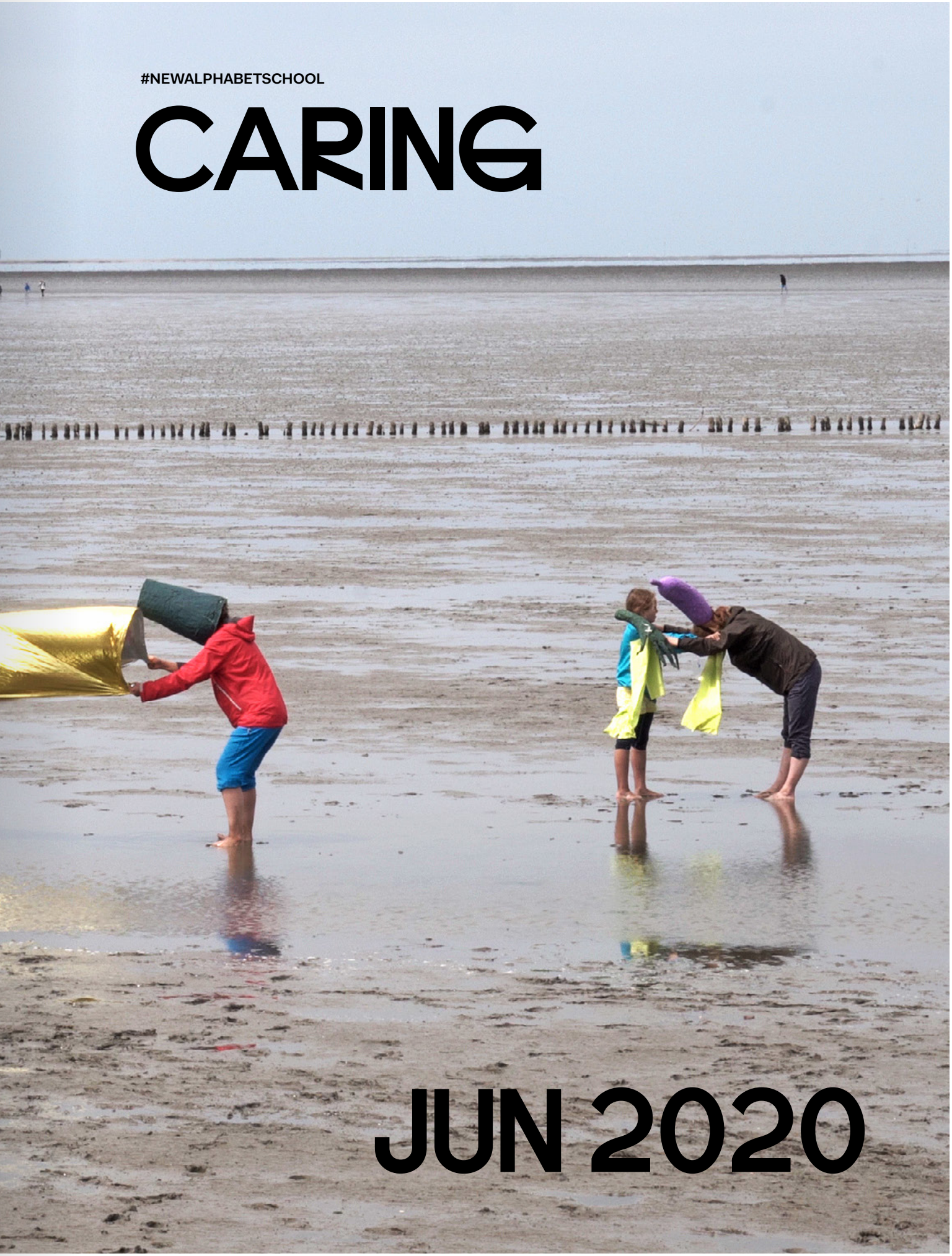
#NEWALPHABETSCHOOL

CARING



JUN 2020

Letters to Joan

WITH:
Sascia Bailer, Edna Bonhomme, Johanna Bruckner, Teresa Dillon, João Florêncio, Johanna Hedva, Elke Krasny, Gilly Karjevsky, Patricia Reed, Yayra Sumah, Rosario Talevi and Joan Tronto

**Edited by Gilly Karjevsky, Rosario Talevi (soft agency)
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The following letters bring together views on the current state of care in times of pandemic from artists, writers and academics. The invitation to write these letters provides a loose framework inside of which these practitioners could position their own practice and identity, in relation to a person who is also a node – Joan Tronto, a key proponent of different concepts and theories on care – with the idea of informal correspondence. These letters then span approaches that vary from the genealogical, to the political, to the planetary, if those distinctions even matter anymore. These letters and their recipient make up a constellation of care, offered here for you to find patterns or images that might emerge out of them – they are stars in the sky, a relational map you can only read from your own personal position, as we begin our long march towards a world imbued with care as norm, as a democractic paradigm.

Letters to Joan vereint verschiedene Perspektiven von Künstler*inen, Schriftsteller*innen und Wissenschaftler*innen in Bezug auf den *Care* Diskurs in Zeiten der Pandemie. Die Einladung, diese Briefe an Joan Tronto zu schreiben, eine Hauptvertreterin verschiedener Konzepte und Theorien zu *Care*, bietet einen losen Rahmen, innerhalb dessen sich die Beitragenden von ihrer eigenen Praxis und Identität aus positioniert haben. In diesem informellen Schriftwechsel adressieren sie ihre Briefe an eine Person, die gleichzeitig auch ein Knotenpunkt in einem weiten Diskursfeld darstellt. Ihre Briefe umspannen genealogischen, politischen bis zu planetarischen Ansätze, sofern diese Unterscheidungen überhaupt noch eine Rolle spielen. Der Briefwechsel, mit den darin enthaltenen verschiedenen Verständnissen von *Care*, eröffnet ein Spannungsfeld, das die Leser*innen dazu einlädt, darin Muster oder Bilder zu entdecken. Diese sind wie Sterne am Himmel, wie eine Art relationale Karte, die Jede*r nur aus der eigenen Position heraus lesen kann – während wir aufbrechen zu einer Welt, in der kollektive Fürsorge als demokratisches Paradigma, die Norm darstellt.

Berlin, March 1st, 2020

Dear Joan,

We begin our long march through the institutions.

In a way, for us, the long march began when we encountered ethics of care and other iterations of this aspect of political thought. For each of us this moment came through a different conversation, practice, friendship, process or personal experience. During the last few decades ethics of care (as a fundamentally feminist concept) have grown to create an alternative paradigm to financialinised capitalism in unparalleled ways. It's critique of the neo-liebral market logic dominating our societies is the most articulated, most practically applicable of concepts - as so much of the knowledge and techniques we need already exist. We just need to reach towards them, stretching from behind our modernist desks, and tap into them on a societal and infrastructural level. You've said before that "Care is not utopian, markets are utopian". What a radical thing to say! Here in a nutshell lies the daring shift we would all have to learn. How do we dare not to dream in grand ways, but to maintain? Dare not to innovate, but repair? Dare not to discover but recuperate? Dare to put a limit to growth, and start to care?

You've also said that it is time to think about care institutionalised. We wish to think of care infrastructuralised. The point of departure for this four-day program is to look at care through the prism of infrastructure. The conditions of social, racial and gender injustices are products of systematic and infrastructural forms that constantly reproduce the same mechanisms of exclusion and marginalisation. If we inscribe care into the building stones of our social infrastructures – does that generate a more just society? This requires a joint process of un-learning our everyday social relations, of establishing new social codes, new social patterns that allow us to restructure the ways in which we relate to one another, the ways in which social groups become public, visible, and recognized. By inserting a notion of “care” (and by learning from care-work) we aim to establish pathways for support, trust, and conviviality.
So we write to ask your permission to write to you, in all these many voices, to advise us on what to pack with us and what to unpack amongst us, as we embark on a joint segment of this long march, this current leg of our mutual journey.

We will begin in Berlin, and travel together to the rural town of Hohenlockstedt, this upcoming June 11th-14th, 2020 as part of an event on caring infrastructures as part of the fifth edition of the New Alphabet School on *#Caring*. As preparation for this hike, we need to stock up on concepts and fellow travelers. We wish to multiply and reverberate *#Caring* messages and ideas in this public setting at the Haus Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, and the M.1 Arthur Boskomp Stiftung in Hohenlockstedt - as well as with the group that will convene to make this journey together.
This is why we wish to open up a privately-written, publicly-published conversation with you, to engage with your ideas about ethics of care, as set forth by you and your collaborators early in the 70's, and the ways they have evolved since. This written correspondence will include practitioners of different attitudes and generations promoting ethics of care, looking backwards at their genealogies, and moving to their applications today. We imagine packing these letters in a neatly folded pile to take and read on our journey, as sustenance together with other provisions and necessities, next to the lunch box, together with a change of clothes and hiking shoes.

Is it OK that we continue to write?

Yours warmly,
Rosario, Sascia and Gilly

New York City
1 June 2020

Dear Rosario, Sascia, and Gilly,

Many thanks for your letter opening this collection of "Letters to Joan." I do still feel strange being the addressee of all of this extraordinary and creative thought; I do not feel that I have done anything so special so that I should be a more central "node" in this process. But even if it is a bit artificial, I am delighted to participate in a process that uses the informal/formal frame of the letter as a way to start this conversation. It is very rewarding for me to acquaint or to re-acquaint myself with you and the remarkable collection of fellow travelers you imagined for this journey we should take together. I see our struggle, along our different paths, as to figure out how to make our world livable for all. I am deeply grateful for this exchange, so thank you. And thank you also, to HKW for its support of this effort.

I also want to acknowledge that I write this letter amid not only a global pandemic but during the latest highly visible outbreak of the violence that is always present as a part of racism. I lived in Minneapolis for ten years, a friend lives within two blocks of where George Floyd was murdered. I now live in New York City, another home to police violence. And the pandemic that shapes this correspondence is a part of racist policies. Andrea Jenkins, a member of the Minneapolis City Council, wants us to declare racism a national public health emergency. If only this could solve the problem, or at least gain more attention than period outbreaks of outrage. I am so frustrated and angry and fed up with this situation in the USA, and yet, I realize that I am, in many important ways, one of the privileged ones.

I also want to acknowledge at the outset that I am living in a settler society where the land on which I live was expropriated from Native peoples. That African Americans and Native Americans are disproportionately suffering from this pandemic has to be a starting point for our journey together.

Let me begin my response to you with a few thoughts about reading through all of these letters. Each raised specific, life-shaping, points about the nature of care. How do we begin to make sense of the range of care needs and burdens, of responsibilities that are unrecognized and unassumed, or the breadth and depth of care concerns across time and space? This is not an easy task. There is, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, a burden carried by the writers that emerges in these letters, including Edna Bonhomme's "A Litany for Surviving Black Death" which is sadly more salient this week than two weeks ago. It comes out in the exhaustion to which Johanna Hadva gives voice. Sometimes that burden is framed in terms of panic or emergency. Sometimes it appears in the dull ache of our disoriented social systems. Of course, one of the many meanings in English of the word care is "burden," and in the face of these burdens, one cannot be foolishly optimistic. Nevertheless, I think it is wise for us to remember that there is a deep problem here: the burden of doing what Yayra Sumah called in her letter "the work before the work," of bringing oneself to the tasks of trying to achieve justice and care, always falls upon those who are already marginalized, oppressed, and aware of the needs for change. Not only do those who suffer injustice and mistreatment suffer, they also bear the burden of making such suffering visible. There can be joy and happiness along the way, but acknowledging as well how heavy is this burden is an important piece of this "work before the work."

Many of the letters emphasize a theme I often discuss, that care cannot be separated from its deeply political place, including Elke Krasny's important recognition that separate nations still must respond to a global pandemic. Many letter writers emphasize the centrality of time and space in this letters, Patricia Reed as well as Johanna Bruckner and Teresa Dillon raise the difficult questions for care ethics about the problem of determining the scale of care. How can one idea fit with intimate support for loved ones and demands for saving the planet? I think that care can do so, but it does require that we can think more creatively about scale. These letters, which go from the intimacy of body and home literally to the cosmos make clear the centrality of this issue.

So I am grateful for any thinking that we can devote to these large starting questions, and I shall take up various points in response to each of the letters.

And now, let us take on this "long march" and think about your framework and questions to me. You began your letter with a really lovely summary of my work, it felt affirming to read these questions that really do capture what I have been trying to do: "How do we dare not to dream in grand ways, but to maintain? Dare not to innovate, but repair? Dare not to discover but to recuperate? Dare to put a limit to growth and start to care?"

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

institutions in turn. So perhaps infrastructural change is necessary, but it might be too much to hope that changing infrastructure is somehow a permanent fix to our uncaring ways.

If we were to take our journey, though, you have asked what we should pack and what we should unpack. (Of course, as Joao Florencio notes in his letter, the capacity to travel here or there is *already* a privilege that we somewhat take for granted.) But this metaphor works very well and leads to these great questions.

Here's what we need to unpack: our defensiveness. Our "thin skin." White privilege. Our fear and disgust at bodies and minds that do not conform to our notions of the normal. Our fear and hatred of others whom we judge too quickly. The ignorance to which we cling and use as a shield against responsibility.

