level, including the possibility for new encounters to produce relationships of care. This festive get-together served as a successful icebreaker between myself as a newcomer with a new curatorial agenda (“care”), invited artists, and the local audiences. Thus the “Social Muscle Club” paved the way for the participatory framework of the upcoming twenty-month curatorial programme.



Image 24: “Social Muscle Club,” M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Bettina Winkler-Marxen.



Image 25: “Social Muscle Club,” M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Soyka Fotodesign.



Image 26: "Social Muscle Club," M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Soyka Fotodesign.



Image 27: "Social Muscle Club," M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Soyka Fotodesign.



Image 29: Workshop participants sharing lunch in the garden at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

Over the course of half a year, M.1 hosted one workshop per month, which took place on a weekend and lasted either one or two days (from 11am to 4pm), with a shared lunch break. The number of the participants was usually limited to twenty, and the average number of participants ranged between ten and fifteen, spanning an age range of fifteen to eighty-four years. Due to free on-site childcare, a number of children of all ages were always present, as well as, at times, teenagers with disabilities. Each workshop addressed a different topic, which corresponded to what had surfaced as a relevant theme during my research phase and for which I invited artists who work with these topics. Sometimes, the focus of the theme changed slightly through conversation with the artist, to better suit their interests and expertise. Together, we would formulate a central question for each workshop, which then was used as the opening line for each workshop's invitation leaflet.

For example, the initial workshop of the series (in May 2019) addressed the tensions between liberating and oppressive categories related to motherhood by asking: "Which role expectations do we live as mothers and which ones would we like to put forward?" (Image 30). Directed by the Hamburg-based performance artists Liz Rech and Annika Scharm, the participants were invited to question societal role models for motherhood. Both artists spoke from a feminist position as mothers,

as creatives with caring responsibilities, and as initiators of research-based performance projects that critically address reproductive labour within society.¹³⁶



Image 30: Leaflet for Liz Rech and Annika Scharm's "Workshop on Motherhood," from the series "Care for Caregivers," M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Graphic design: Michael Pfisterer.

The two facilitating artists invited the ten participants from the region around Hohenlockstedt to performatively explore their everyday lives through artistic exercises using their voices and bodies, and to challenge existing narratives around motherhood (Image 31 and 32). Since the participants brought highly diverse approaches to motherhood (adoption, stepmotherhood, single motherhood, consciously without children), the result was an inspiring engagement with the ambivalent relationship between notions of care and motherhood.

136 Taking their feminist approaches into consideration, they seem to stem from an understanding of the theoretical tensions around care work, gender, and feminist practices that I sketched out in chapter 2 – "Uncaring Conditions: Care Work Under Capitalism." The two performance artists Liz Rech and Annika Scharm, together with Nora Elberfeld, Angela Kecinski, Hannah Kowalski, Sylvi Kretschmar, Teresa Monfared, and Regina Rossi, continued to collaborate around questions of motherhood in their ongoing performative research project BEYOND RE:production. See the project webpage at <https://motheringintheperformingarts.wordpress.com>.



Image 31: Exercises with voice and body, facilitated by Liz Rech and Annika Scharm as part of the “Workshop on Motherhood,” from the series “Care for Caregivers,” M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Sascia Bailer.



Image 32: Facilitated role-play to collectively reflect on practices of motherhood, facilitated by Liz Rech and Annika Scharm as part of the “Workshop on Motherhood,” from the series “Care for Caregivers,” M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

Other events of the series also aimed, like the workshop on motherhood, at challenging common understandings of a range of notions related to caring responsibilities. In the workshop “Vegetable Resistance – What Are We Seeds For?,” run by Julieta Aranda, it was the question of time, as a political aspect of caregiving, that we critically explored. The invitation card asked: “What kind of future is dormant in us?” (Image 33).



Image 33: Leaflet for Julieta Aranda's "Workshop on Time," from the series "Care for Caregivers," M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Artwork: Julieta Aranda, Memories of things present, part 1, 2010, installation view, New Museum, New York. Graphic design: Michael Pfisterer.

The two-day workshop departed from the premise that time is socially constructed and culturally charged, particularly within the framework of neoliberalism. The artist expanded on the capitalist version of time as productivity, which renders non-productive moments as a “waste of time.” With a mix of seriousness and irony, Aranda shared with the participants that she was only interested in “wasting time together,” as an anti-neoliberal practice. After an intensely discursive first day, which also included collective reading sessions of writings by the science-fiction novelist Ursula K. Le Guin and the viewing of political cinema, the second

day was dedicated to collective cooking (Image 34). Here, children were explicitly welcome, and the artist announced that this part of the workshop was a way to politicise time by spending it collectively and making it unproductive in neoliberal terms:

On the second day we will cook together with our children. We will take a closer look at our ingredients in order to make abstract concepts of time more accessible: What potential lies dormant in a seed (immanence), which later becomes apparent, for example, in the form of a carrot (latency)? How can we take this as a starting point to think anew about our hidden potentials and aim for a future that lets us grow? And how do we ourselves become time, a time that is our own?¹³⁷



Image 34: Collective cooking session, facilitated by Julieta Aranda as part of the “Workshop on Time,” from the series “Care for Caregivers,” M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

137 For a full workshop description, see M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, “A Workshop on Time by Julieta Aranda: Vegetable Resistance – What Are We Seeds For?,” November 2019, <https://www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de/en/kalender/2019/11/23/ein-workshop-zum-thema-zeit/>.

For a moment, I want to home in on the notion of “a time that is our own.” It is around this notion that various strands of gendered, societal, and economic pressures overlap to make time within the cultural sphere not only political but also a sensitive matter. It is a question of power and agency – how much “free time” one has access to and how one’s time is divided between paid labour, unpaid domestic labour, and leisure and recovery time.¹³⁸



Image 35: Leaflet for GRAND BEAUTY's "Workshop on Collective Self-Care," from the series "Care for Caregivers," M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Frauke Frech. Graphic design: Michael Pfisterer.

It is precisely this fragile junction between phases of recovery, agency, and collective well-being in a diminishing environment that makes the question of self-care a political one. This relationship between care for others and care for the self was explored in the workshop “Collective Self-Care,” run by two members of GRAND BEAUTY from Leipzig, an intercultural beauty salon, in which care experts both with and without migration backgrounds, autodidacts, and beauty professionals work together.¹³⁹ For their workshop at M.1 in October 2020, they posed the central ques-

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

139 More information on GRAND BEAUTY is available at their website, “Our Care Offer for this Society,” accessed May 10, 2023, <https://www.grandbeautyontour.org/was-wir-wollen>. <http://www.grandbeautyontour.org/was-wir-wollen>.

tion: “What kind of relationship do you have with yourself and what kind of relationship does this allow you to foster with your peers?” This query also highlights the correlation between individual and collective well-being (Image 35). In particular, the context of caregivers, who have the tendency to neglect their own needs in favour of the care-receiver’s, was made central.



Image 36: Collective writing exercise during GRAND BEAUTY’s “Workshop on Collective Self-Care,” from the series “Care for Caregivers,” M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

Through conversations, mindfulness exercises, and collective mapping sessions, the participants were invited to explore their own needs. In the workshop’s second part, the participants came together to explore self-made beauty treatments. Using ingredients that can be found anywhere, whether in Hohenlockstedt or Karachi, the participants produced their own masks for hair and face, beauty drinks, and special treatments for teeth and nails. For me, the beauty of this day lay in the encounter between students in their early twenties with participants in their sixties, seventies, and mid-eighties; between Afghan and former East and West German women; and between the two participating men. The latter pair discussed the lack of conversation about “caring masculinities” and the internalised toxic patterns of masculinity that

insist on the totalising narrative of “strength,” which doesn’t provide space for male vulnerability, care, or self-preservation.¹⁴⁰

Hengame Sadeghi, who co-hosted the workshop together with GRAND BEAUTY founding director, Frauke Frech, spoke to the political importance of creating safe spaces for women in Afghanistan, Sadeghi’s country of origin, where they are able to tend to their needs. As a member of GRAND BEAUTY, Sadeghi shares how beauty rituals provided a safe space for women in Afghanistan and how this coming-together of women only, in a separate room, was a source from which they derived the energy and mental strength to continue everyday life in a conflict-ridden country. For her, the doing of nails, hair, and makeup was a means to an end – that end being collective well-being in a women-only safe space. This is a practice she continues to promote and teach within her socially engaged work with GRAND BEAUTY.

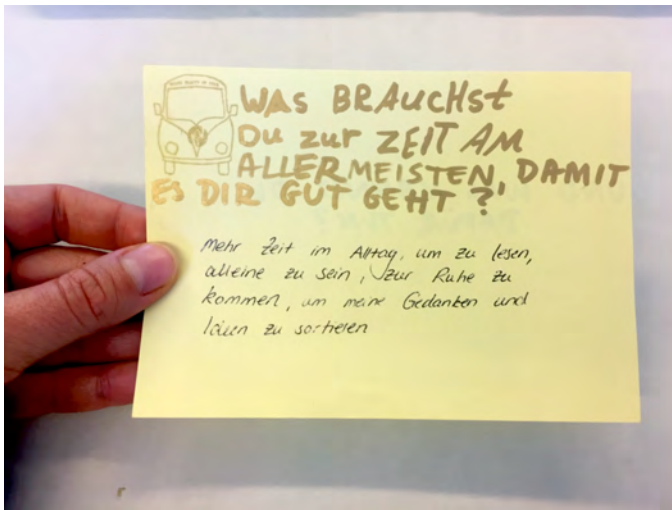


Image 37: Example of an outcome of the collective writing exercise “Workshop on Collective Self-Care” with GRAND BEAUTY from the series “Care for Caregivers” at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Sascia Bailer. The text on the card reads: “What do you currently need the most to be well?” The response says: “More time to read, to be alone, to find tranquillity, and to sort my thoughts and ideas.”

140 For further reference, see Karla Elliott “Caring Masculinities: Theorizing an Emerging Concept,” *Men and Masculinities* 19, no. 3 (2015): 240–59.



Image 38: Workshop-facilitator Hengameh Sadeghi (GRAND BEAUTY) in conversation with another participant, while preparing a natural mask, from the series “Care for Caregivers,” M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Sascia Bailer.



Image 39: A participant puts a self-made natural mask onto another participant's face as part of the “Workshop on Collective Self-Care,” facilitated by GRAND BEAUTY, from the series “Care for Caregivers,” M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2019. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

The two workshop facilitators also contextualised the importance of wellness treatments as a way to build intercultural bridges between so-called newcomers to Germany and the local residents (Image 36–39). Here, they “understand beauty as a gesture of solidarity. In our intercultural salon, the languages of beauty connect beyond the boundaries of language and cultural differences.”¹⁴¹ Through regular beauty sessions in public spaces, migrant women offer their services – makeup, hair, nails, and so on – to passers-by, creating contact zones that otherwise might have not occurred. Frauke Frech emphasises the importance of migrant women taking the role

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

of experts “in a world that is diminishing,”¹⁴² that tends to treat them as less valuable, less recognised contributors to society.¹⁴³

As the workshop series “Care for Caregivers,” within the LOCAL stream of the curatorial programme, set out to do, the curatorial formats created direct engagement with the local caregiving community, touching upon themes relevant to them via artistic and participatory methods. Over the course of more than six months, a small community of regular attendants was fostered, many of whom returned to several events throughout the curatorial cycle. Therefore, not only was a consistency in themes created throughout the various formats but also a consistency in relations, which spanned across the three programme streams.

4.3.4 FUTURE: Collectively Building Future Support Structures

The FUTURE programme stream followed the intention to collectively build future support structures, beginning from the local.¹⁴⁴ In this section of the programme, various positions from art, activism, academia, and society were brought together in order to think about a future of solidarity in our society across all sectors. What support structures are needed in art and society to make inclusion and equity a reality? Which approaches already exist? Which deficits are hardly questioned? This stream consisted out of three event series: the solidarity storytelling café “Holo Miteinander” (February–June 2020), the cross-institutional online symposium *CARING* (June 2020), and the closing event for my curatorial cycle at M.1, “Caring Infrastructures” (October 2020).

4.3.4.1 Storytelling Café Series: “Holo Miteinander”

The first FUTURE event series was the solidarity storytelling café “Holo Miteinander,” which translates to “Holo Together.” As the storytelling cafés also took place once per month on a weekend, they continued the rhythm begun by the workshop series “Care for Caregivers,” while broadening the thematic focus from care in a narrow sense to solidarity and community care in a wider sense. Together with decision-makers from various community sectors, the M.1 team launched five storytelling cafés on the topics of mobility, living, working, eating, and leisure. The idea was to co-create a solidarity platform that held the potential for its participants to continue

142 Sara Ahmed, “Selfcare as Warfare,” *Feminist Killjoys* (blog), August 25, 2014 <https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/>.

143 In Proposition #8: “Care for the Self” in chapter 5 – “Caring Infrastructures: Roadmap for an Otherwise,” I return to this notion and formulate it as a counter-hegemonic strategy.

144 The ART stream included publications and formats with a reflective character that, in the context of this research project produce a more fruitful discussion after an introduction of the full range of curatorial formats. Thus, contrary to the order in which the programmes were actually presented, this section now addresses the third part, FUTURE.

the programming in a self-organised way, to collectively discuss and shape alternative futures of care within the region.



Image 40: “Holo Miteinander” storytelling café on mobility at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2020. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

My M.1 colleague Claudia Dorf Müller, the moderator and inclusion activist Antje Hachenberg and myself developed this series as a locally rooted platform for exchange and solidarity alliances, making use of the underused café area at M.1.¹⁴⁵ The project received funding from the Federal Agency for Civic Education within the framework of MITEINADER REDEN (Talk to Each Other). This nationwide pilot project targeted at rural areas funded a total of one hundred projects between 2019

¹⁴⁵ Antje Hachenberg – who is a regular visitor of M.1, a very active advocate for inclusive housing, a freelance moderator, and a mother to two children, one with mental disabilities – had shared the open call of the Federal Agency for Civic Education with my colleague Claudia Dorf Müller. Dorf Müller was the co-director of M.1 between 2018 and 2023 and led the programme M.1 LOKAL, which – as the name suggests – focuses on community-engaged projects. As the open call touched on questions of collective care, we decided to apply to the open call together and turn it into a collaborative project, in the event the funding was successful.

and 2021. Within this rural-activist framework of the “Holo Miteinander” project, we sought to pave the way for a future of solidarity in Hohenlockstedt, one which promotes and values the village community, care work, and inclusion. The project aimed to network local actors from the area through a platform for exchange and action (Images 40 and 41). The storytelling sessions were co-moderated by local activists, aligning with existing social initiatives and making accessible the tools and knowledges that these practices had already allocated for this specific region. Our goal was to work together to care for the community and to counteract the acute care crisis through community solidarity. We did this by establishing the café room in M.1 as an easily accessible, low-barrier platform to get to know each other, learn from each other, and exchange ideas. Participants included both those from the surrounding area affected by and interested in the topic as well as people already working on these issues. We dedicated ourselves to listening to each other and to creating awareness for the needs of different life situations. The task of the process was to collaboratively transfer this “new” knowledge into stable, sustainable solidarity structures in Hohenlockstedt.