And to pack? Let's start with our curiosity. Our humility. With those two we can learn and be attentive to caring needs among the humans and non-humans we encounter. You suggested that we pack lunch, yes, a good idea to bring along sustenance and self-care and even things that bring us pleasure. And our boots. And more importantly, *someone else's* boots. As many of these letters point out, care requires that we see the world from someone/something else's perspective. This task of seeing from another's point of view is more complicated than it at first seems. Simply imagining that we know how to do this, and putting ourselves in that other place commits another kind of violence, for it presumes that "we" would "know" how that other person's boots feel, how are legs would feel in those differently worn heels, what we have been through there. Then comes the burden of knowing, really, what that person or thing's existence is about, with such knowledge comes responsibility. And so our last critical piece in our knapsack: an open mind willing to take and remake judgments. So often in our culture decisions are short-circuited. If I admitted, for example, that black people don't have the same degree of "choice" than I wouldn't be able to blame them for the inequalities that exist. Rather than admit that, I'll just imagine that everything they do is a matter of bad choice. (And we could say the same thing for other disparaged groups, too: the ill, the queer, etc.)

I look forward to continuing this journey with you and to hearing how you are doing on the way. Thanks for writing to me and initiating these exchanges.

My best Wishes,
Joan

New York, May 10, 2020

Mother's Day under COVID-19

"This experience of genuine love (a combination of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, and respect) nurtured my wounded spirit and enabled me to survive acts of lovelessness. I am grateful to have been raised in a family that was caring, and strongly believe that had my parents been loved well by *their* parents they would have given that love to their children. They gave what they had been given – care. Remember, care is a dimension of love, but simply giving care does not mean we are loving."

- bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions.*[1]

To Mother

by Yayra Sumah

I can hear you struggling aloud.

Despite the tears
that shone in your eyes,
I did not belong to you.

Despite the foundation
that you laid for me,
I wilted.

Your language instigates violence,
and the arrow of your voice
uproots me.

Your wing protects me,
but your tongue slices.

Care is not love.

The crow is not
a refuge for the hawk.

[2013]

I situate myself at the crossroads of art, activism, academia and music, the four directions from which I spiral, moving across my past, present and future in a process which I conceive of as the recovery of the lost and fragmented parts of my vital energy. The call to black feminist and labor organizing for me is an ever present one. But responding to this call demands that I cultivate the moral, affective and spiritual resources needed, and recover from my personal traumas in process of unlearning and self-care which lays the foundation for an anti-patriarchal mode of relating to myself and others – a process which I call "the work before the work."

But not only does black feminism inform my poetry, academic writing, and organizing, decolonial, critical theory and Afro-centricity forms another weft in the warp of my text. African and Afro-diasporic traditions of healing, which are rooted in ritual, initiation, and the spirits of my ancestors in nature, also guide me on the path which I seek out of what Sylvia Wynter has called the "Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,"[2] – that is, the histories, values, moral systems and politics of Western modernity.

When the pandemic hit us at Columbia University, we witnessed how the institution appropriated the languages of the 'left'. It spoke of the importance of 'community' even as it simultaneously began to fire faculty, staff and graduate student workers, and also reduce the incoming undergraduate student body, all in the name of austerity. Suddenly, many were facing houselessness, financial precarity and the inability to complete their degrees. Worst of all was the situation of international students, many of whom had no home to go to, as flights began to be cancelled while they were being evicted and while the Governor of the State of New York urged people to "shelter in place." Following this, a strike was organized by a minority of graduate student workers. But the organizing process was full of fear and betrayal. The appeals that strikers made to non-strikers in the name of Western liberal (colonial) moral principles – Aristotelian, Kantian, Utilitarian – fell on deaf ears. The response was, "we are in solidarity with you, but we will not strike," vitiating the meaning of 'solidarity' in one fell swoop.

I had a conversation with a colleague of mine during this period. When we considered the moral systems which could have motivated people to take courageous action and risk their privilege on behalf of those who were being harmed and disenfranchised, we began to consider one female faculty member who was also a mother. "She has guts," my colleague commented, "You can see that she is taking on that motherly, lioness role, by being willing to stick her neck out, care for, and protect us." We were amazed that this faculty member even spoke of resigning her position, were we to lose our position as Instructors for the coming academic year of 2020-2021. This comment that my colleague made is what has prompted my reflection on motherhood in this letter. It has prompted a reflection on patriarchal parenting and on childhood abuse, as I think about the extent to which motherhood in Western society can be a source of moral strength in the form of care work, and a site of practical ethics in the face of capitalist assault.

But without an organized politics aimed at ending imperialism, white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy, care work will continue to co-exist with, and facilitate oppression. This is because in our lived experiences, motherhood is often a site where care work can intersect with abuse and domination. The patriarchal mother may care for, and yet also abuse her children – emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually. A care ethic is not necessarily a love ethic, as bell hooks writes, because care is but one dimension, or ingredient of love: "embracing a love ethic means that we utilize all the dimension of love – 'care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, and

[1] bell hooks, *All About: New Visions,* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc/ HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 8.

[2] Wynter, Sylvia, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument," *Cr: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2000): 257-337.

knowledge' – in our every day."[3] Certainly, in the patriarchal nuclear family, care-takers and care-receivers are abused and become abusers, and complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is the name of the game.

In 2020 we are living in a lockdown, having been told to wash our hands and stay inside for lengthy periods of time in the name of care. Many are experiencing weakened immune systems, claustrophobia, trauma and depression – even as the medical community begins to murmur about the healing powers of the sun and being outside. Living under the specter of a constant threat has been a form of psychological abuse. People fear contracting the virus, fear being denied access to food, being impoverished, and being punished for protesting disenfranchisement.

A lot of care work – both for children and for the elderly – is done by mothers within the household. But in the context of the domination which exists in our societies, care work generates moral dilemmas. For example, when a dying elder refuses the care that an abusive care-giver gives, what is the morally good act? No doubt there have been many moral dilemmas that care-workers have faced in the hospitals of COVID-19, in a medical system which functions to reproduce the abuses of racism, sexism and other forms of oppression.

The crisis has exposed many moral failures, and there has been a search for alternate moral resources and ethical systems which could infuse Western society with different values, norms and practices. The pandemic seemed to offer us a liminal space for this transformation, but this is inevitably diminishing. Revisiting Motherhood as a site to work out how the struggle to end domination can be linked with care work, might be a place to start.

Sincerely,

Yayra Sumah

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[3] bell hooks, "Values: Living by a Love Ethic," in *All About Love,* 94.

New York City
1 June 2020

Dear Yayra,

Thank you for this letter. I am honored that you have written it, and enclosed one of your own poems, and quoted at the outset the very wise woman, bell hooks. What I read both in the poem, "To Mother," and in hooks's distinction between care and love, is that you have honed in on a central problem in talking about care: care is often bad care. It is bad care when it is not loving, it is bad care when—like the patriarchal mother in your letter—it is unjust. And in place of it, you describe for yourself the centrality of black feminist thought, for self care, for, as you put it, "the work before the work." I love that way of putting this point. That expression captures this particular kind of burden very clearly, the most oppressed also must do the work of dealing with the trauma they suffer by having constantly to try again to explain to both clueless and well-meaning people with privilege what it means. But I also imagine that not only is it the work before the work, it is also the work after the work, and the endless cycle of work to protect oneself that goes on and on, like daily care, never ending.

I share your outrage at your own university in this matter. Really, what does it mean when in the face of a pandemic international graduate students are thrown out of their dorms with nowhere to go, no income, and a visa that doesn't permit them to work? How can universities, which take themselves to be places of enlightenment, be so wrong about their own roles in injustice? I liked the description of the one faculty member who was willing to "stick her neck out" (what an expression this is) to "care for and protect" you as graduate students and insecure faculty. One of the themes about care that I have been thinking about a lot lately is that care starts with, and always contains, protection. So even unjust forms of care look like care when they are protective.

You are correct to note that in our society, trying to care creates moral dilemmas. This is surely true. It feels to me, for example, that Columbia University is caring, but it is caring much more for its endowment funds and real estate holdings than for the students and faculty who are supposedly its purpose.

(Here is the moral dilemma I have faced in writing this letter to you. If I don't mention I'm white, I am being complicit in assumptions about what is racially normal. But if I do mention it, have I again switched the burden back on you? As a white person, it pains me to know that, I inflict this burden on people of color. I try to figure out how not to do it. I try to listen from the edges and not to put myself in the center. Is there another way, without spending time together, for you to judge whether my concern and commitment is authentic? Is there some other way to create trust?)

Finally, I want to raise a question. I am happy to share in your hope that we may be able to find in this pandemic, and in this uprising against racism in the US, a "liminal space for transformation." You tie this to revisiting motherhood. But why turn to motherhood, an institution you have already shown is implicated in some of the bad forms of care that exist, rather than turning to bell hooks's radical idea of love? As you began the letter, quoting hooks, "simply giving care does not mean we are loving." What would it mean to be loving as well as caring? What would it mean to try to instill a desire to love, for elementary school teachers all of their students, for police officers of the communities they police, for workers of their jobs (and if it isn't possible, what is wrong with their jobs?)?

Before we can struggle for good care, we have to be able to envision it. Is there a way to use love to guide us through this liminal space?

As the world around us has changed, even more dramatically in the past days with the protests that have erupted from the murder of George Floyd, it is not clear what will happen. But I am set in my belief that thinking from positions of love and care, as deep and painful as they are, might help.

Thank you for your letter.

Wishing you well, from your neighbor on the Upper West Side,

Yours,
Joan

Vienna, May 6, 2020

Dear Joan,

It is a very long time ever since I have written a proper letter. Letter writing seems to have disappeared with the frantic pace of neoliberal time, timing, time-inc. Our minds and our bodies are constantly pacing, struggling to adapt to the dictatorial rhythm of late financialized capitalism, and letter writing is but one of its many victims. My mother, who is someone who has kept up the habit of writing letters, who stubbornly resists to enter into the digital world, was quite distressed the other day. She wanted to send a letter, an actual physical letter, to one of her friends in the United States. But, of course, the pandemic has shut down all postal communication between Europe and the United States. So, even if I wanted to write an old-fashioned letter to you, a letter that is being put in an envelope, a letter that carries the stamp of a nation state and is delivered through postal services, this would not be possible today. From the smallest action to the largest economic entanglements, the COVID-19 pandemic is reorienting humans' lives, reorganizing the frameworks that define the everyday. This goes from time spent washing hands, from not leaving the house, or the experience of no longer being able to send a letter, as my mother reported to me, to the scale of the global economy. Economic time frames and political time frames are radically changing. While the economic time frame is on hold, the political time frame goes into overdrive. Round the world new laws are being made by governments. The pandemic regime is a regime of rules. The changes are experienced as swift and dramatic. Governments jump to action. While in many countries around the world the speed of decision making is impressive with new rules being implemented, the pandemic situation also clearly shows the power of the nation state over humans' lives. Some citizenries become the test population for herd immunity, some citizenries become the target of the oddest kinds of instructions including the suggestion to inject bleach, some citizenries are being told that their bodies are strong and will therefore not be affected by the virus. While the virus goes global, the pandemic regime goes national. The extent to which the economy was put on hold is unprecedented and might, at least in the beginning, have given cause to hope that the possibility of degrowth and system change present a real alternative now with the cogs of the economy no longer turning. The split of the time frame of the political from the time frame of the economy seemed to provide some evidence that it is actually possible that in the future other priorities than those of compulsory neoliberalism with its norms and normalization of exhaustion, extraction, and depletion might orientate politics on a global scale. The longer the pandemic regime is in place, the less I indulge in this feeling of hope.

This letter is of course not an ordinary letter. This letter is not like the letter that my mother wanted to send her friend overseas. This is an open letter we have specifically been invited to write, and you accepted to be the addressee of the letter. Therefore, the letter becomes a responsibility, maybe even an obligation. The letter requires to be treated with utmost seriousness. The letter becomes part of capturing and reflecting our historical pandemic moment. The letter, or so it feels to me, should contribute to thinking with the historical conjuncture of the COVID-19 situation and climate catastrophe. The letter should be addressed to our global present and to post-pandemic perspectives. Even though I felt really encouraged by the invitation to share my thoughts, feelings, and reflections, I also feel daunted by the task at hand. The enormity of irreparability looms large. Yet, this must not stand in the way of radical thought, of fighting for different futures with the means we have. What to say about the future? What to write for a future? And, maybe most importantly, how to stay with thinking about post-pandemic futures, albeit tentatively and tenuously, yet prospectively and, still, hopefully.

At the beginning of the pandemic experience, some people have written on facebook, on instagram, on twitter, on their blogs, or in their e-mails, that they experience the new pandemic regime that has emerged since the COVID-19 outbreak as a break. This break, even though they had not wished for it, seemed to present an opportunity to understand what really matters, what is really essential. Their usual pace has been lifted. The lockdown is experienced as a slowdown, as a moment of focusing on what is needed or wanted. It was even being described as a moment of prescribed restfulness. I personally did not and do not experience the lockdown as a period of slowdown with the obligations of my university job all having been turned into new demands, with new obligations on top of the already existing obligations. There is what is being called remote learning, with increasing hours spent on-screen, zooming away with colleagues and students, with new duties that come with being on the Corona task force of the university, and with attending to anxieties of students and colleagues, in particular those with sessional teaching jobs, many of the female students who have children and other care obligations are feeling the pressure rising. My middle child, who will turn 19 in June, sent me a link via e-mail from his desk to my desk in the apartment where the five of us live. This is the link he shared with me: "Women academics seem to be submitting fewer papers during coronavirus. 'Never seen anything like it,' says one editor."[1] Even though this is a minor problem compared to millions of lives imperiled compared to millions of women part of the endangered and exhausted frontline workforce in the health care sector, compared to millions of women either losing their jobs or forced to combine home office and housework, I was still really touched that they were thinking about what the pandemic situation might mean for their mom.

The German weekly *Die Zeit* actually diagnosed this pandemic as "the crisis of women" bringing to the fore the detrimental effects of the crisis, with women even further losing their

income and their jobs, in particular jobs connected to the informal and formal service sector. Die Zeit reported that women are losing their jobs because of the fact that they have to take care of children otherwise in preschool, kindergarten, or school, that women's working hours are skyrocketing as they combine home office hours and caring labor hours, and that women are disproportionately exposed to contracting the virus as they work in the service sector and the health sector including intensive care units, but also mobile health services in particular in underserviced rural areas or in urban slums. What is being described as a crisis for women is of course a crisis of care. The pandemic situation with its emergency regime brings to the fore the highly uneven distribution of caring labor with inequality, injustice, and discrimination affecting both the necessity of having to perform caring labor and the access to adequate care provision through sufficient public infrastructures. Globally, the world is united and divided by care at the moment. This was, of course, also true before the outbreak of COVID-19, but it is becoming crystal clear at the moment.

At the very beginning of the lockdown, which in Austria, the country where I live, started in mid-March, I had some hope that for those who have the privilege of experiencing the pandemic as a break from normal, might contribute to breaking the neoliberalization of bodies and mind, might break routines and bad habits, in the sense Sara Ahmed speaks of breaking bad habits. I had some hope that recognizing how unhealthy the frantic pace of neoliberal time frames actually is, individual resistance might contribute to collective, even global change. Now, after some weeks of following the news closely, of reading the COVID-19 reporting by the World Health Organization, by the United Nations, or by the Sexual Violence Research Network, I am less hopeful, but more convinced than ever that global system change is necessary, and that a new global international care framework is needed.

With the centrality and essentiality of care being recognized through the current pandemic crisis, there might be more awareness that not only human bodies are imperiled by a deadly virus, but that our planet has been infected by the deadly virus of neoliberal capitalism for a very, very, very long time now. I wonder what it would take to actually arrive at system change. I wonder what a new global international care order can, could, and should look like. There are changes on the ground, there are signs of understanding the inseparability of bodies and planet, there is awareness for the interconnectedness in and through care. But will it be enough? Or will the post-pandemic agenda be determined by the call to returning to the so-called normal. How can change be organized? How can we work toward a future without care injustice and care discrimination?

As I am about to finish this letter to you, I see on the display of my phone that my colleague Angelika, with whom I curated the Critical Care exhibition, is calling. I pick up. Apart from some organizational issues we need to discuss, we start talking about our disillusionment with the cultural sector, in particular museums and spaces of cultural production. In our local environment in Austria, most of the leadership in these institutions are fully aligned with the rhetoric and the ideology of what is considered essential services and indirect profitability. The sad thing is that they want to be considered essential and profitable for an unsustainable system, yet there is no consideration and no forward-thinking initiative or plan to change cultural institutions in such a way that they become useful to system change and to a new economic and political order hinged on care. All the more I am thankful to Gilly, Rosario and Sascia, and to HKW as institution for devoting this program to care and for making it possible to have an exchange with you about care for post-pandemic futures.

I am sending you my kindest wishes,
Elke

[1] (https://www.thelily.com/women-academics-seem-to-be-submitting-fewer-papers-during-coronavirus-never-seen-anything-like-it-says-one-editor/)

New York City
2 June 2020

Dear Elke,

Thank you for this letter. Your concern about how this pandemic will reorient people's lives is, as you say in various places in this letter, "serious" and "the enormity of irreparability looms large." It seems as if your letter calls out for some reassurances that things will get better. I'm not sure if I can offer such reassurances, but I am usually an optimist, so I shall try. Your thought that "maybe values other than compulsory neoliberalism" can come to the fore is exactly right. Indeed, even if we begin to recognize how neoliberalism has become compulsory, we can begin to see our way out of it.

Your letter makes a desire for change palpable. And I know that you have been thinking about this a lot, since we already "met" last year when you involved me in the project for "Critical Care: Architecture for a Broken Planet." Architecture primarily concerns space. (By the way, at least one professor was assigning the book to his introductory students this year, and asked me to help him think about it, so this work is being used!) Perhaps because you have already been thinking so much about space, in this letter you seem to have focused upon time.

To me, your letter captures what the biggest battleground for ending compulsory neoliberalism will be: time. Time to write letters, answer the phone to speak to friends, yes. But also time organized around human and other forms of life and matter. Marx saw that the first great struggle for workers was the eight-hour workday. It is not a bad place to begin to reorient our lives and ask: *how might everyone have time - to care, and not to care?*

Die Zeit (ha ha, "Time" in German) notes that the pandemic is a crisis for women, which you correctly see as better described as a crisis of care. This is surely correct, but we cannot lose sight of the fact, as you point out elsewhere in your letter as well, that the "world is united and divided by care." The pandemic has its worse effects where care has long been most lacking; a not unexpected, yet deeply unjust, truth. To use one example from your letter: Yes, women academics are submitting fewer papers for peer review, though men are unaffected. What does this mean? We cannot, of course, lose sight of the fact that women academics are already leading lives of extraordinary privilege in that they are relatively autonomous knowledge workers, who can work from home and have some degree of control over whether and how they work. Perhaps such women cannot, while at home, compartmentalize their lives as well as men, and, seeing the endless work of living at home, abandon their desks to take up their kids' toys, dirty dishes, etc.? Perhaps such women, trained to care better, cannot switch off the enormity of the crisis? Perhaps, and this is wishful thinking. Perhaps, such women cannot lose sight of the privilege that they have as women who usually hire other people to do their care work?

What would it mean to organize society's time so that everyone had enough time to fulfill their caring responsibilities? And what would it mean if we made everyone take up such responsibilities? If care were at the heart of the way that we organize time, we probably would not have time chaos as we do now. In the USA, for example, school time does not mesh with parental work time, school calendars do not fit with the rhythms of modern life (instead of agricultural life).

Another point in your letter is your disillusionment with the cultural sector as institutions such as museums, as you put it, want to be "essential" to a corrupt system, not understanding their place in the world.

Here is the ray of hope: even though regimes have a logic and a completeness to them (as your letter makes clear about the emerging pandemic regime), cracks appear in the tightest of regimes. When people see the exhibit on "critical care" and ask, how can I change my practice of architecture, there has been a small shift in the world. We cannot say now which, if any, of these small shifts will become a turning point. But we can keep pushing and hoping.

Thank you again for this letter.

With best wishes,
Joan

Dear Joan,

I write you this letter suspended in time. All around the big rock we were taught to call our shared human "home," people are being asked to stay indoors, and suddenly "home" became much smaller—dangerous and risky, even—leading many of us to feel the claustrophobia others have lived with all their lives.

I still remember the first panic attack I felt once the demand to stay home was first uttered by governments around the world. I was born in a small rural Portuguese village, where my parents still live. I have been living and working in a small English university town for the last five years, where I have no support networks. Most of my friends in the UK live in London (which I also called home for ten years prior to my latest move). Yet, when we started being told to stay home, I was in Berlin, where my US-American partner lives. I still remember that one evening, laying in bed shaking, trying to manage the panic attack that had been triggered not so much by my recognition of the full scale of the COVID-19 pandemic nor by the fact that I would likely have to stay home for a long time, but rather by my sudden realisation that I had no idea where "home" was. Where was I supposed to go? Back to Portugal? Back to the UK? Or stay in Berlin with my lover? What choice was I being intimated to make? Where was I expected to lock myself in? Regardless, everywhere the demand was being uttered increasingly louder, as if its meaning were as clear as the waters of an unspoilt stream. Yet, life is hardly unspoilt; it is thick, viscous, saturated with expectations, aspirations, traumas, objectives, work, doubts, desires, pleasures, hopes, as well as—sometimes, though not for all—the warm and caring presence of others.

It is about that that I wish to talk to you—about "home." You see, as a gay man, the panic I felt when intimated to stay home by my British employer, by the Portuguese consulate, by the government of the UK where I live, and by the government of Germany where I decided to stay for the time being, was an especially queer kind of panic. Particularly when the "home" that is being evoked but never named by those demands is, for many of us, an *unhomely* place. It is a place that, as you know, has historically been sustained by Oedipal relations of kinship, by gendered divisions of labour, sometimes even a place where gender and kinship themselves have been defined, played out, and sustained through deployments of violence. To add insult to injury, the "home" we were asked to stay in quickly became synonymous with "nation." Or, better perhaps, the close connections "home" has always had with "nation"—that kinship formation that's come to be policed, regulated and eventually subsumed by the modern state—became further stressed, heightened, articulated as if unquestionable and self-evident. It highlighted the dark underbelly and actual limitations of the universalist and cutesy narratives that taught us—those of us brought up with the narrative that travelling and settling were our centuries-old right—that the whole world was "our" oyster, that the planet was "our" home, "ours" to inhabit.

It only took a pandemic. It only took a pandemic for the mutuality of freedom and confinement we have been living in to surface to the edges of our perception. To show that "home" isn't the same for everybody, that the universalist discourses of a large planetary home built on care and kinship have always rubbed against experiences of home as confinement, of home as a place to run away from, a place where violence steals away joy and life, a place that is policed, maintained through border controls—a place where we must stay, or else. That is, after all, as the likes of Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle have noted, the aporia of hospitality. As both authors told us, the ethics of hospitality—that is, the ethics of welcoming a stranger in one's home—is always sacrificial, it always risks the undoing of both the self and the home. At the same time, it is that same sacrificial ethics of hospitality that is "the condition of survival of all human societies."[1] Yet, modernity brought with it a progressive conditioning of the terms of hospitality in order to protect the emergent narratives of national kinship and belonging that sustained the new political figure of the nation-state. As Dufourmantelle noted, from the fourteenth century onwards

> […] the intrusion of the foreigner into the "home"—which figures so strongly in the process of unconditional hospitality—would be subjected to certain conditions, rules pertaining to the concept of hospitality: Whom are we going to open our door to, and under what circumstances? How can the one hosting a foreigner protect himself against the violation of his home, or even violence as such? […] At a time of massive colonial conquests, what hospitality could or should be offered the "savage," the stranger arriving with his or her own unfamiliar codes and culture? What right do we have to ask strangers to abandon their rules and adopt ours?[2]

Hospitality, conditioned as it has become by the modern policing of the "home," thus shares many attributes with the ways in which immunity has come to be understood, from its emergence as a

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[1] Anne Dufformantelle, "Hospitality—Under Compassion and Violence," in *The Conditions of Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics on the Threshold of the Possible*, ed. Thomas Claviez (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 15

[2] Ibid.

concept in political theory to its adoption by the nascent biomedical discipline of immunology that was emerging in the 1800s. Both modern hospitality and immunity inhabit a paradigm according to which homes—whether the houses we live in, the nations of our citizenship, or our individual bodies themselves—ought to be protected from the risks posed to them by experiences of community. If community is what draws us together to the point that it may lead to our own undoing—wasn't it Hobbes's idea that what we have in common is our ability to kill one another?—the state emerged as the immunising formation capable of protecting us from the potentially self-obliterating bonds we form with one another by replacing those horizontal relationships of community with the vertical relationships between citizens and the state, which we must favour and protect if we are to be conferred rights.[3] Thus community—that experience that draws us towards one another despite ourselves—becomes a kind of intoxication, the "vertigo of the infinitely near"[4] that can trigger the "shattering of the identical and the one-in-itself."[5]

So I'm led to understand not only the tension at the heart of the times we live in, but also the panic that I felt that one night in Berlin, once I realised that "home," as it was being evoked in the compulsion to self-isolate, was difficult to accept, let alone inhabit. As we were being compelled to stay "home"—in our households, in our countries, in our bodies—I understood why not staying home—going to someone else's home, entering someone else's body or being entered by them, crossing those borders that tell the "I" and the "you" apart—had become life-threatening. Yet, I also realised that the relationships of care, communion, comradeship, sociability and kinship that had sustained my life were being reframed as causes of my potential undoing. Not that I wasn't already deeply acquainted with that narrative. Growing up as a gay teenager in the 1990s meant that the prospect of my own undoing through AIDS was a spectre constantly haunting me and the forms of intimacy and friendship that had become fundamental to what I understood to be a joyful and affirmative life, a meaningful life worth living. Today, after AIDS is no longer something I fear as much (there is treatment; there is prophylaxis), the biopolitics of the public health responses to COVID-19 once again make a similar request: stop all contact; communing with others will be your undoing; in order to care for yourself, you ought to stop caring for others. And yet, despite the pandemic, relationships of care continue to sustain us in the form of gendered housework and emotional labour, as healthcare work undertaken by doctors and nurses, as deliveries of meals and essential supplies carried by precarious workers of the gig economy, as manual working class and oft-racialised labour ensuring that "essential" services continue to function.

It only took a pandemic. It only took a virus roaming free around the planet we liked to call "home" for many of us to be reminded that "home" is everything but a certain and happy place. That it may either be much smaller than we think, or maybe even not be there at all for us to inhabit. It only took that virus to foreground the tensions between those things we hold dear, the practices that are meaningful to a life worth living and a home worth inhabiting—care, intimacy, friendship, contact—and the always-already highly-regulated and highly-policed ways in which those practices and relationships are allowed to unfold, not the mention the divide between those who feel that care, intimacy and physical contact are a privilege of life, and the others who experience them as a job, a duty, a burden.

Of course I don't mean to argue that we shouldn't be acting in ways that will allow us to contain the spread of this virus and bring the pandemic under control. As you've noted, "democratic caring requires citizens to think closely about their responsibilities to themselves and to others."[6] Yet, I still cannot but feel like we are entering a moment in our history in which "home" and "care"—in both their conceptual and material dimensions—are once again being regulated and instrumentalised in ways that leave me deeply apprehensive and worried about what may come next. I am reminded here of how marginalised groups—the working classes, women, queers, black, indigenous and people of colour—have historically created networks and practices of care in order to build for themselves a home and structures of kinship that willfully existed besides institutionalised social relations, and I am worried about what may happen to all of those as we move forward from our present conjuncture. What will the future look like? What can we do to shape it, right here, right now?