Image 41: Antje Hachenberg moderates the conversation during a “Holo Miteinander” storytelling café at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2020. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

The conversation processes of “Holo Miteinander” were co-shaped by the Berlin-based artist duo Polyphrenic Creatures (Ulrike Bernard and Marei Loellmann). They guided the dialogic process, carried out artistic interventions, and ultimately created a sound collage that hints at the multiplicity of vulnerabilities, needs, and capacities inherent to the community. In their artistic practice, the artist duo initiates performative situations in which listening plays a central role. As part of the storytelling café, they themselves became the listeners and co-shaped this listening and sharing process for the other participants through various artistic interventions.



Image 42: Participant drawing a Gedankenkeks (Thought Cookie), an artistic intervention by Polyphrenic Creatures, part of the “Holo Miteinander” storytelling café at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2020. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

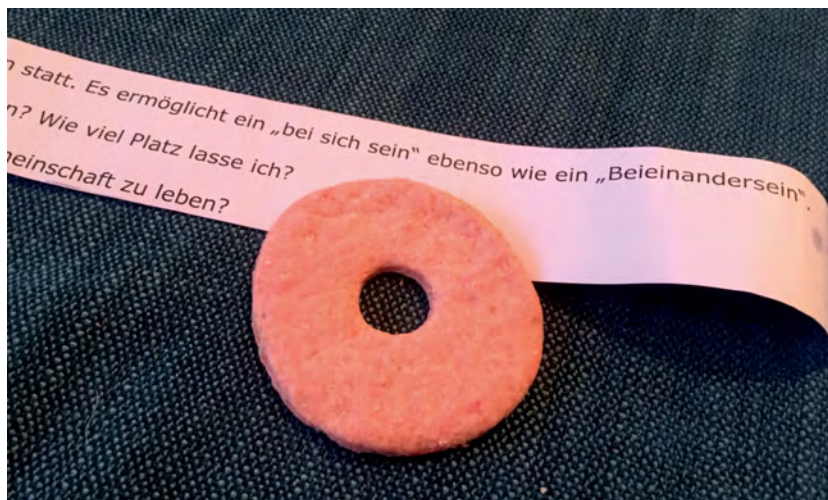


Image 43: *Gedankenkekse* (Thought Cookies), an artistic intervention by Polyphrenic Creatures during a “Holo Miteinander” storytelling café at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, 2020. Photo: Sascia Bailer.

For their performative intervention *Gedankenkekse* (Thought Cookies) the artists shared homemade red O-shaped cookies with the audience, served from a large violet vessel (Image 42). Each of the round cookies held a paper roll in its hole, featuring various poetic and reflective questions or short texts, which Polyphrenic Creatures chose according to the thematic focus of each storytelling café session (Image 43). Through this act, they prompted the conversation with “food for thought” and welcomed feedback, answers, and thoughts after the session in the form of letters or conversation.¹⁴⁶

It was Bernard’s and Loellmann’s active presence throughout the conversations that formed the material basis for the creation of their sound piece, which was supposed to artistically reflect and document the process of the storytelling cafés. The sound work, titled *Umrisse – In den Rissen* (Outlines – In the Cracks), thus does not feature, for example, recordings of the participants’ voices but rather is a collage of the artists’ observations and memories of the conversations. The participants’ individual stories were transformed into a polyphonic space of resonance for the ideas and needs of differently lived realities. In the work, they retell these conversational fragments using their own voices, and thereby recreate these intimate stories while abstracting them, and simultaneously protecting the individual participants. For

146 During the pandemic, this process shifted to analogue letter exchanges between the participants and the artist duo.

the twenty-minute sound piece, these fragmented stories were woven together into a carpet of collective experiences, reflections, and thoughts.¹⁴⁷ While holding space for intimate encounters, the artistic work still grants retrospective access, with a documenting effect, to the kinds of themes and conversations explored in the storytelling series.¹⁴⁸

4.3.4.2 Collaboration with the Haus der Kulturen der Welt: New Alphabet School on “CARING”

While building from these locally rooted, arts-based formats of solidarity and care, it was important to also establish transregional alliances with artists, curators, organisations, and other actors with a similar social justice agenda. The New Alphabet School (NAS) edition “CARING” was conceived as a collaboration between Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin and M.1, and I co-curated it with the curatorial collective Soft Agency (Gilly Karjevsky and Rosario Talevi).¹⁴⁹ Due to the then aris-

147 More detailed description of the contribution to Polyphrenic Creatures in section 4.3.5 – “ART: Discourse & Artistic Production on Care.”

148 Polyphrenic Creatures is an interdisciplinary collective founded by the artists Ulrike Bernard and Amelie Marei Loellmann. Since 2014, they have devoted themselves to the utopian and fantastic under the guise of reality in dialogic exchange formats, live audio dramas, and audio walks. To do justice to their incredibly rich, sensitive, and intimate sound piece *Umrisse – in den Rissen* (Outlines – In the Cracks, 2020), we wanted to share the work with the participants of the storytelling cafés and the general audience in a collective listening session, as part of the on-site closing event “Caring Infrastructures.” However, as we were unable to run this event as envisioned, we shared the digital version with the participants to immerse themselves in the sound piece on their own terms. I lament the missed opportunity to engage in this experience collectively. Also, as a curator, I would have hoped to have been able to provide an adequate listening environment for the artists to share their newly created piece. The work, nonetheless, remains accessible in the digital realm of M.1.

149 In early 2019, I participated in the first iteration of the New Alphabet School (NAS), title Unlearning Place, which took place at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, initiated by curator and editor Olga von Schubert. Over the course of almost a week, sixty cultural producers, activists, and scholars from around the world came together to challenge engrained norms of patriarchal, racist, ableist, and classist capitalism. This programme thus allowed for a range of like-minded actors from around the world to connect and to exchange ideas, strategies, and visions. For the upcoming two years, the next iterations of NAS were to be hosted by various members in their respective communities. One of the curatorial themes, set by von Schubert and her colleagues at HKW, was CARING. Other participants and contributors from the Unlearning Place iteration had also expressed an interest in the topics of care, such that the interdependent curators and urban and architecture scholars Gilly Karjevsky and Rosario Talevi (who cooperate as the collective Soft Agency) and myself found one another and began to collaborate with the intention to co-curate an event together under the CARING rubric. The event was conceived as a collaboration between HKW and M.1, with the three of us as co-curators, in close conversation with the curators and other collaborators of NAS.

ing pandemic, our programme for June 2020 was altered in very unexpected ways. The three-day programme – originally conceived as a collective journey from Berlin to Hohenlockstedt with public programming at the sites of destination and departure and en route – had to take place virtually and included conversational lectures, performances, film screenings, workshops, artist talks, and the publication *Letters to Joan*, which offered a written dialogic format.¹⁵⁰

The curatorial concept focused on “care as the recognition of all bonds between both humans and non-humans; between humans and their systems, their infrastructures and institutions, and to attend to their fragility.” The event description continued with guiding questions:

As concepts of care can also provide us with an ethical and political framework for action, it situates the human as a caretaker; a custodial figure in the ongoing recuperation of a broken planet and its people. How can we practice care across different scales – the personal, the collective, the rural, the urban, the atmospheric – in order to sustain more-than-human worlds? And how can we proceed to a thinking and doing with care in a way that challenges the uneven labour conditions upon which the field operates?¹⁵¹

The “CARING” edition of NAS could thus be seen as an extension of the locally situated curatorial programming at M.1, which was aiming to engage with other scales of care via collaboration, to insert itself into the urban realm, and to connect with wider global discourses and international artistic positions.

To produce a written complement to the event, we conceived the lettered exchange *Letters to Joan* between the care ethics scholar Joan Tronto and a range of scholars, artists, and writers.¹⁵² Tronto, who introduced the concept of care into political philosophy, arguing for a caring democracy, became the central node for an

150 For detailed programming, see Haus der Kulturen der Welt, “Programme: CARING,” accessed February 2024, https://archiv.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p_163699.php. The curatorial project brought together a range of scholars, artists, curators, and activists, such as Júlia Souza Ayerbe, Malu Blume, Edna Bonhomme, Loren Britton, Johanna Bruckner, Teresa Dillon, Andreas Doecke, João Florêncio, Johanna Hedva, Elke Krasny, Henry Lyonga, MATERNAL FANTASIES, Romi Morrison, Mwape J. Mumbi, Polyphrenic Creatures, Pallavi Paul, Helen Pritchard, Helena Reckitt, Patricia Reed, Eric Snodgrass, Yayra Sumah, and Joan Tronto.

151 Haus der Kulturen der Welt and M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, “CARING – 4th Edition of the New Alphabet School,” New Alphabet School, June 2020, <https://newalphabet.school.hkw.de/category/caring/>.

152 *Letters to Joan* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt; Hohenlockstedt, Germany: M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, 2020) is edited by Sascia Bailer, Gilly Karjevsky, and Rosario Talevi, with contributions by Edna Bonhomme, Johanna Bruckner, Teresa Dillon, João Florêncio, Johanna Hedva, Elke Krasny, Patricia Reed, Yayra Sumah, and Joan Tronto.

exchange of letters on care.¹⁵³ As co-curators, we invited eight thinkers and artists to write open letters to Tronto, in which they share thoughts on the current state of care from their different experiences during the global pandemic – and Tronto responded. Collectively, the *Letters to Joan* span genealogical, political, and planetary approaches.¹⁵⁴ We imagined these letters and their responses as making up a landscape of care – a relational map one can read from one's own personal position, as we collectively begin our long journey to creating a world imbued with care as a norm, as a democratic order. With this emerging map of care, it is possible to see how far the concept stretches – and how essential it is as an alternative paradigm.¹⁵⁵ We were touched by the intimacy that the writers display in their letters, and by the depth and attention with which Tronto responded to each of them.¹⁵⁶ The lettered exchange further holds tremendous inspiration for the theoretical and conceptual engagement with care within this research-creation, as I continue the process of “thinking-with” Joan Tronto in the next chapter.¹⁵⁷

4.3.4.3 Closing Event: “Caring Infrastructures”

The multivoiced, interdisciplinary event “CARING” was hosted online at HKW in June 2020 and continued at M.1 in Hohenlockstedt on October 24 and 25, 2020, with the event “Caring Infrastructures.” Due to the largely English-speaking and

153 Even before the pandemic interrupted our physical programming for HKW and M.1, we – Karjevsky, Talevi, and myself – had considered an editorial project that would extend existing discursive formations on care. We considered putting two key figures of care theories into dialogue, without asking them to physically travel internationally (because we consider it counter-productive to our cause of thinking about care for more-than-human worlds, but also because some of these scholars are not physically fit for travel due to age or illness). We therefore wanted to revert to a more traditional mode of exchange: the letter. As the pandemic appeared on the horizon, we decided to expand on this idea and make it a more expansive exchange of letters between a range of scholars, artists, thinkers, and activists on the notion of care during the pandemic.

154 To provide a brief overview of the content of the letter exchange: Yayra Sumah proclaims that “care is not love” and reflects on the confusion of motherhood with care. Elke Krasny highlights how this current pandemic hit women hard. João Florêncio points to the contested notion of “home” in times of self-isolation. Edna Bonhomme writes “a litany for surviving Black death.” Johanna Hedva points to the revolutionary potential of the bedridden body. Teresa Dillon turns our attention to more-than-human care concepts and the internet of life. Patricia Reed describes the co-dependency of care and knowledge, especially when thinking in planetary dimensions. Finally, Johanna Bruckner follows particles as they escape from the earth's atmosphere and form new caring constellations in our sky.

155 This passage comes from our editorial text for *Letters to Joan*; see <https://newalphabetsschool.hkw.de/letters-to-joan/>.

156 The compilation of letters formed part of the edited publication for the New Alphabet School on CARING and was made available for free downloading on the project blog: *ibid*.

157 See section 5.1 – “Thinking-with Joan Tronto: In Search of Caring Infrastructures.”

academic tone of the HKW event, it was incredibly important to me to host a second, on-site edition tailored to the local audience, in terms of language, format, location, and mode of communication. As this event was also to be the closing event of the curatorial cycle, it was incredibly difficult to imagine how it would be possible to conclude a socially engaged curatorial programme without another face-to-face encounter.¹⁵⁸

Conceptually, the event proceeded from the local as a starting point and presented a series of talks, workshops, film screenings, and community forums that focused on encounters based in care and solidarity. Artistic, design-based, activist, and local initiatives invited the audience to reflect on care practices from different perspectives and to design long-term caring infrastructures.¹⁵⁹ The curatorial concept stated:

Social norms and often unquestioned values act as invisible infrastructures that determine how we shape interpersonal relationships: In what way do we care for ourselves, for each other and for our communities? As rigid as these norms and values may seem, they have the potential to be carriers of social change: Can we unlearn traditional mechanisms of exclusion and design new social protocols that focus on collective care and solidarity? Can our society become more inclusive by incorporating ethics of care into our social infrastructures?¹⁶⁰

However, the irony of the occasion was that the second lockdown would end up occurring on that same weekend in October, so the event had to be reconceptualised again, from the local back to online. However, due to the sustained relations with the community – and the programming being in German – it still managed to be a successful, and surprisingly intimate and engaged, online programme, with lectures, film screenings, artist talks, the presentation of projects, and community conversations.

Taken together, these three event series within the FUTURE programme stream expanded from the local towards the establishment of wider networks of alliances and discursive formations. They were sustained by collaborations with other local

158 I reflect on these tensions in my chapter “Care without Bodies” in Bailer, *Curating, Care, and Corona* and in this account in section 4.4 – “Dis/continuities.”

159 The event continued the New Alphabet School's CARING edition from June 11 to 14, 2020 (co-curated by Sascia Bailer, Gilly Karjevsky, and Rosario Talevi) in cooperation with the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. It was generously supported by Förderstiftung des Kreises Steinburg and Kulturstiftung des Landes Schleswig-Holstein. This event marked the closing of the curatorial cycle 2019–20. For the full programming, visit M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, “Symposium: Caring Infrastructures,” October 2020, <https://www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de/en/2019-2020/future/infrastrukturen-des-zwischenmenschlichen/>.

160 For the full text, see *ibid.*

initiatives, regional and international institutions, and collaborative curatorial processes, and driven by the idea of co-founding or strengthening infrastructures of support, resistance, and alliance in Hohenlockstedt and beyond.

4.3.5 ART: Discourse and Artistic Production on Care

Alongside my intention to curatorially support the strengthening and building of local-regional support structures, solidarity platforms, and community tools, it was also my goal to support artistic, curatorial, and editorial processes that would critically address questions of care. Thus, for the programme stream ART, I was working from the argument that, within the realm of artistic freedom, new strategies could be developed to address the complex issues around care. Artistic practices located at the interface of social reproduction and social justice were the main focus. Through theme-specific artist prizes, artistic interventions, publications, and collaborations with regional art academies, the programme sought to support curatorial, editorial, and artistic practices on care.