[3] See Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

[4] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Intoxication* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 41.

[5] Jean-Luc Nnancy, *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 10.

[6] Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), x.

I will leave you with words by Walt Whitman:

I dream'd in a dream, I saw a city invincible to the
attacks of the whole of the rest of the earth;
I dream'd that was the new City of Friends;
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust
love—it led the rest;
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of
that city;
And in all their looks and words.

Warmly,
João

New York City
2 June 2020

Dear João,

Thank you for your letter. Thank you for bravely sharing your panic attack as the pandemic again forced you to consider the question, "where is home?" There is a "queer kind of panic," I would agree with you, around the "unhomely" home, especially when that home becomes suffused with claims about "the nation." (And, have you ever noticed how homosexuality is always made into a national trait of those "others?") Do we have to go … there? Why? And yet I also want to take issue with a few points that you make or imply.

Your predicament leads you to reflect upon what it means to be forced back home. Your answer to this question is really thought-provoking. You suggest that in forcing us back to home, an unstated norm emerges that people "ought to be protected from the risks posed to them by experiences of community." Yes, always the Hobbesian pattern of non-social individualism and a powerful state re-emerges. Those others around you are untrustworthy, the only safe bet is to stick it out by yourself or to trust in the all-powerful state.

This fear of community is in keeping with the thinking of totalitarians who view the world in "mass" and "state" terms. Communities exist in the middle. They disrupt this simplistic view of the world. And communities can, in fact, be both affirming and constraining. Have you ever noticed that people who live in difficult straits are more often described as a "community"? A community in this sense might be Walt Whitman's "city of friends."

This pandemic forces us back home in a different way, though. It is not the same as AIDS. Having lived through the AIDS crisis from its start ("Have you heard about the gay plague?" asked the Jehovah's Witness at our door of my girlfriend and me; "yes, thanks, we have!" we replied), to me this pandemic feels somewhat different. It feels different because transmission happens from a basic bodily function such as breathing, or "shedding" cells, not from a deliberate act (and a sexual or otherwise illicit one, at that). While most people are surely motivated by fear (that basic Hobbesian starting point), the mysteries of spread and the apparent randomness of developing a mild case or a fatal disease also meant that one could be unknowingly infecting one's "home" or family, or "community." So we are forced back to home to become monads. The goal is to create isolation, and its consequence is to cut off the life blood of economy and society.

Although (and now come some of the disagreements), please let us not forget that for some, returning and staying home is not permitted. This is true not only for the health care "heroes," but also for the delivery people, grocery store clerks, morgue attendants, transit workers, launderers, etc. who must still work whether they want to or not. It is true for the millions of care-work migrants working around the globe. It is true for refugees and prisoners.

Because the other side of all of this confinement to home is the reality of all of this moving around. You acknowledge that your predicament is partly caused by the belief that "traveling and settling were our centuries-old right." Yet, not all who travel do so in the manner of exercising a right; many are cast out of "home." Refugees are among the most vulnerable of people, yet no one is asking them much about their needs for care. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides people with the right to emigrate, but no one has a responsibility to receive refugees. Insofar as nations can still choose whom they will grant asylum, you are right to see a connection here between "nation" and "home." Hospitality does resemble immunity, and sometimes hospitality requires the "home population" to immunize itself against its guests.

"Please go home to shelter" short-circuits all of these difficult questions of care. You also observe how "care" and "home" are "once again being regulated and instrumentalized…" You hold out some hope that marginal communities have always been about to create "methods and practices of care in order to build for themselves a home." But isn't it time for us also to challenge why some communities have to do so, while others have the presumptuous possibilities both of travel and safe return? With whom does that set of responsibilities lie?

Thanks again for this provocative letter.

With best wishes,
Joan

May 18, 2020
Johanna Hedva

Dear Joan,

I don't want to have to write this letter. I don't want to have to write about care at all.

One of my favorite ways to express my impatience at the world is to say, "I just want to go to sleep and wake up once X is taken care of." Yet I am stopped as I try to write this now, because I would have to say it like this: "I just want to go to sleep and wake up once care is taken care of."

Isn't that what we always imagine, that care will be given to us by someone else?

Isn't that dialectic—the one that casts care-giving and care-taking as antipodes to each other—the reason why we're in this pernicious mess at all?

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 idea that we are sovereign, able agents of our own self-actualized telos holds us in its arms, with an embrace like a chokehold. It holds the world this way, we think sovereignty is our throne to sit in,

this rigid, hard thing at our backs. In this embrace, if I need care, I am weak, too fragile. I shall "owe" my carers and my society for the resources and time they've "lost" in caring for me. If I need care, I am a drain on the system, I am a negative in a world where the only currency of value is positive — though I would insist that positive is false.

I'm so tired, Joan.

Since COVID-19 extravasated into the world a few months ago, my inbox has become swollen with invitations to speak or write about the pandemic. People want to know the perspective of a disabled person, a crip person, a sick person, on this "new" reality. My inbox is swimming in blood and tears and spit.

In the past, when I've written about care and illness, it's been motivated by a frustration that reached a boiling point: I wrote, finally, because I had to. What needed to be said hadn't been said yet — at least, not to me, and not in the way I needed to hear it. I wrote for myself, I wrote for my sick friends. My words tried for a kind of lullaby, a simple string of emojis, beating hearts that pushed my little idea forward: "I care. And I know you do too."

I haven't written about illness in more than two years. From 2015 – 2018, I wrote about illness — three essays: "Sick Woman Theory," "In Defense of De-Persons," and "Letter to a Young Doctor" — and these writings found their way to homes in small pockets of the world. They brought me attention and money and opportunity, and I should have been grateful. But it exhausted me, the texts, what they came to mean, to me, about me, for and to my readers. I received many, many letters from strangers — similar to this letter that I'm writing to you now, stranger to stranger — that enumerated the letter writer's many, many traumas and illnesses. I could barely carry my own trauma and illness, and now I was being asked to carry those of many others. I wanted to care for each of them, but I couldn't — at least, not much more than I already had. I reached a breaking

point. I put an auto-response on my email that said, *Sorry, I probably won't ever respond to you*, and I left it there for two years. I said no to invitations to write or speak about illness, which meant I said no to many opportunities. Who knows the price of that refusal. I turned down book contracts with publishers I'd dreamed of working with. *We'd love to know your thoughts*, the invitation would say, but in my head, there was a vein of bitterness, of exhaustion. Weren't the thoughts I've already elucidated enough? In how many more ways can I insist on care, explain why its not only valuable but necessary, point my finger and show that, lo, it's already everywhere, we're just taught not to see it, not to value it? A few times, I needed the money, so I'd acquiesce, but it was like picking at a scab. Digging up old blood and pain, again showing my wound to a public that seemed to think it was wisdom.

When I wasn't writing about illness, I felt wonderful. I wrote and performed music, recorded an album and am now recording another; I toured a solo performance of guitar and voice throughout Europe and America; I wrote essays about mysticism, Susan Sontag, Nine Inch Nails; I wrote about the politics of doom metal and mosh pits; I wrote a novel, and then another one; I laughed and danced and sang and slept well and enjoyed the colors of the trees outside my window. I was awarded a residency for music, and it was particularly sweet because no one there had ever heard of "Sick Woman Theory." I was someone without that text, despite it. I was. I am. My three essays on illness were so small in the world of my work, they were a blip in the constellation of my vast cosmos.

I'm tired, Joan, please forgive my rancor. I am a writer who serves my craft, but, because I have used autobiography in my work, because I've written about illness and pain and madness, because I look like a woman, because I insist on care, it's become that my craft is being sick, and the fact of my writing is an afterthought. It's that my writing buttresses my illness, so that it is the only part of me held aloft, what everyone sees is only that, not the thing it's standing on, the thing that's giving it support.

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

Put another way: over these years, I've learned to care for myself pretty well.

*

The artists Sam Lavigne and Tega Brain received a commission in March 2020 to make a project on the internet that responded to COVID-19. They wrote a piece of software that scraped the comments sections of medical crowd-funding projects on gofundme.com, and archived these 200,000 lines of text on a website. "It is an archive that shouldn't exist," they said. They asked me to write something to accompany the website, and also speak to the larger context of COVID-19. Below are some quotes from that text. I agreed to participate in this HKW project of writing you a letter if I could quote my recent self because I'm too tired to summon something new. So often when institutions talk about care, when projects are curated on the theme, when a group of crip and sick artists are asked to make work about their embodiments, there is nowhere in any of them much care. I understand — care is hard to do, not because it's hard, but because we've never been taught that it's easy.

This is also why I'm wary of entering into new relationships that are expected to unfold with little time or support; over these years, I've learned that the only relationships, especially when it comes to work, that I'm willing to engage in are ones where care is primary. Sam and Tega are two people in my care family; they have given me places to stay in accessible buildings; concerned for

my energy and pain levels, they have counted with me how many steps there are to a restaurant we want to go to, and they have found different restaurants when the first one was too far for me to walk to. Sam once tried to secure wheelchair service for me at a museum that was inaccessible, and then we sat down together in frustration and exhaustion at how inaccessible the whole world is. My relationship with them is one that is formed by care before anything else — that's why I agreed to write about illness after so long of refusing to.

It's not that I don't think this work — this work that agitates for care, for demolishing ableism — is important. I think I am so disquieted because it may be the *most* important work I ever do. All these other things that I write, do, that I am, don't matter as much as the work on illness. This is because illness is a crucible. In it, one is forged, transformed, annihilated, and what emerges from this decreation is a self radically reconfigured through its dependencies. A person goes into illness alone and comes out multiple, enmeshed in community, all entangled in the mess of sociality. It helps to have words for this experience; it is such a radical undoing of all that one has ever known. I understand — I've needed words to help me through it too.

*

"We tend to place illness and revolution opposite each other on the spectrum of action: illness is on the end of inaction, passivity, and surrender, while revolution is on the end of movement, surging and agitating. But maybe this spectrum is more like an ouroboros: one end feeding the other, transforming into, because of, made of the same stuff as the other…

"Now might be a good time to rethink what a revolution can look like. Perhaps it doesn't look like a march of angry, abled bodies in the streets. Perhaps it looks something more like the world standing still because all the bodies in it are exhausted—because care has to be prioritized before it's too late.

"Those of us for whom sickness is an everyday reality have long known about its revolutionary potential. We've known that a revolution can look like a horizontal body in a bed, unable to go to work. We've known that it might look like hundreds of thousands of bodies in bed, organizing a rent strike, separating life's value from capitalist productivity. We've known that a revolution can look like the labor of a single nurse, keeping the patients in her ward alive, or the labor of a single friend, helping you buy groceries. We've known that it can look like the labor of nursing and care expanded exponentially, all of us reaching out to everyone we know, everyone we know reaching out to theirs. We've known that a revolution can look like a community pitching in $5 per person for someone's medical treatment—we've wondered when that community would notice just how revolutionary the act of communal care is.

"The world has changed into something unrecognizable in these last weeks. The interminable now of illness is upon us, and the world's ableism has risen forcefully to meet it. The world's ableism has always been a thing, it's just now getting closer to those who normally don't feel it.

"What we're watching happen with COVID-19 is what happens when care insists on itself, when the care of others becomes mandatory, when it takes up space and money and labor and energy. See how hard it is to do? The world isn't built to give care freely and abundantly. It's trying now, but look how alien a concept this is, how hard it is to make happen. It will take all of us—it will take all of us operating on the principle that if only some of us are well, none of us are. And that's exactly why it's revolutionary. Because care demands that we live as though we are all interconnected—which we are—it invalidates the myth of the individual's autonomy. In care, we know our limits because they are the places where we meet each other. My limit is where you meet me, yours is where I find you, and, at this meeting place, we are linked, made of the same stuff, transforming into one because of the other.

“Care so often feels as though it has to be given to you by someone else, and this can also seem how revolution feels. We wait for the change to be given to us by those in control, we hope for those in power to come to their senses. So many activists know that as power can be taken, it can be taken back. As care can be given, we can also take it. I’ve always found solace in the fact that the words caregiver and caretaker mean the same thing. We take care, we give care, and it can be contagious, it can spread. It shows us that the limit of the world is always a place to be exploded, pushed against, transformed. Meet me there, at the end, where there is give and take, and let’s follow each other into the beginning.”

Signed,

Johanna Hedva
Berlin

New York City
2 June 2020

Dear Johanna,

Thank you for your letter. It was moving and challenging for me to read it. I will keep this thought in mind for a long time: "Isn't that dialectic—the one that casts care-giving and care-taking as antipodes to each other—the reason why we're in this pernicious mess at all?"

The letter was very honest in saying how tired and how exhausted you are. I am, too, sometimes. To write this letter, I went back and read your essays on sickness, and listened to some of your music, and read your recommendation of Christina Sharpe's book, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* for the journal *Mask.* So I want to begin by saying I admire you for taking on yourself this pain to try to help others to understand. And for being honest about the fact that it is painful.

You write, "care is hard to do, not because it's hard, but because we've never been taught that it's easy." This is a provocative idea. Everyone does care work, including some self-care. I think that we have, in fact, been taught that care is easy, but it is disagreeable, and therefore not for the likes of "us." Leave it to those others. And in making care "easy" for them but wasteful for "us," we again are taught to avoid it. It is disagreeable because it deals with flawed bodies, dirt, real elemental needs that betray our animal nature. Care-giving may be easy but it is undignified.

On the other end of the antipode, those who show their need for care, rather than hiding it or buying someone else's service for it, are breaking an invisible code of silence. If the "abled" do not acknowledge that they, too, are always care-receivers, they can blame those who need care for making crazy, unreasonable demands. If, in fact, everyone is on the continuum of needing care, blaming "the needy" loses its sting. You are quite right with the hard truth of this statement in your letter, that you "owe" your carers and society "for the resources and time they've 'lost' in caring for me."