This rubric of ART involved three commissioned artistic interventions: the archival art and design project *Archive of Encounters*, by students of the University of Fine Arts Hamburg (HFBK Hamburg); the sound work *Umrisse – In den Rissen* (Outlines – In the Cracks), by Polyphrenic Creatures; and a second sound work, entitled *Atmospheric Escape: Fabulating Care*, by Johanna Bruckner. It further included the commissioned digital performance *Love and Labor. Intimacy and Isolation. Care and Survival*, a performance between mothers and children in a state of lockdown, organised by MATERNAL FANTASIES, and four publications: two artist monographs, the first by Malu Blume, called *What We Could Have Become: Reflections on Queer-Feminist Filmmaking*, and the second, by MATERNAL FANTASIES, called *Re-Assembling Motherhood(s): On Radical Care and Collective Art as Feminist Practices* (both Onomatopoe, 2021); the anthology *Letters to Joan* (HKW, 2020); and my reflective booklet *Curating, Care, and Corona* (Verlag der Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, 2020).¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ At M.1, each artistic director is expected to write a small publication at the end of their curatorial cycle. While the publications form a series, which adhere to a common visual and conceptual framework, the content and style of the publication is rather open. I decided to do a reflective publication that would weave practice-based and theoretical considerations around my curatorial programming into one another, with the goal to make them accessible to a wider audience. Under the title *Curating, Care, and Corona*, I produced a piece of writing that is reflective of the political conditions, my curatorial practice, and the encounters and conversations with the local audiences, yet it is also a highly personal rapport. My intention was to produce a bilingual publication about the programming that would be accessible to the local audience yet also relevant to scholars and theorists who work on similar intersections of curating, care, and social transformation. See Sascia Bailer, *Curating, Care, and Corona*, Kuratieren, no. 6 (Hohenlockstedt: Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, 2020).

The latter two publications are open access and have been circulated widely and used in teachings in different international contexts.¹⁶²

4.3.5.1 Artist Prize on Care

The basis for several of the artistic and discursive formats of the ART stream was the artist prize that the Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung awards every two years to two young artists (or art collectives) with a connection to Northern Germany. The winner receives 3,000 euros (4,000 euros for groups) and access to an artist's apartment and studio in Hohenlockstedt for three months, as well as further funding and curatorial and editorial support to realise an exhibition or final presentation as well as an artist monograph.

As artistic director 2019–20 at M.1, part of my formal tasks included conceptualising and implementing the open call for artists, selecting the jury, curating the exhibitions, and editing the publications. In the framework of my curatorial focus on care, I therefore also tailored the open call to artists with critical practices that address questions of care:

Considering the alarming state of these social conditions surrounding care, relatively little action can be noticed within public and political debate. One has to ask: *Who cares?*

Within the realm of artistic freedom, new strategies can be developed to address these complex issues around *Care*. We are looking for critical artistic positions at the intersection of social reproduction and social justice – in short, art that cares for care. Applying artists may define *Care* widely, ranging from an understanding of care for social, ecological, spatial and technological processes, to care as an artistic investigation of intercultural, intergender, intergenerational forms of co-habitation within rural and urban territories. Of interest are also: artistic practices that explicitly address the complexities around the ongoing care crisis; that develop new strategies on the tensions around invisibility/visibility, private/public; that challenge the contemporary imbalances around gender and race within care work and propose alternative future visions; that critically examine isolation and social exclusion; that connect disparate social groups and allow for the emergence of alliances or possibly even new social infrastructures of care.

The jury selected two artistic positions that critically addressed care work, community, and gender, developing their visions of a caring future in very different ways.¹⁶³

162 Due to the space limitations of this publication, I focus only on a selection of examples from the curatorial programme. For a full overview, please refer to Sascia Bailer for M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, "Artistic Direction 2019/20: CARE," October 2020, <https://www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de/en/2019-2020/>.

163 I extended jury invitations to Elke Krasny (based in Vienna) and the socially engaged artist Jeanne van Heeswijk (based in Rotterdam). Unfortunately, Krasny fell sick in the week of the

4.4.5.1.1 MATERNAL FANTASIES

The Berlin-based feminist art collective MATERNAL FANTASIES consists of seven women and their children and uses everyday materials and environments to create otherworldly realms to challenge the rigid narratives around motherhood within society and art history. Their often experimental aesthetics disrupts audience expectations of mother and child imagery and the perception of maternal care as a purely affectionate, loving, and selfless activity. It is thus not merely at a representational level that MATERNAL FANTASIES seeks to promote other ways of seeing and understanding the entanglements of art and motherhood: their work is shaped collaboratively with their children, and collective reading and writing sessions inform their work as much as their myriad lived experiences do. In deciding to integrate their children into their artistic process, they also integrate the absence of quiet. The children's personalities, moods, and (un)willingness to participate substantially shape the artistic outcomes and point to the delicate ethical foundation upon which their processes rest. As mothers and artists, how do they balance the desire for quality image production with the needs and wants of their children – priorities that are often in conflict? Who decides which images make the final cut? Will the children feel uncomfortable watching themselves when they are older? Can children be authors of artistic work? These questions point to the fact that MATERNAL FANTASIES operates in fairly uncharted territory, which in turn highlights the timeliness of their work.¹⁶⁴

In the framework of their fellowship at M.1, the collective produced the experimental film *Suspended Time, on Caring* (2020; Images 44 and 45), the digital performance piece *Love and Labor. Intimacy and Isolation. Care and Survival* (2020, Image 48), and the publication *Re-Assembling Motherhood(s): On Radical Care and Collective Art as Feminist Practice* (2021, Onomatopée; Images 47 and 48).¹⁶⁵

jury session, so it took place without her. Ulrike Boskamp, founding director of the Arthur Boskamp- Stiftung, also formed part of the jury, alongside to myself.

164 For the contemporary and historical trajectory of motherhood and art-making, see section 3.1 – “Against all Odds: Mothers in the Arts” and section 3.1.1 – “Feminist Legacies: Histories of Renegotiating Art, Maintenance, and Sexuality.”

165 The artist monograph *Reassembling Motherhood(s): On Radical Care and Collective Art as Feminist Practice* is the result of MATERNAL FANTASIES two-year fellowship. It invites the reader to learn about and from the collective's artistic methods by offering insight into their working process. As both a handbook and an archive, this publication is an important contribution to the field of feminist art-making, uniting reflective essays, autobiographical writing, performance scores, selected artworks, and a manifesto for a caring economy. It thereby documents MATERNAL FANTASIES' critical engagement with motherhood(s) on personal, artistic, and societal levels – producing eccentric visibilities and concrete counter-strategies in a field in which invisibilities of care prevail. Sascia Bailer, Magdalena Kallenberger, and Maicyra Teles Leão e Silva, eds. *Re-Assembling Motherhood(s): On Radical Care and Collective Art as Feminist Practices* (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2021).



Image 44: *MATERNAL FANTASIES, Blumenwiese, 2020*, film still from *Suspended Time, on Caring*. © *MATERNAL FANTASIES*.



Image 45: *MATERNAL FANTASIES, Wattenmeer, 2020*, film still from *Suspended Time, on Caring*. © *MATERNAL FANTASIES*.

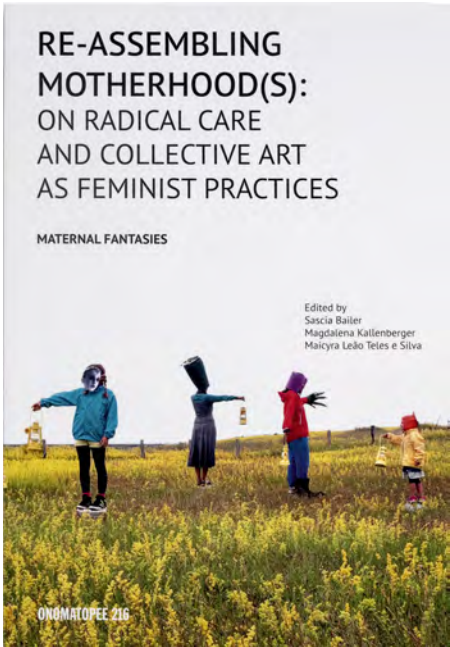


Image 46: Cover of *Re-Assembling Motherhood(s)* by MATERNAL FANTASIES, 2021. Courtesy of Onomatopee.



Image 47: A spread from *Re-Assembling Motherhood(s)* by MATERNAL FANTASIES, 2021. Courtesy of Onomatopee.



Image 48: *MATERNAL FANTASIES, Love and Labor. Intimacy and Iso-lation. Care and Survival*, 2020, screenshot from online performance. For the event “CARING” at HKW, *MATERNAL FANTASIES* produced the new digital work *Love and Labor*. Taking place on Zoom, this performance with mothers and children during the Covid-19 lockdowns allowed viewers to peek into the artists’ homes, where artistic production exists alongside domestic tasks and childcare. © *MATERNAL FANTASIES*.

4.3.5.1.2 Malu Blume

The other artist prize recipient during my term at M.1 was the Berlin-based queer-feminist artist, performer, and educator Malu Blume. Blume mostly works as part of artist collectives on issues of care, collective knowledge production, archive politics, friendship, and queer feminism. During their residency, Blume produced the feminist sci-fi video work *The Book of S of I* (2020). Told as a queer-feminist tale, the film celebrates the utopian power of self-love at the social fringes, belonging and friendship as survival strategies, and care as a radical means of anti-capitalist resistance and life.¹⁶⁶ The film appears like a fever dream – a spontaneous vision of that which humanity could have become (Image 49 and 50). Blume also produced an artist monograph, *What We Could Have Become: Reflection on Queer-Feminist Filmmaking* (2021, Onomatopée) (Image 51 and 52),¹⁶⁷ in which they argue that the given

166 Sascia Bailer, “Staging Ground for Action,” in *What We Could Have Become: Reflections on Queer Feminist Filmmaking*, by Malu Blume, ed. Sascia Bailer (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2021).

167 In their artist monograph *What We Could Have Become: Reflections on Queer-Feminist Filmmaking*, Blume reflected on the film production process. The publication brings together fragments of writing and visual material from and about *The Book of S of I*, providing the reader with the artist’s critical reflections on the process and aspirations of the endeavor. Blume thus not only invites the reader to merely escape into a different world order but to ques-

world serves as a blueprint to create other worlds, “even if they are just as terrifying as ours, or show us how terrifying our world actually is. But there is something very powerful about imagining that our world could be different.”¹⁶⁸ The artist further claims that this attempt at a fictional-world-becoming-reality often fails, but, arguably, it is through these ambivalences that the politics of care can be negotiated – and Blume’s work contributes to this urgent renegotiation of collective care.¹⁶⁹

Both Blume and *MATERNAL FANTASIES* conceptualised and recorded central elements of their respective films during their residencies in Hohenlockstedt. Thus, the region between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea lent itself as a stage upon which their visions of caring futures could extend (Images 44 and 45; 49 and 50). These artistic positions allowed the fields of tension between care, gender, and community to unfold, oscillating between euphoria and delusion.¹⁷⁰

A showcase of the video work of *MATERNAL FANTASIES* and Blume, *FANTASTIC FUTURES – Films on Care and Collectivity*, was intended to take place at M.1 in the spring of 2020. Due to Covid-19, however, the exhibition could not take place in its originally intended format; instead, shortened versions of the films were shown in the street-facing windows of the art foundation.¹⁷¹

In the course of the curatorial cycle, several other commissioned performative or participatory artworks and publications also came into being.¹⁷² For the purpose

tion – to imagine – what forms of collective care we could be living today if we reimaged our past.

168 Malu Blume, *What We Could Have Become: Reflections on Queer Feminist Filmmaking*, ed. Sascia Bailer (Eindhoven: Onomatopoe, 2021), 38.

169 Ibid., 39.

170 However, due to the Covid-19 health measures, the exhibition *FANTASTIC FUTURES – Films on Care and Collectivity* at M.1 with the recipients of the M.1 artist prizes, Malu Blume and *MATERNAL FANTASIES*, could not open as planned in May 2020. To provide access to art even in times of “social distancing,” the trailers of the Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung’s 2019–20 awardees, Malu Blume and *MATERNAL FANTASIES*, were shown daily from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. in the street-level windows of M.1. The works were also shown in full as part of the closing event “Caring Infrastructures.”

171 Additionally, their works were presented online as part of the New Alphabet School (NAS) on CARING. The full version of Blume’s *The Book of S of I* premiered online as part of the NAS programme in June 2020. The screening was followed by a conversation between Blume, their friends and collaborators, and myself, which is also included in their publication. Due to the second pandemic lockdown, a thirty-minute version of their film *Suspended Time, on Caring* was also shown online during the two-day closing event “Caring Infrastructures” in October 2020. The screening was followed by an artist talk on their methods and the political potential of their work.

172 For an overview of all the works, see Sascia Bailer for M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, “Artistic Direction 2019/20: CARE,” October 2020, <https://www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de/en/2019-2020/>.

of this account, I focus in on the collaborative art-and-design-based archival project *Archive of Encounters* in the next section.



Image 49: Malu Blume, *The Book of S of I*, 2020, film still. © Malu Blume.



Image 50: Malu Blume, *The Book of S of I*, 2020, film still. © Malu Blume.

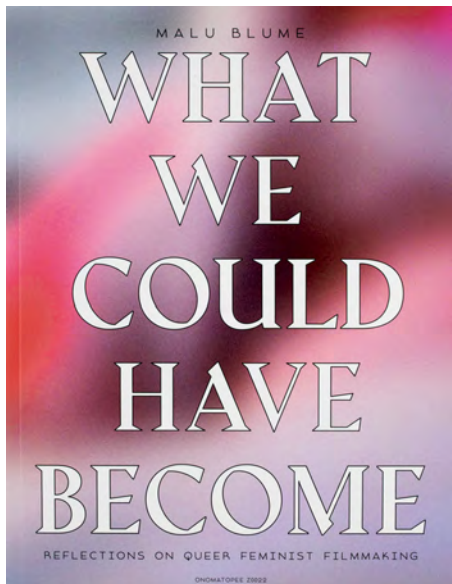


Image 51: Cover of *What We Could Have Become* by Malu Blume, 2021. Courtesy of Onomatopoe.



Image 52: A spread from *What We Could Have Become* by Malu Blume, 2021. Courtesy of Onomatopoe.

4.3.5.2 Archive of Encounters

Well aware that all the participatory processes that we would explore in the curatorial programming would not result in any tangible, object-based products, I had reached out to Studio Experimentelles Design at HFBK Hamburg (overseen by Prof. Jesko Fezer) to engage with questions of ephemerality, alternative forms of archiving, and accessibility right from the start.¹⁷³ To address matters of participation, accessibility, and documentation, the collaboration departed from these questions: What remains of an encounter, of a conversation – perhaps personal memories, sensations, emotions, and maybe some notes? How can these fleeting moments be captured? And how can the experience be made accessible to people who were not there?¹⁷⁴

In their search for answers, four HFBK Hamburg students developed *Archive of Encounters*. The project brought together artistic interpretations and documentary elements for each of the events in the curatorial cycle, which were collected in eight wooden cases. To produce the cases, one or two of the students of Studio Experimentelles Design provided assistance for each event. The eight archival cases were designed to be mobile and participatory: through cooperation with the community library in Hohenlockstedt, people could borrow and take home the cases, just like other media (Images 55–57). The archive invited users to investigate the traces of each event, engaging at their own pace with the themes, impressions, and experiences and developing their own encounters with the cases' contents – thus enabling a continued engagement with the curatorial program long after its formal conclusion (Images 53–57).¹⁷⁵

This collaborative and participatory series of works fulfilled several roles within the curatorial cycle, as it not only brought together a range of actors from within and outside Hohenlockstedt but also produced accessible archival formats that provided conditions for future engagement with the themes and artistic methods of the discursive events. In terms of curatorial strategy, it is important to recognise that the students' presence throughout the process formed the precondition for their archival undertaking, and, hence, the archive could not have been created as an afterthought at a later stage of the curatorial cycle.