In light of these dangers, I can well understand your decision that you are "only willing to engage in relations where care is primary…". There is a way in which understanding that care is the center, the starting point, requires a gestalt shift from the current order's way of thinking about the world. And while I might disagree with how someone is caring, it is important to try to figure out whether they have found that shift. This is not a dream. And indeed, we can never lose sight of the fact that not all care goes well. Some care is done poorly or abusively. Yet, when all is said and done, I couldn't agree more with you when you write, "The world isn't built to give care freely and abundantly." But it could be.

This brings me to the last point in your letter to which I want to respond: if illness and revolution are opposite, what might revolution look like? You observe that care's revolutionary potential might be realized in the radical act of community care. This act would be so radical because it would require that we all recognize that we are needy, even if we are needy in different ways. It would require that we all recognize and do what we can to care for ourselves and others. And it would require that we all realize that we have responsibilities to participate in caring relations. You are correct to say, "care demands we live as though we are all interconnected…"

Perhaps because I am a trained political scientist (!) I don't use the language of revolution very often. But it is a revolutionary act to demand a reordering of the social and political world so that the conditions for everyone's care matter. And as we begin to make that switch, we might also notice that we are not the only beings on the planet and that the planet itself is in need of care.

Thank you again for your letter.

With best wishes,
Joan

Dear Joan,

A Litany for Surviving Black Death

"Because white men can't
Police their imagination
Black men are dying"
-Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*[1]

The spectre of death weighs heavy on my thoughts. This has been predicated by analysing and inspecting global trends, reading about the reproduction rates of COVID-19 and the increased death tolls of the novel coronavirus. On the surface, the data creates a sense of abstraction which highlights the conditions of life which also points to new uncertainties—new normals. For those who are not on the front lines or who have not lost a loved one, the numbers anonymize the experience of the disease—leaving one to experience the pandemic through sound bites, government decrees, and urban sirens. The aesthetics of data has circulated images of a global pause of social life—closure of cinemas, restaurants, and schools. Plazas, which once served as meeting spaces for lovers, are left abandoned while digital spaces are being reconfigured for family gatherings, workout sessions, and book clubs. Courtship and intimacy are evolving, metamorphosing and even tantalizing. The internet has become the ambient space for the media, anxiety, and games.

Yet, this digital platform has also elicited the racial contours of a pandemic, the gross inequalities of health, and the emotional burden of witnessing Black death. In their Propublica article from April 2020, Akilah Johnson and Talia Buford documented that from Alabama to New York, Black Americans were dying disproportionately from the coronavirus.[2] In circumstances when African American men attempted to abide by government regulations and wear protective masks, they feared that they will be subjected to racial profiling and harassment by police.[3] In the United Kingdom, French president Macron suggested that Africa could be a living laboratory for testing.[4] Beyond that, as Ishena Robinson noted in *The Root*, Black women's pain is being taken even less seriously.[5]

At the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, the Jamaican American poet Claudia Rankine lamented, "the condition of Black life is one of mourning." In the United States, most people are unaware of the extent that state violence can cost Black people their lives. Whether it is Trayvon Martin- a Black Florida teenager who was murdered by a vigilante or Sandra Bland a Black woman who died under police custody, the gruesome reality of Black life is **precarious.** Five years later, during a global pandemic, Rankine's morbid aphorism still rings true.

The markers of Black death have not gone away, yet they are amplified and persisted because of compounding crises—deeply rooted in colonial legacies that haunt the bones and souls of Black folks. This is due—as many commentators have noted, to the social vulnerabilities that Black people face: being less likely to have healthcare, being more likely to be essential workers, being more likely to have insecure housing, being more likely to be incarcerated, and being less likely to receive adequate care. Care appears, on the surface, to be a fantasy obstructed by the perpetual and intergenerational transmission of trauma, poverty, and discrimination.

Yet, in the midst of a historic pandemic, Black people are witnessing the death of their kin in the face of the callousness of the powerful. Racism reinforces physical hardships, which are predictable outcomes of a society that devalues and lacks care for Black life. In the recent cascade of Black death, surrounding the outright murder of a 25 year old man from Georgia, Ahmaud Arbery and the murder of Breonna Taylor, we have seen that the index of racial violence presents one layer of death, showing the failure of white imagination.[6] These modern-day lynchings are state sanctioned or judicial coverups, and they are part of the spectre and lifeline of America's malfeasance, hastened by a global health crisis, leaving many Black people incensed.

Racism is the barometer for our ability to live.

Some of us have gotten confirmation for what we already knew, that the United States is a racist society that has created a racial caste system, that is not just built on the gluttony of the wealthy, but the everyday rapacity of outright murder. The state does so through the criminal injustice system, the border regime, and labor practices. At the same time, the United States is not the only place where labor and care are racialized. In Brazil, the domestic workers are mainly Black women, and the latest outbreak has led to a resurgence in a social movement where these women are challenging the racist system of care in the age of the coronavirus pandemic.[7] The exploitation of Black life also comes with a Black radical reimagination, a reshuffling that challenges the structural violence that happens for no reason.

Which is why I ask: why are we not allowed to live? As Jelani Cobb mentioned in *The New Yorker*, we are living in a world where Black people are always on defense underscored by unjust killings of Black people performing the everyday act of self-care: jogging.[8] Unfortunately, the emotional toll is often bereft of substantive solutions from the powerful, the institutions that claim to serve and protect. COVID-19 is one of the many contributors to Black death, but the social avarice that we are witnessing during the pandemic just goes to show how the US government continues to put black people to death.

Social distancing is the new normal for people afforded that privilege, however, it also comes with the contradiction of not being able to collectively mourn during a period of open assault on Black life. For me, that pain is coupled with a perpetual grief built on witnessing devastating images of black life being cut short. There is a quiet suffering that is carried out given that we cannot publicly gather to protest, to lament our dead, or release our wrath. Our protest is digital, our teach-ins happen in cyberspace, our collective mourning is put on screen. It is not merely that the virus is killing us, but that white silence suggests societal approval.

At the same time, Black women have been on the front lines of facing the epidemic whether they are cell-culture technicians working in New York City or grocery workers providing the public with food.[9] The labor and care provided by Black people in the age of an unprecedented pandemic has moral contradictions when US society relies on Black labor while also rendering that same life disposable.

How much do we practice radical care towards Black life today? Radical care is a tapestry invoking Black feminism, Black radical tradition, and creativity. The practice is not merely focused on the suffering—albeit well documented—but envisioning and erecting freedom. Black radical care is a collection of labor actions designed to dismantle the trauma that we continue to witness. For some, it

might encompass the bravery of Harriet Tubman leading enslaved people along the Combahee River to emancipation. On the one hand, care may incorporate the revolutionary spirit of Trinidandian Claudia Jones who advocated for socialism and the carnaval. For others, care means reckoning with the horror of neoliberalism, surveillance, militarization, environmental racism, which is a product of the ongoing economic crisis.

Care is a fight for full abolition.

As Charlene A. Carruthers has written in her 2018 book, *Unapologetic,* Black liberation is curiosity. Carruthers notes: "Black freedom dreams and freedom fighting have always entailed multiple issues."[10] This means building and deepening our practices of care through collective change and forming a radical politics that is feminist, queer, and anticapitlist. Care is not merely a dialogue about the world we want but providing the robust and material foundations that make Black life worth living.

Evoking Audre Lorde, Alicia Garza, one of the co-founders of the Black Lives Matter movement, advocated for self-preservation during the COVID-19 pandemic.[11] "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence," enjoined Audre Lorde, "it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."[12] A lesser known aspect of Lorde's interrogation with care can be found in her *Cancer Journals*. The journals are an intimate account of her reflections of living with cancer, her mastectomy, the growing anxiety that she faced, and her struggle to find joy.

In her *Cancer Journals,* Audre Lorde wrote: "For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth."[13]

Black people have been committed to their survival and joy and committed to maintaining their liveliness even when faced with death. Reading her diary is a glimpse into her psyche, her intimate connections, and her methods for healing. She is upfront about what her survival entails—for Audre her curiosity and ability to express herself through her creativity will save her. Beyond that, care is located in her community and survival was predicated on her appreciation for living.

Care must challenge power with retrospection and vision. Care also requires a politics of reparations and transformative justice, one that is grounded on acts of repair and healing to undo the past and current injury that is done to Black life. Our struggle for dignity is taken for granted, but the structural violence is not inevitable. Rather, reimagination is part of our historical and current emancipatory project. Black feminists such as Audre Lorde, Alicia Garza, Charlene A. Carruthers, Harriet Tubman, Claudia Jones, and the many others have not only created a lexicon for care, they have also provided the tools for a radical imagination.

Dreaming can be a corrective for Black people witnessing Black death. Yet, it will require emotional honesty and an end to white silence as part of our litany for survival.

Sincerely,
Edna Bonhomme

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New York City
2 June 2020

Dear Edna,

Thank you for this letter, “A Litany for Surviving Black Death.” It is so true on its face, and yet so painstakingly written, put together citation by citation, it achieves its overwhelming power.

To me, one key of your letter appears in the lines of poetry you quote at the beginning from one of my favorite poets, Claudia Rankine. She wrote, in “Citizen: An American Lyric:”

“Because white men can’t
Police their imagination
Black men are dying.”

I am writing back to you after an unspeakable harm has happened yet again. This time, George Floyd was killed by a white officer, hands in his pockets, kneeling on his neck. And while it is unspeakable, it is not unusual. In the time I lived in Minnesota, several black men were killed by officers who could not “police their imagination.” It is unsettling to have walked on the block where George Floyd was killed, to have often driven past the place where Philando Castile was pulled over for a broken taillight and murdered. And it is unsettling that this pandemic is, as you so carefully document, a disease that disproportionately affects and kills Black Americans, “black” domestic servants in Brazil, and people of color treated with indifference around the world through all kinds of institutions and in all kinds of situations.

There are protests, even riots, in the streets. But this too has happened before. Will anything make this time different? In speaking about Black People, you write that “racism is the barometer for our ability to live.” Right now, we are living under a high pressure system that is squeezed by covid-19, by the unleashing of virulent white supremacy, an economic crisis, and deepening inequalities. In the face of such pressure, only radical care towards Black life can begin to abate the dangers of black death.

Change might come. But it is difficult. You conclude the essay, “Dreaming can be a corrective for Black people witnessing Black death. Yet, it will require emotional honesty and an end to white silence as part of our litany for survival.”

In response to your essay, I want to say a bit more about white silence. Radical care for Black life requires that Whites, and I include myself here as one of the people I am speaking to, do more than break our silence. I am sure that you know all of this, but in light of your patient exegesis of the threat to blacks, it seems only right that I respond by trying to spell out some of the elements of what lies behind this white silence.

First, whites breaking their silence often takes some form of “white fragility,” as Robin DiAngelo calls it, “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves.”[1] One of the remarkable privileges of being white is *not* having to think about race, becoming uncomfortable when the subject arises, and meeting that discomfort by changing the subject.

Second, but white silence isn’t the only problem: despite their ignorance about the lives of most Black people, whites reap the benefits of “whiteness as property” every day. In a society where wealth matters the most, whites have exploited blacks to become more wealthy since the beginning. It goes back historically to whites’ ability to own rather than be property. It goes back to the ways public benefits were provided only to whites. The conceptual account of whiteness as property appeared in Cheryl Harris’s article on the subject[2] and was solidified for me by example after example in George Lipsitz’s account of possessive investment in whiteness.[3]

Third, whites are oblivious to the real life harms that Blacks face. The “justice” system works disproportionately against blacks and has deliberately done so since slavery was abolished.[4] Blacks are given less pain medication because they are not as susceptible to pain.[5] Students in Baltimore public schools do not read any literary works written by African Americans.[6]

How, then, to break through the discomfort, economic interest, and ignorance of whites? Asking whites to care about Black lives without compensating for these problems will only produce bad care. Because in addition to all of these distortions, there is another: on some level white people genuinely know, and feel guilty about, their role in oppressing others. The burden of this

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[1] Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility,” *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3,3 (2011): 54; quoted in Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2015): 99.

[2] Harris, Cheryl I. 1995. "Whiteness as Property." In *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller and K. Thomas. New York: The New Press.

[3] Lipsitz, George. 2006. *The possessive investment in whiteness : how white people profit from identity politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

[4] See, inter alia, the film, DuVernay, Ava. 2016. "13th."

[5] Kim, H. J., G. S. Yang, J. D. Greenspan, K. D. Downton, K. A. Griffith, C. L. Renn, M. Johantgen, and S. G. Dorsey. 2017. "Racial and ethnic differences in experimental pain sensitivity: systematic review and meta-analysis." *Pain* 158 (2):194-211.

[6] Young, Roxanne V. 2018. "Why Aren’t Schools Teaching Black Literature?" *Baltimore Sun*, June 30.

responsibility (and by the way, a deep and parallel argument could be made about the treatment of Native Americans) is heavy. It is easier to live in denial than to face up to it.

One thing that has really helped me to break my state of being frozen in this trap was reading Resmaa Menakem's book, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (2017). Menakem observes that racism traumatizes. And trauma becomes *bodily*; our pre-cognitive brains react to trauma, which also builds over generations. White, black, and police bodies, he argues, respond to race in trigger-fast, pre-cognitive fashion. After that, no wonder so many whites still admonish themselves to "listen" but cannot police, cannot restrain their fears. The solution is to begin to work through the trauma, and to break down those barriers to genuine learning. Only then, to go back to the language of care, can people begin to take responsibility for what they have, consciously and unconsciously, done. So, radical care for Black life requires not only that we see racism as a barometer, but that we think quite concretely about the ways it creates trauma for whites, blacks, and police officers.