173 The project was designed and carried out by students of the Studio Experimental Design programme at HFBK Hamburg, under Prof. Jesko Fezer: Veronica Andres, Pablo Lapettina, Laura Mahnke, and Skadi Sturm.

174 See Sascia Bailer, "Care for Caregivers: Curating against the Care Crisis," in *Curating with Care*, ed. Elke Krasny and Lara Perry (London: Routledge, 2023), 193

175 For a self-critical perspective on the dis/continuities of the programming, see section 4.4 – "Dis/continuities."



Image 53: An archival case made by Veronica Andres for the “Workshop on the Value of Care,” as part of the Archive of Encounters project, 2020. Photo: Laura Mahnke.



Image 54: An archival case made by Veronica Andres for the “Workshop on Time,” as part of the Archive of Encounters project, 2020. Photo: Veronica Andres.



Image 55: An archival case made by Skadi Sturm for the “Holo Miteinander” storytelling caf  s, as part of the Archive of Encounters project, 2020. Photo: Skadi Sturm.



Image 56: Archival cases presented at the public library in Hohenlockstedt, as part of the Archive of Encounters project, 2020. Photo: Laura Mahnke.



Image 57: Pablo Lapettina interacting with the archival cases at the public library in Hohenlockstedt, as part of the Archive of Encounters project, 2020. Photo: Laura Mahnke.

While most of the curatorial programming was ephemeral and of a relational nature, contributing to the aesthetic-discursive sphere which connects art, care, and feminist practices was nevertheless important. Many of the artistic works and publications we produced also served as a mediator between the local community, situated artistic practices, and a wider audience. The programme stream ART further allowed for the production of contributions to the field that were able to outlive the temporary nature of the programming, while still stemming from situated, relational practices of art and knowledge production.

4.4 Dis/continuities

It's over. I'm officially no longer artistic director at M.1, and my project was completed with the final event "Caring Infrastructures" – even though it had to be moved online as well, last minute. But even though it has formally come to closure – the relationships have not. I am no longer paid to nurture these relationships; I no longer live there; I was unable to meet everyone physically to say goodbye. My leaving feels half-baked. It seems like I was unable to obtain a full closure due to the restrictions around Covid-19, but also due to the fact that relational curatorial practice does not end – not like that.

Relationships were fostered, nurtured, and built over almost two years. Now where do they go? What happens when the budget is gone? When employment ends? Who sustains the social

*processes and with what resources and intentions? When is a social process over? What does that say about a social process – does it make it less valid, or does it simply continue to exist in the memory of people as what it was? Do the relationships fade out, do they reconfigure (without my presence)? And is it necessary for them to continue for the process to have been meaningful? In which ways would a self-organised continuation add value to the project? Or would it basically become something else anyways – another project in itself?*¹⁷⁶

This excerpt from my notes, made roughly one month after the last event at M.1, brings out the unresolved aspects within the context of my artistic directorship, which are also relevant for other practitioners with a community-engaged practice: How to carry social relations in times of social distancing? How to find closure for a relational curatorial practice? How to enable self-organisation from within an institution? How to deal with ending budgets but continued responsibilities?

In the following sections, I aim to critically engage with potential reasons for the curatorial programming terminating without any self-organised continuation, despite my curatorial efforts.

4.4.1 Conceptual Contradictions

At M.1, the participatory design of the programming, from the outset, was not without contradictions. The open call for the position of artistic director 2019–20 at M.1, to which I had responded, explicitly asked for participatory curatorial approaches. But it remained unclear how the participatory processes – which were to be initiated throughout the eighteen-month engagement with the town's residents – could be continued after the position ended. I therefore had aimed to develop a self-organised continuation of the program from the outset.¹⁷⁷ This, however, proved particularly difficult due to the social-distancing measures and closing of cultural institutions for large parts of 2020 under the ongoing pandemic. Due to this intensive engagement with the community, the idea of the ending my term without a planned continuation created a sensation of violent abruptness – the “luring in” of residents from the community, to then cut off these myriad relations with the community, felt inadequate. But I also knew that, with my usual place of residence being almost a thousand kilometres south of Hohenlockstedt and with my employment ending, I would not be able to *afford* to continue to care for these previously fostered social relations.

Throughout the course of my programming, it also became clear that the other employees of M.1 with programming responsibilities would not have the capacity to take over parts of my former programming. The institution's priority was to provide complete curatorial and conceptual freedom to the next appointed artistic director,

176 Field notes, November 20, 2020.

177 See section 4.4.1 – “Initial Curatorial Concept.”

without them being called to continue the programming strands of a previous director. While it was this precise curatorial freedom that had enabled me to create an experimental curatorial undertaking into the realms of care, it was also what limited its continuation. This prioritisation certainly creates unique curatorial freedom for each appointee, yet it becomes unfruitful when the fostering of social relations takes such a central role in one's curatorial practice, as it does in mine. I therefore had hoped for, and arranged for, a self-organised continuation among the community members of some of the curatorial formats, in particular the storytelling café series "Holo Miteinander."

4.4.2 Pandemic Deviations

The Covid-19 pandemic hit Central Europe in March 2020, fourteen months into my public programming. Until then, it had been possible to strengthen micro-communities around caring and solidarity practices in the region of Hohenlockstedt through the curatorial programming. However, the essential stage of transitioning into self-organisation mode was originally planned for the last six months of the curatorial residency (January–June 2020).¹⁷⁸ It was exactly this stage that was tremendously interrupted by the first intense lockdown across Germany (and most other countries around the globe). Despite the continuation of the programming via online platforms, it did not allow for the same quality of encounter to emerge, through which the necessary degrees of mutual trust, commitment, and also regularity could be established. It seemed as though the lived practice of sharing required more time to become robust enough to weather the social-distancing measures of a global pandemic. While the digital continuation did work to some degree, the digitalised programme was unable to foster social relations strong enough to form a basis for later self-organisation.

With this in mind, I therefore had pushed very strongly to have a physical gathering after the first major lockdown of the pandemic. For us organisers, it had been difficult to imagine holding the planned closing event "Caring Infrastructures," and with it the final forum for the storytelling cafés, digitally, as the intention for that event was to develop a collective vision for the project as well as a plan for the continued self-organised. An in-person closing moment was needed, on site at M.1, with

178 Ibid.

the Hohenlockstedters and community collaborators with whom we had been working for over a year.¹⁷⁹

In my reflective essay “Curating, Care, and Corona,” which I was finalising in the last few days before the final event (October 2020), I formulated the following convictions in the subsection “Care without Bodies”:

After the decision to hold the cooperating event with the HKW digitally, the necessity of an analogue continuation became increasingly clear. For, digital and physical forms of gathering have to be thought out and practiced in mutual engagement, as the media scholar Felix Stalder articulates: “A culture of digital solidarity can be described as one rooted in a lived practice of sharing.” Accordingly, a closing moment is needed on site at M.1, with the Hohenlockstedters and the initiatives with whom we have been working since over a year: under the title Caring Infrastructures, we set an event for fall 2020. The local will be situated as the starting point for a series of conversations, workshops, film screenings and community forums in order to focus on everyday encounters based on care and solidarity. Artistic, design-based and activist practices should enter into exchange with local initiatives to reflect on care from different perspectives and to clear the way for future local action in solidarity. And for this we want and need bodily presence, on site.¹⁸⁰

The goal was to have the reflective booklet, *Curating, Care, and Corona*, printed for the final in-person encounter, “Caring Infrastructures,” scheduled for October 24 and 25, 2020, at M.1. Hence, I wrote this passage with the strong belief that this physical encounter would be possible, that the lockdown was over (not anticipating, then, how many more were to follow), and that, with a very careful public health plan, we could meet collectively for a concluding encounter. With the intention to offer the bilingual publication to the participants for the closing event, I had sent it to print. Yet, within those same few days, the pandemic conversation shifted rapidly, and another lockdown was announced, commencing in the week of our planned event. I was utterly frustrated. Again, overnight, we – the M.1 team, the contributors, and myself – had to carefully rethink a public programme that was intended to take place on site, just as we had had to do for the earlier “CARING” event at HKW. It further had to be transformed into a digital event that would be suitable for a generally elderly, non-tech-savvy community. For this process we had only four days. To my

179 Initially, the closing event was scheduled to take place in June 2020, as part of the CARING collaboration with the HKW. However, due to the lockdown it had to take place online. As this format did not allow for a sincere engagement with the local audiences from Hohenlockstedt and the surrounding area, I pushed for an extension of my contract for another two months, in order to organise an onsite closing event for October 2020.