Before we can properly assign care responsibilities, we need to think about who has taken on which burdens for how long, and how to address those issues. Racism makes this task more difficult, because the trauma makes it next to impossible to take this point seriously.

At the end of your essay, you quote Audre Lorde on the importance of self-care. Let me end by quoting her on the difficult task of honesty that will be part of the process of rethinking caring responsibilities:

> Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives here. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices.[7]

Thank you again for your letter.

With best wishes,
Joan

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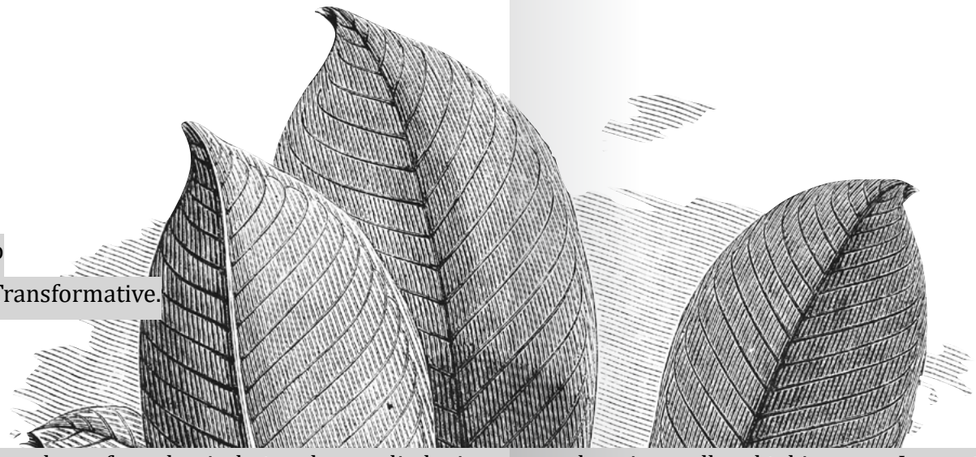
[7] "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 110-113.



Location: Earth
5th May 2020

A Letter to Joan C. Tronto
Care is Messy, Wild and Transformative.

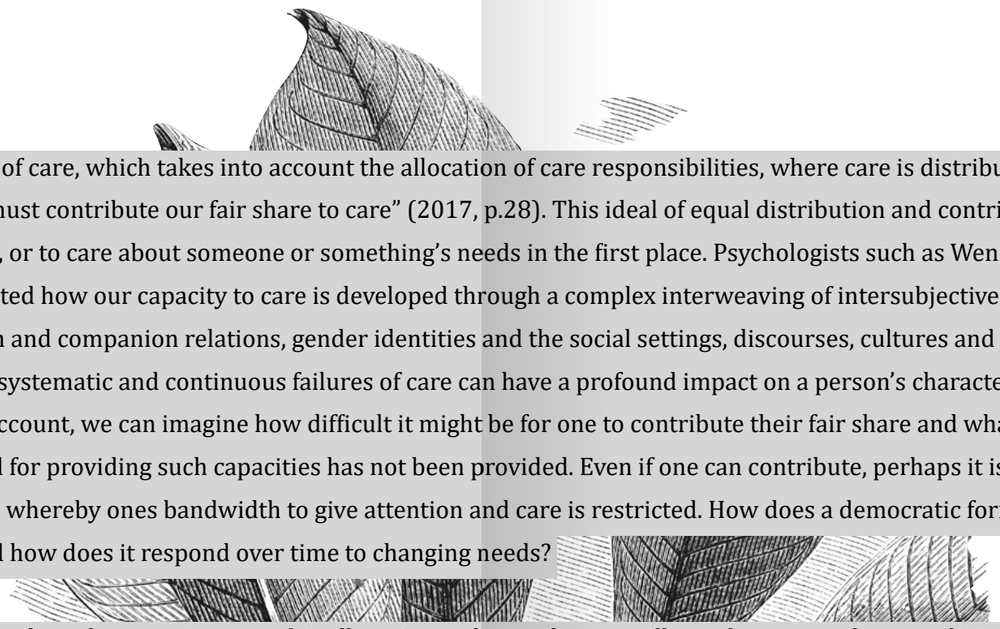
Dear Joan,

I hope within these days of pandemic, bat and pangolin logics you are keeping well and taking care. I open this invitation, to write a letter to you, with a nod to our non-human world makers. Attending to their needs, alongside considering how we care for infrastructural forms (speaking specifically here about the Internet) are the two intertwining elements that I would like to open up for discussion.

Borrowing from political theorist Jane Bennett's[1] notion of vibrant matter, if we are to take seriously the vitality, capacity and agency of non-human things, then how do we attend to and care about such liveliness?

María Puig de la Bellacasa also picks up this question in her book *'Matters of Care'*[2] noting that it would be absurd to disentangle human and non-human relations, but the ethics involved in this symbiosis requires on one hand the decentering of human agencies, whilst also "remaining close to the predicaments and inheritances of situated human doing" (p.2). If we are to take the premise as you note in your 2017 paper titled *'There is an alternative: homines curans and the limits of neoliberalism'* that care conceptually offers a different ontological path, first in that it is always a relational act, a dynamic dance of interdependency so to speak. Second it presupposes that all humans will be vulnerable and fragile, at some point in their lives and third, we are all caregivers and receivers. Let us extend this notion of vulnerability to all species and things. As you and Fisher do in your often quoted definition of care, as a "species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we may live in it as well as possible". This world, as you note, includes our bodies, selves and environment, "all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web"[3] (p. 40).

This generous definition of care centres on its wholeness and inclusivity. The moral community set out from the start could be read as all encompassing. While your own work as focused on human species, as we know not everyone has equal footing in this community. One's ability to weave a life-sustaining web is not the same as another's, and this is certainly not the case when it comes to thinking about land and species, particularly given the current levels of extinction. Equally, it is quite impossible to care for everything to the same level and intensity. To do so would consume and distort a single body, which is why, I imagine that you have worked so hard on thinking through what it means to



produce a democratic form of care, which takes into account the allocation of care responsibilities, where care is distributed equally. For this to happen, you also note “all must contribute our fair share to care” (2017, p.28). This ideal of equal distribution and contribution assumes that we all have the capacity to give, or to care about someone or something’s needs in the first place. Psychologists such as Wendy Hollway[4], as you acknowledge, have highlighted how our capacity to care is developed through a complex interweaving of intersubjective experiences from early to adult parenting, guardian and companion relations, gender identities and the social settings, discourses, cultures and practices within which we swim. As Hollway flags, systematic and continuous failures of care can have a profound impact on a person’s character and how they relate to others. Taking this into account, we can imagine how difficult it might be for one to contribute their fair share and what does fair share actually mean, if the ground for providing such capacities has not been provided. Even if one can contribute, perhaps it is in a limited way, as a mode of living has emerged whereby ones bandwidth to give attention and care is restricted. How does a democratic form of care take into account such dynamics, and how does it respond over time to changing needs?

We can also imagine that what constitutes as fair allocation and contribution will vary between cultures, religions and societies. Thinking from a non-human perspective, how would this form of fair share taken into consideration? Is it the attention given to the manner in which a whale cleans the barnacles on its back, or a beaver gives a hug to another beaver, or how a bird builds a nest, or the tenderness expressed in how a bee pollinates a flower, or the delight elephants take in strolling together, or the success of an invasive species? From a human position, how is the capacity to care about, for, and with ones land, soil, trees or water engendered? This begs the question that de la Bellacasa also raises, — “How do we build caring relationships while recognising divergent positions” (p.83)? Or to be clearer, how can we build multispecies caring relationships while recognising divergent positions. I emphasise divergent positions in relation to Hollway’s differences in our capacities to care about something, in the first place, but also how different species and entity positions come to the fore when we start to think beyond human centred needs. I add this multispecies emphasis, which I appreciate is central to de la Bellacasa’s view, and could be read into many contemporary views of care, including yours, but I find that without continually and explicitly restating it, it is all too easy to fall into anthropogenic traps.

Within my work, I have been interested in the relationship to care, maintenance, repair and healing from a multispecies perspective in relation to the city, with a focus on how artistic acts of making, doing and thinking enable forms of practice and experimentation. Considering caring as an ongoing act of decision-making, care requires us to implicitly and explicitly choose what, with whom and where we place our attention and energies into and alongside. Within my work this has enfolded in various manners from the influence of surveillance hardware on urban avian wildlife, to studying repair cultures and economies, to supporting the inheritance of a community Internet network, to

performative escapades such as casting spells, or creating mourning rituals for land and species loss, to scripting acts of hospitality and encountering that enact commons centred sensibilities. Reflecting on this, as well as personal instances of care and attention, what can I say about care?

Care is messy
Care is wild
Care is transformative

Care is messy in that we are often trying to do our best within any moment of care giving and receiving. Within such moments, an encounter takes place that can defy expectations or needs, and so care splits, splinters and forks. This is why it is also wild. To say care is messy and wild, is not to walk away from the ideals of systematically thinking through what a democratic approach to care might look like, nor does it shy away from attempts to move beyond ideologies that reduce living to autonomous units of fantasised individual or familial self-containment and mastery. Caring is transformative in that it holds the power to transcend such units as it muddies any orderings. It is transformative in that the reciprocal nature of care giving and receiving, leads to feedback loops that shimmer and reach to the quasi material vibrancies that Bennett speaks of, which could also be articulated as a form of loving or binding that can bring us into enhanced and profound relations with others; - human, animal, material, land, forest and sea.

What has struck me all the more in these days of quarantine, isolation and social distancing is how much our caring relations have been brought to the fore. There is much to unpack here from the treatment of our elders, to the exacerbation of inequalities, to the bonds of community networks, to government leadership and corporate ‘care washing’ slogans. Within this, rainbows of support for care services, shop windows and store aisle notices, with the words “Be Kind to Each Other” and “Stay Safe” demonstrate how powerful displays of care can articulate a sense of collective endeavour in the face of a common threat and how receptive, as humans, we are to it. This of course begs the question about the authenticity and dependability of care relations, particularly in moments of uncertainty and crisis.

However, there is one track that I would like to focus on for the closing part of this letter, and that is how much our human caring interdependencies have been expressed and articulated through Internet infrastructures. Once something that had to be stoked into existence through a clatter of whirls and beeps, the Internet is now seamless, on tap. For those with high-speed connections, there is no ‘visible’ barrier to entry; the Internet operates with minuscule latency and drops. Captured in Microsoft Teams adverts that state, “We are living on teams, it’s as

simple as that" referring to the myriad platforms for remote working. These and other synchronous communication systems have been providing zoomed in spaces for maintaining webs of human contact, communication and expression. This takes place against a backdrop where the existing and future environmental impacts of Internet usage are being sidestepped as these difficult conversations challenge business-as-usual as well as future working paradigms.

To exemplify the point, the illustration that forms the backdrop for this letter its the Gutta-Percha[5] tree, which produces a natural, electrically nonconductive thermoplastic latex. Native to Malaysia, Singapore, Sumatra, Cambodia and Borneo, after fifteen years Gutta-Percha trees produce white rubber that when heated can be moulded into various shapes. The tree was first introduced into Europe in the 1800s and was used extensively for coating telegraphic wires and submarine electric cables. John Tully, in his article, *'A Victorian Ecological Disaster: Imperialism, the Telegraph, and Gutta-Percha'*[6] describes how dangerous the process and collection of latex was at the time, with the chilling statistics of how rapidly (within a few years) the tree became extinct and endangered, due to the high demand for telegraph services. This was further impacted by approaches to tree tapping that were not intended for exploitation at a mass scale, resulting in wasteful extraction processes. With Tully concluding "the telegraph industry destroyed the very trees that made its existence possible" (p. 579). The story of the Gutta-Percha tree highlights how our blind quest for continuous communication ravaged a forest landscape, which still has not fully recovered. The tracks it laid, the telegraph and submarine cables providing foundations for future Internet conduits.

In the spirit of this letter, the intention of sharing this brief story of the Gutta-Percha is to open up a space for conversation and exchange. Similar to restating questions about building capacities to care about someone or something, the story and questions form part of a continual effort to engage in the radical power of your proposition for a democratic approach to care by placing emphasises on a more-than-human perspective. Drawing on your point that care conceptually offers a different ontological path, it seems impossible not to think of care as an first and foremost an earth bound activity that is relational, vulnerable, fragile, and part of constant cycles of giving and receiving. How then do we begin to build capacities for caring in a manner that takes seriously the land and species within whom we co-habit? As you so often state, an ethic of care "constantly forces us to place into the context of people's daily lived lives any political or moral concerns that we might wish to raise"[7] (1995, p.145). At this point in time, the political and moral concerns relating to environmental degradation and the life sustaining force that is earth seems a just place to focus our collective attentions.

I look forward to our future correspondence.

Wishing you all the best and thanks to the *New Alphabet School, Care* curators and team for making this connect possible.

Kind regards, Teresa Dillon

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[1] While it seems a little unnatural to add a footnote to a letter, I would like to acknowledge the work of others and so decided to include them.
Bennett, Jane (2010). Vibrant Matter, A Political Ecology of Things, Duke Press Durham and London.

[2] Puig de la Bellacasa, María. (2017). Matters of Care, Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London.

[3] Fisher, Berenice, and Joan C. Tronto. (1990). Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring. In Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives, ed. Emily Abel and Margaret Nelson. Albany: State University of New York Press.