180 Sascia Bailer, *Curating, Care, and Corona*, Kuratieren #6 (Hohenlockstedt: Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, 2020), 28–29.

pleasant surprise, the audience members and the contributors were very willing, open, and dedicated, despite the new circumstances.

Regardless of my frustration or my initial reluctance, the German-speaking event was able to reach the local audiences, and it engendered fruitful engagements and conversations between the participants, the residency artists, and the HFBK Hamburg art students. For the virtual presentation of artistic works, artist talks, and curatorial lectures, local and nationwide audiences came together for one and a half days.¹⁸¹

In the course of the transition from physical to virtual event, my colleagues and I had decided to shift everything online except for one event: a hands-on workshop by the anti-capitalist organisation Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie (Laboratory for New Economic Ideas) from Leipzig. This workshop provided information and tools for communal self-organisation, in the hopes it would empower interested participants to continue the solidarity process via the storytelling cafés on their own. However, because of the large share of elderly people, we deemed it better to postpone the workshop until after the lockdown (not knowing the pandemic would continue for years). In retrospect, I consider this workshop to have been a key element in the path towards self-organisation, which, due to the pandemic, was not able to happen and hence could not contribute to a solid basis of relational trust and skills towards community-based self-organisation.

Other forms of communal engagement during the pandemic also turned out differently than anticipated. In the case of *Archive of Encounters*, the collaboration with the community library of Hohenlockstedt didn't attract as much attention as hoped for. The eight archival cases were accessible in the library, yet our collaborator, the library's director, shared with us that the library users hadn't taken up the offer to borrow the cases and take them home. In retrospect, it might have taken more art educational facilitation to communicate the project to the community and spark more interest in further engagement. However, neither the art foundation nor I had the capacity to perform this necessary work at that particular moment.

For archival case number 8 – which took inspiration from the storytelling cafés and was designed for its users to record their own stories on cassettes (Image 55) – we initiated a collaboration with an ambulant care service, whose workers attended their patients at their homes. The idea was that the individual care worker would take the case to their patients and help them interact with the participatory case, where the patients could record their own stories of solidarity. However, the feedback was that the patients, in many instances, were unable to focus on the case, as they suffered from chronic pain or severe illnesses. Hence, the collaboration was ended.

181 For more details, see M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, "Symposium: Caring Infrastructures," October 2020, <https://www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de/en/2019-2020/future/infrastrukturen-de-s-zwischenmenschlichen/>.

4.4.3 Continued Quest for Self-organisation

The quest for another on-site encounter, despite the failed attempt in the autumn of 2020, lingered on. When the second lockdown had ended, my colleagues from M.1 and I reached out to the participants of both the workshop series “Care for Care-givers” and the storytelling cafés to invite them to an in-person gathering, where we would reflect on the programming and consider possible next steps. Twenty participants came together for this reflective discussion, moderated by Antje Hachenberg, who had also moderated the earlier storytelling cafés. The visitors were greeted by the same arrangement of tables into a square banquette as in the previous events, they were offered cake and coffee, and they each took a seat at the large table. Each participant was granted the same amount of time to share their reflection on their participation in the curatorial programming on care.

The general sentiment seemed to be that, after the programming ended, they had missed these encounters – the social quality of the events, the exchange, the networking and information-sharing opportunities, the sense of hospitality. Many expressed a wish for the storytelling café series to continue. However, with my position at M.1 already over and my colleagues unable to continue the programming due to lack of capacity, the participants were confronted with the only path forward: self-organisation.

M.1 offered to continue to share the resource of the café area with the group, if they decided to proceed. One segment of the participants seemed hesitant to commit to a self-organised continuation, due to their enormously high engagement with other social and volunteer activities in the region (such as refugee-welcoming groups, church, choirs, and other local activism groups). The other part of the group was less socially active and had partly joined the events at M.1 with the motivation to feel less isolated and to informally connect with others. This segment had little to no experience in organising social events and seemed as if they were feeling intimidated.¹⁸² Unfortunately, that afternoon we were unable to find a volunteer to host the next session.

The conclusion that I drew from this session was that with my emphasis on “care” had indeed created very comfortable spaces of encounter which had appeared like consumable cultural products for the participants. This seemed to create the impression for the participants that they would have to match the level of professionalism with any self-organised event, leaving them intimidated and rather discouraged – when, in reality, any low-key continuation of the project would have been welcome.

182 To replace the missed workshop by Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie, my colleague Claudia Dorfmueller offered to host a workshop on the basics of cultural management, to equip the interested community members with the necessary skills for event and community organising.

The day following the final get-together, one of the dedicated, yet rather timid, participants offered to take responsibility for the first self-organised event. They set a date a few weeks away, but too few people committed to joining, and so it did not take place.

4.4.4 Open Endings

The foregoing accounts highlight the fragility and many complexities involved in sustaining relational processes after such projects have come to their official end. Already in my initial curatorial concept I had noted the importance of staying open to the participatory process and its unpredictability:

Since the process is – and must be – an open one, the outcome cannot be predicted. [...] Whether these processes are made visible in a final symposium, a summer festival, an online platform, or a (travelling) exhibition is ultimately dictated by the process that precedes them. In this sense, curating is taken seriously as a relational practice that aims to make care tangible and visible for caregivers.¹⁸³

I therefore do not regard the project and its aim to have *failed* due to its dis/continuity. In my understanding, such an outcome does not devalue the processes, encounters, conversations, and learnings which preceded its official conclusion. While the attempt of a self-organised continuation may have failed, this outcome must be taken serious as a possible, and viable, option for a community-driven project: if the participants do not have the desire nor the capacity to self-organise, then discontinuing the programme is a valid decision.

I want to end this train of thought with a quote from the artist Abraham Cruzvillegas:

After transforming something, I want it to be ready to be transformed again, by interpretation, by physical decay, by its weight, by time. That's why I don't like the idea of production, because it means arriving at the end, not at the beginning.¹⁸⁴

Following Cruzvillegas's thought, "production" is the tied to terminal processes, and "reproduction" is framed as a continuous new beginning. If we consider a relational curatorial practice as one of reproduction and care – as a practice that continuously

183 For the full initial concept, see section 4.4.1 – "Initial Curatorial Concept."

184 Abraham Cruzvillegas, quoted in Clara Kim, "Organization of Matter through Sympathy," in *Abraham Cruzvillegas. Autoconstrucción: The Book* (Los Angeles: Roy and Edna Disney/Calarts Theater, 2014), 17.

recreates the conditions of its existence – then what does it say about its termination? The social relations of curatorial encounters do not abruptly end; rather, they are transformed again and again, into acquaintanceships, into friendships, into new collaborations. Time turns shared lived experiences into shared memories that withdraw themselves from the sphere of a curator's control or influence. They obtain a life of their own – remotely, diasporically – as participants and contributors part along their various pathways again. They turn into book projects, poems, and anecdotes, from which new encounters may emerge.