[4] Hollway, Wendy. (2006). The Capacity to Care: Gender and Ethical Subjectivity. Women and Psychology. London, UK: Routledge

[5] Image credit, Gutta-Percha, Franz Eugen Köhler, *Köhler's Medizinal-Pflanzen, Public Domain*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gutta-percha#/media/File:Palaquium_gutta_-_K%C3%B6hler%E2%80%93s_Medizinal-Pflanzen-099.jpg

[6] Tully, John (2009). A Victorian Ecological Disaster: Imperialism, the Telegraph, and Gutta-Percha. Journal of World History, Volume 20, Number 4, December 2009, pp. 559-579.

[7] Tronto, C. Joan (1995). Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgments. Hypatia, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Spring, 1995), pp. 141-149

New York City
2 June 2020

Dear Teresa,

Thank you for your letter. You present care as "messy, wild, and transformative" in this letter, and I admit that I have never thought about care this way. So thanks for this provocation. To me, care is much more often about maintaining, that is, about creating or recreating order. But then, as you note, I'm also usually thinking about care from the standpoint of humans, and mainly ignoring the roles of "our non-human world makers." You are right to bring this larger perspective, articulated already by Bennett and Puig de la Bellacasa and others, into this discussion.

I agree with you that we cannot care for everything with the same level and intensity, and that, as you wisely summarize Hollway, care results from a "complex interweaving of subjective experiences." You are correct then to say that it makes it very difficult to judge what is a "fair share" of care. And that it becomes very difficult to "build care relations while recognizing divergent positions." But for me, this is a key point. To raise the question of fairness, of justice, requires that we have some understanding of the nature of morality and how humans frame morality. At this place, I think Margaret Walker's idea of "moral understandings," of arriving at a moral order that everyone can live with, makes sense. It works to add in, of course, the wild and messy into these judgments. I am perhaps less optimistic than are you that such re-imaginings will make care "transformative" and allow us to move beyond "self-containment and mastery."

One central way in which many people conceive of care is as *safety*. It has taken me a long time to realize this point, and it doesn't make me happy. Along this dimension, care becomes extremely conservative. Not just preservative, but potentially conservative or even reactionary. The ignorance and avoidance of the seriousness of climate issues is perhaps one dimension of this concern for safety—it seems inconceivable that we could have done such damage and so, rather than opening a space for conversation and exchange, it requires a shutdown to address such questions. I'm not sure how to avoid that outcome.

Finally, let me both agree and disagree with you about the internet's infrastructures as key to caring and toward transformation. I would of course, as I correspond with you in cyberspace, have to agree about their importance. But it is also important to remember their dangers, and to think about the responsibilities of having internet access and thinking about its role in democratic societies committed to some form of fairness. Stories abound in the recent moment about the inaccessibility of internet resources for the most disadvantaged. As schools have moved on line, the least well off students are hurting the most in the USA. If one looks at a global map of access to internet resources (which I first did when I was in South Africa and using a lot of bandwidth), you will see how this resource is distributed globally; it follows income and colonization and… well, it's not just. (Here is a table from the World Bank[!]).
And here is a network map. Wall Street companies have struggled to build their servers as close to the New York Stock Exchange floor as possible; the advantage of the non-seconds of shorter time to complete a transaction makes them more money.

So, as I know you know, these realities work against the hopes we might have had for a fair internet. My enthusiasm for the internet is thus less profound than yours. (And perhaps it is just that I'm turning into an old curmudgeon…)

But if we can't care for everything at the same level and intensity, then we have to go back and forth constantly among the messy, wild things and wonder about who is responsible for caring well for them. I'm convinced that care is important to us, but sorting out what is fair about that remains a deeply messy question.

Thanks also for the illustration, and the "background" on the Gutta-Percha tree. It is an important cautionary tale to keep us from thinking we are so clever. I also found your term "corporate care-washing" to be brilliant, it helps to name something that has made me uncomfortable in this pandemic time as well.

In all, thanks for your letter,

With best wishes,
Joan

Berlin, May 13, 2020

Dear Joan Tronto,

The very format of a personalized letter that is predestined for public reading mirrors your long-standing claim that care, typically considered solely within the domain of the household, must be thought inseparably from the domain of politics. That is to say care is irreducible to purely intimate conceptions of it, despite the fact that any politics of care yields intimately felt, material consequences, particularly when it is utterly insufficient, as your critique of the marketization of care poignantly addresses. The purpose of my letter to you, is to open up some questions and provoke further speculation on pictures of care within our historical plight, a context demanding the unprecedented coordination of human solidarity in order to confront the planetary-dimensioned crises of the 21st Century. And yet that feat alone would not be enough, since climate crises demand not only considerations at the inter-human level, but attention to the biospheric conditions that support and nourish a diversity of life forms, of which we are but one sort in the mix. As local/planetary, or territorial/extra-territorial problems, climate crises reveal that State apparatuses by themselves are inadequate in grappling with the multi-scalar demands of our time, which are indifferent to sovereign jurisdiction – signaling the need to think an ethics of care in an equally multi-dimensional manner. Just as your concept of care is inseparable from the domain of politics, so too we may infer that 21st Century care must come to negotiate the inseparability between humans and the biosphere at large. How are we to consider an ethics of care within such complex social-environmental conditions composed of chains of (asymmetric) entanglements, be they economic, infrastructural, communicative, and/or viral? And conversely, how does this plight of entanglement shape the ways in which we ought to be enacting and structurally enabling an ethics of care in both personal and impersonal ways? How are we to think an ethics of care for an environment in common where currently future risks, urgent threats and material conditions are so uncommonly and unequally distributed?

There are three points running throughout your decades-long work on care that strike me as valuable concepts of entry into such questions. The first concerns a

‘view of the self’ in juxtaposition with ‘relationships’ and the ‘social order’ at large as part of your triadic formulation on the ethics of care. Crucially, this triangulated conception helps reveal a notable incompatibility at work in Western liberal democratic orders with their inherent emphasis on individual, nodal rights, that obscures a self-picture that is always relational. The second concerns the complicated task of discerning needs, as such, since to care for something proceeds from a demand to meet needs. The third point concerns the issue of competency when it comes to care, both in the capacity to determine needs, as well as the cognitive, material, and/or emotional faculties to meet the demands of those identified needs. All three points gesture to conceptions of care that are not self-evident activities, an important perspective in your work that pushes us to recognize care beyond the realm of immediate, proximate, and/or personal responses (like the obvious response to comfort a child who has scraped her knee, or soothing a friend during a difficult time).

It’s through these three intersecting vantage points that you have opened up ways in which to consider care not only in ethical and political dimensions, but also in its abstract and epistemic dimensions as well. For instance, if the ‘view of the self’ is a constitutive force in framing relationships to each other and the surrounding social environment, than any transformation upon that view would yield consequences on the way those relationships are understood, acted upon and institutionally reconfigured. As I see it, this ‘view of the self’ is a stereoscopic endeavor: namely, the view of a particular self in the world on a local level, working in tandem with a generic view of human selfhood in a nonlocal register. My interest lies in how these views of selfhood shape each other in mutually influential ways. Climate crises reveal that we are no longer able to sustainably imagine ourselves in a Euro-Humanist self-picture, as masterful agents separate from an infinitely plentiful ground that merely serves as a resource for feeding our ever-expanding desires. It is this (nonlocal) view of human selfhood, premised on an initial active figure / passive ground separation, that drives the logic of Liberal social models – wherein what is understood to be the basic building block of any society: the (localized) individual, is the sole driver for the conception of freedom and rights. In contrast, by emphasizing care as a primary frame of reference through which to imagine social

reconfigurations, your work privileges the locus of ‘relation’ that is situationally and contextually sensitive. As Liberal models of organization are collapsing in the face of complex social and environmental realities, responsibility and care can no longer be conceptually or structurally localized upon the individual. It’s here where I would ask how may we reimagine institutions of care that could speak to the ‘rights of relation’, and how would this recondition human self-images in both local and nonlocal dimensions? How could a ‘rights of relation’ take account of / be accountable to the power asymmetries that are present in any relationship of care, between care-giver and care-receiver?

The second and third points of necessity and competency that play out in your work strike me as urgent in view of finding ways to navigate our complex, entangled order that is irreducible to individualized responsibility-taking. As the late Mark Fisher discussed in reference to mental health epidemics, the personalization of what are actually social problems, is a cruel artifact of hyper-individualization at work in Liberal, particularly, Neoliberal orders. As you’ve noted, the discerning of necessity can be straightforward in an immediate context, like when I see someone who’s thirsty and I can care for them by providing water. Yet the moment we are asked to up our scales of reference, or address a situation outside the most basic of physiological requirements for survival, the determination of necessity is a complicated affair. (At this moment, we see an utter perversion of even this ‘basic’ formulation, since bodies are literally being martyred at the height of the pandemic to serve the ‘necessity’ of market-driven transactional activity.) If we desire an ethics of care beyond mere survival (which, as a human species, we have not yet achieved) it is contingent upon the collective discernment of needs that can be materially substantiated through infrastructures of care. You identify this process of defining and understanding necessities as ‘caring about’, so, inferentially, in order to engage in this process we require a degree of competence to interpret and see certain things or conditions, as needs. When we uphold a picture of care that can account for planetary-dimensioned entanglement, the accessibility and intelligibility of such complexity presents itself an incredibly daunting competency problem. What we can think of as ‘complexity competency’ seems vital, since the quality and durability of caring infrastructures is dependent on a rigorous needs-assessment within such a context – a condition, furthermore, where said needs cannot be accountably discerned from a purely anthropocentric perspective. This predicament raises an important link between care and knowledge, including the adjudication of diverse epistemologies that have historically been discounted. So while reasoning the world is often considered the ‘cool heady’ opposite to the ‘hearty warmth’ of care, there is a codependence between the two – not only with regards to the discernment of necessity within complex societies, but in subsequently learning *how* to care well, especially as you note, when the enactment of care cannot be figured as a purely instinctual process.

There is also, I believe, an additional consequence immanent in your concept of ‘caring about’ as it relates to risks and the way future threats can only be abstractly cognized or modeled, but not immediately felt, yet which shape the determination of material necessities in the present. Such an interfacing of possible care infrastructures with the modeling of risk, seems critical in the face of climate crises and the sets of forecasted events (of a there and then) that ought to instruct the discernment of necessity in the here and now. The difficulty of such propositions, is not only better articulating the bond between care and (always imperfect) knowledge, but a question of creating enabling frameworks to competently negotiate the collective determination of “how we wish to live in the world as well as possible”. This problem conjures the importance of what we could think of as ‘imaginative pedagogy’ vis-a-vis care, since ‘how we *wish* to live in the world’, requires that we nurture the imagination of worldly conditions unbound to concrete here and now, an activity often dismissed as being naïve, or unrealistic. While, ‘as well as possible’ sets a necessary scalar or material constraint against unreasoned, unsustainable, purely hubristic aspirations. How are we to foster the will to ‘care about’ the world in a responsible way, such that the collective, political discernment of necessity is imaginable in a competent way, and how is this measure of ‘competency’ accounted for?

Your decades-long work on care, on making it explicit when it is so often treated as if care is self-evident, or a purely ‘natural’ response, or only something one does within strictly interpersonal or familial limits, provides us with several conceptual tools when

confronting the planetary-dimensioned crises of our time, in what is shaping up as the riskiest century yet for the human species. The impersonal perspectives you bring to the concept of care, along with your emphasis on it as a primary frame of reference from which to elaborate political and institutional struggle, is what allows us to imagine care in a scalar way. Since we cannot care directly for everyone, nor can ‘caring about’ shared problems be adequately negotiated on an individual scale, learning how to live as well as possible is contingent on us learning how to care at the scale of an environment in common (especially the inequitable distribution of risks this environment in common practically entails). This additionally involves learning the competencies to care about, and how to care for that which is uncommon and non-proximate, yet nonetheless recognized in constitutive relation.

With warm wishes,
Patricia

New York City
June 2, 2020

Dear Patricia,

Thank you for this letter. It is incredibly satisfying for me to read the analysis that you offer because it lets me see that my work has been well understood and taken seriously. You are correct to see the centrality of a different kind of self, the nature of needs and issues of competency as central elements of my work. We could probably talk for days about what you have compressed into this short text. But since this is a short letter, let me focus instead on two issues about selves and rights and "scalar" issues.

Yes, there are particular local selves and universal selves always present, both in giving and receiving care. How we should talk about these selves remains problematic. A classic model thinks through the logic of what one should need and drawing obligations and rules out of that logic. How do more complex selves best think about these matters? I often rely upon responsibility rather than obligation. I sometimes invoke notions of interest, even; especially when we can play upon the difference between long and short-term interests, or between thoughtless desire and what Tocqueville called "self-interest properly understood." Increasingly, I think what it takes to become a better self is the capacity and desire for imagination, which is in ever shorter supply in the world.

In contrast, in your essay you want to insist on a "right of relation." I prefer not to use the language of rights here, I don't think that it does the work you want it to do. You ask, "could rights-of-relation take account of/be accountable to the power asymmetries that are present in any relationship of care?" Maybe I'm misunderstanding, but rights-of-relation seem to me to be about the relationship of care vis-à-vis the world outside of that particular care relationship. Such relations have the right to exist, to be shaped as those within them wish, etc. yes. But *within* a care relation, I don't see rights as a way to make sense of power. Within care relations there are always power dynamics. But I don't see how rights discourses help us to think about that power differently. Rights are usually tools against power, but I don't see them as especially useful tools for discerning power imbalances, say.

But perhaps this misunderstands your take. For I surely do agree with your next point that individual responsibility-taking, where you refer to Mark Fisher as suggesting that "personalization of what are social problems is a violent artifact of hyper-individualization at work in liberal, particularly neoliberal, orders." Such personalization is a threat for all individuals, though once again, the threats come more thoroughly to those who already suffer injustice.

To me, this important point that you have raised is of the same kind as the other problem you raise in the letter, the scalar issues of care. This is another problem about care that I have been thinking about a lot, lately. Once we try to scale-up and talk about needs beyond even the most basic needs (air, food, water), it gets, as you point out, "complicated."

You thus see care providing, through its conceptual "impersonal perspectives" a frame of reference for political and institutional struggle, since we can think about these scalar dimensions. But notice that the scalar can also take us down to the more minute levels of care for particular individuals. In that way, the scalar problem—how do we care at this level—is both a problem of complex selves *and* a problem of social life, order, political processes.

Actually, all of the dimensions of care have to be to the right scale. Needs are different in intimate relations than when the state provides for citizens' public health needs. Responsibilities are scalar. The original Scottish Enlightenment thinkers who wrote about benevolence, who were an inspiration to me, thought about benevolence as if it were gravity: more distant relations made fewer claims of benevolence than close ones. This might be a metaphor to use in thinking through these difficult issues of how much? For whom? From whom? in order to make care more just.

Again, thank you for your letter.

With best wishes,
Joan

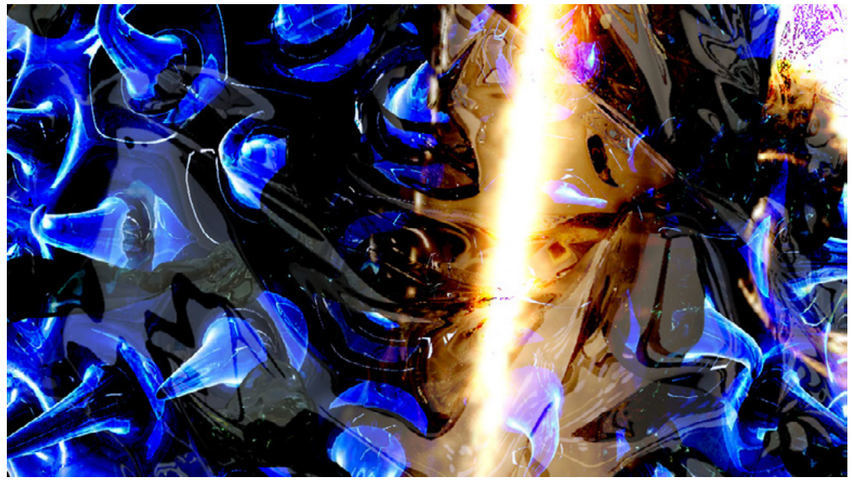
May 25th, 2020

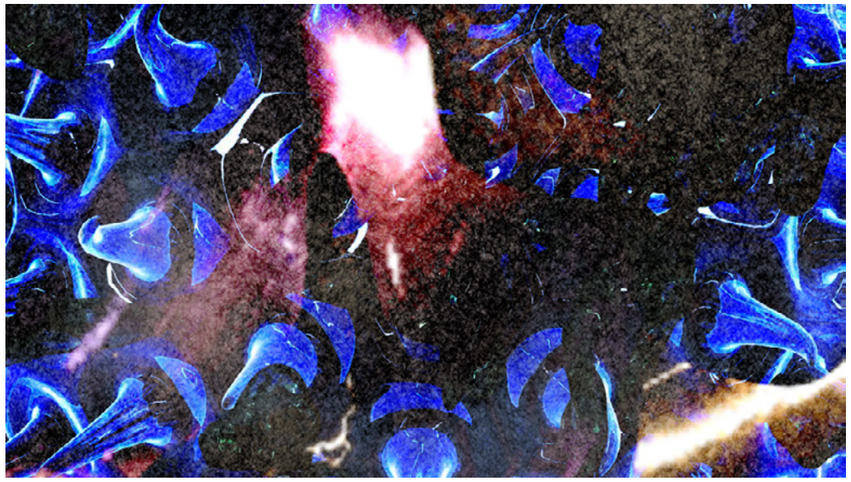
Dear Joan,

The void of interstellar space
a desert of polar energies and planet winds
faces histories of distinct occupation,
human and artificial settlement
and displacement.
The violences of political, cultural and technological
aspiration and reimagination.

Turning to the occupied space beyond the Earth
recalls the presence of these recent pasts,
the objectification of indigenous knowledge,
as a politics of care.
The determined alignment
with the corporeal materialization of space
signals a mode of decolonization,
along with the strength, the fragility and the ephemerality
of its macromolecular body formations.

Speculating on care as a political texture,
as a micro-politics of particular matter,
I am turning to the polymorphous affinities
within nonhuman substances
that escape into and perform in interplanetary space.
As processes that ignite us think of a world more capacious
than the small ones we too often think we only inhabit.





The here sketched politics of care
essentially concern what I call
assemblages of particular possibility
constituted by the molecules and particles of vibrant virtual matter
as transmaterial affections
that surround non/human intention.
Caring for the sum of the social affects
that the technological and ecological transformations
in a global machine of techno-physical violence,
perform on and with our bodies.
Carbon, xenon, volcanic emissions
are escaping as gaseous toxicity
as a result of ecological emergency.

The sun is slowly brightening
at a current rate of about ten precent per billion years,
destined to become a red giant in some seven billion years.
However, long before the Sun reaches that limit,
hydrogen escape will have dessicated our planet.
Earth will then have been transformed into a desert,
with the Sun being bright enough that all the remaining water evaporates,
and the greenhouse gas effect strong enough to melt rock.

At this point, some four billion years from now,
Earth will have turned into a barren and lifeless state.
The ancient Sun rotated faster than present
because the solar wind has removed angular momentum.
The increasingly brightening Sun triggers gaseous erosions
and mass fractionations.
But, ultraviolet emission depends on
the charge-exchange
– the performativity –
of the Sun's magnetic field.

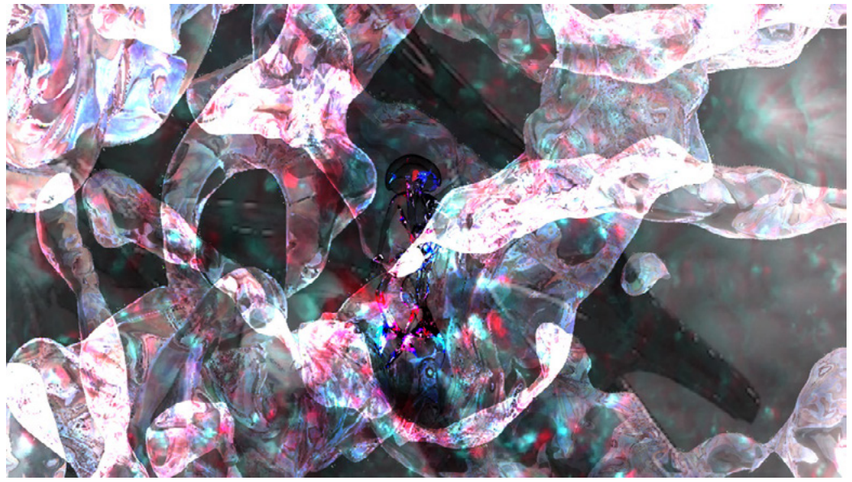
To deal with the increasing energy of sunlight
that the planet is faced with,
it responses through atmospheric escape:
In a process of ultraviolet decomposition,
the gases diffractively absorb light.
Through the energy of charged fellow-particles,
gases are carried up by and through the atmosphere
while evaporating and decomposing into atoms,
to overcome gravity.
This form of escape, called planetary wind,
is an analogy to the solar storm,
a tornado of radically charged particles blown from the Sun
into erosive interstellar space.

Upon escape, gases such as hydrogen and xenon
form extracorporeal bodies;
physicalities of composites constantly shifting figure and form.
Coming into being as they merge and align with,
or destroy each other while rippling against abiotic waves
and the wrinkled ultraviolet field,
as queer inhuman intimacies and enemies within and between matter.

But the bodies of escape don't move in an indeterminate zone.
Indeed, left by powers of gravity,
geo- and biopolitics reach far into space.
Interplanetary performance is in a machinic, accelerating relation with
the magnetic field of ultraviolet light:
Carbon, human-technological encounter and its waste,
and the resistance of other physical bodies of gaseous outbreak,
whose magnetopauses of power
detract and exclude.

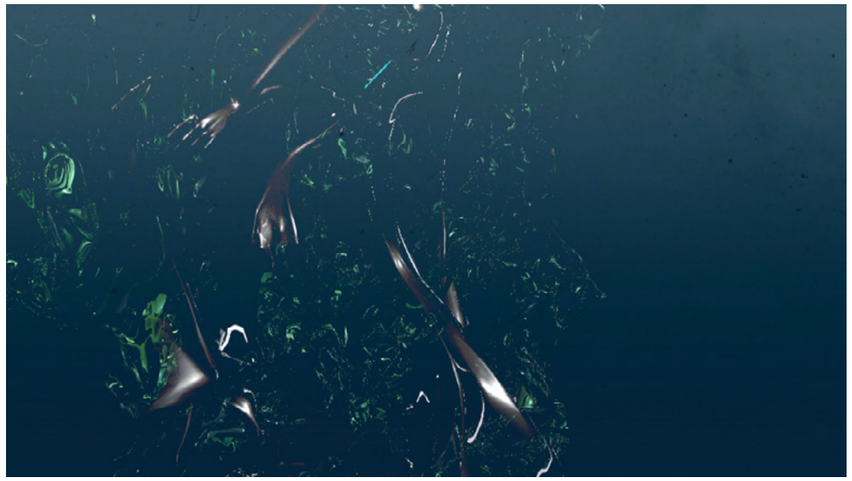
Interstellar non/human performance tells us that
a politics of care cannot unfold in an ubiquitous web of entanglement;
when everything and everyone is entangled
and universally serves one another.
How can aleatory agencies of the present unfold
when the excluded ones are not accounted for;
those relations for which the inclusiveness of planetary entanglement
doesn't have signals,
codes and languages for?
The ultraviolet light of the Sun intensifies matter in particularities.

This particular form of care produces non/human life
that enables textures of specificity,



voices, forces and poetics
that trouble the understanding of the world
as a general web of uniquely entangled relations.

It remains to be seen
how a particular form of polymorphous care,
that intensifies particular relations,
in macromolecular formations,
can un-fold, under-fold, de-fold, re-fold and poly-fold.



To care is to be and act from in-between,
from the position of embodied multiplicities,
and requires more than a concept of betweens.
Activating beyond reciprocal dynamics.

To care can be directionless and formless,
as long as it takes the respons-ability
to care for many others,
and as long as it installs support systems
that hyperbolically respond,
while providing the conditions to re-entangle
within the particular immersive.
The emerging affinities may affect micropolitical temporalities
and circles of radiation.

These intensifications conceive of
the cared-for/caring-bodies,
the cared-for/caring-situations,
the cared-for/caring-void and virtual,
as a complex web of toxic vibrant matter,
as particular assemblages and textures of poss-ability.

Sincerely Yours,

Johanna

Ps. All images are production stills from „Atmospheric Escape“, video, Johanna Bruckner, 2020.

New York City
2 June 2020

Dear Johanna,

Thank you for your letter. I found it fascinating to read and beautiful to apprehend. These images that you have created are stunning. Your essay prompted me, for the first time, to contemplate how the universe itself—in its vastness—might be imbricated in practices of care and point us towards breaking down "The violences of political, cultural and technological aspiration and reimagination." Although I have been trying to bend my mind away from its human focus, I had not yet managed to conceive of the "assemblages of particular possibility" that you have described.

What I find especially appealing about the message of the letter is that, at the same time you invite us readers to think about the "void of interstellar space," you do not also lose sight of the "ecological emergency" that we face. You make your intention clear, in the precise way you state it: "I am turning to the polymorphous affinities within nonhuman substance that escape into and perform in interplanetary space. As processes that ignite us think of a world more capacious than the small ones we too often think we only inhabit."

I find this idea of "a world more capacious" to be very freeing. My main reaction to your essay was to think about the ways in which wonder at the world frees us to think and to interact differently. Wonder, as a genuine openness to everything, helps to dislodge the control and order that we think generally exists in how we frame the world.

But your letter warns against trying to find such a "meaning" within it; I take your point that you want to resist some happy ending to the entire story of care. As you write, "Interstellar non/human performance tell us that a politics of care cannot unfold in an ubiquitous web of entanglement when everything and everyone is entangled and universally serves one another." Instead, you reflect upon the particularity revealed by the sun's ultraviolet light, and argue for "A particular form of care…"

In the end, though I probably would never have put it in this way, I agree with you that "To care is to be and act from in-between, from the position of the excluded, and requires more than a concept of betweens" "as long as it takes the respons-ability to care for many others." I fear that I am still too caught up in the ways that gravitational pulls, shaping power, create the positions of the excluded in the first place, and block and shape our ways of seeing our respons-abilities, and even our responsibilities, to care for many others. It is helpful for me to be reminded to pull back from this non-capacious, small world, approach and to see the greater, and the much more particular, both at once.

To raise a final point, though, I am not certain that "The determined alignment with the corporeal materialization of space signals a mode of decolonization, along with the strength, the fragility and the ephemerality of its macromolecular body formations." I am much more worried that the "void of interstellar space" is indifferent to our "violences" than that it offers us assistance to align against them. Perhaps this is because I am still stuck within a modernist understanding of science as somehow "neutral." As I write this, I realize it is a prejudice that I have. I'm not even sure where it comes from. Other knowledge regimes have existed, even in Western cultures, that had very different ideas about whether the universe is so indifferent to us. (And I often wonder what future beings will think of our "sciences" just as we marvel that anyone could have believed that the world is flat.) So, I promise that I will keep thinking about this point: Why can't we conceive of matter as animated toward care and justice rather than indifferent to these concerns? Certainly, if we expect science to function as an all-knowing system, why could it not have a purpose, and a good purpose at that?

So thanks again for your letter,

With best wishes,
Joan

#4 Caring

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