CIRCE

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The Promise of Care – Facing the Crises of Social Reproduction in the Performing Arts

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It is becoming increasingly difficult to not care about care. Care is simply everywhere: From the personal register of "self-care" to the infrastructural dimension of the "care crisis" as it appears in the healthcare sector, the ubiquity of the word undeniably conveys something about the current historical moment, a moment marked by but not reducible to the fallouts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Cultural work, in European institutional contexts especially, has been at the forefront of this discourse: The emphasis on the necessity of care, or related terms, e.g. healing, vulnerability and relationality, has provided a crucial backdrop for artistic practice, curation and programming in recent years. Interrogating this trend, this research project focuses on the independent performing arts in Europe. Contemporary dance and performance in this context, seem to be particularly drawn to care as an entry-point into re-envisioning formats such as rituals and other participatory formats and aesthetic qualities conveying what care might feel like. Here, we increasingly encounter an emphasis on softness, tenderness or slowness. At the same time, this project wants to critically engage the optimism that so often seems to accompany these practices: To what extent does the aestheticization of care obscure the power relations and material conditions that underlie the current modes of reproduction?

As the project reconstructs the concept from a materialist and intersectional feminist lineage, care appears as an umbrella term for a perhaps surprisingly contradictory set of practices and demands. On the one hand, and very much in the vein of the current wave of careful art, feminists have looked to practices of care as prefiguring a different way of living together. If people just cared more, one could polemically extrapolate their argument, we could meaningfully address the current crises. On the other hand, however, feminist Marxists such as Silvia Federici have underlined the complex ways in which unpaid care work, from tending to sick family members to housework and emotional labour in the service sector, is integral to reproducing capitalist societies. How care makes life possible, from a materialist feminist perspective, cannot be simply disentangled from the way its devaluation maintains the status quo. This simply means that caring more will not necessarily be enough to transform the social relations which have led to the "care crisis" in the first place. The intervention of this research project is to stay with rather than to flatten this tension between the prefigurative and the reproductive dimension of care.

With this in mind, the project thinks with artistic approaches to care. Rather than to stabilise the status quo by an empty signifier of care, how can artistic approaches meaningfully

contribute to transforming the conditions under which we care? Thinking with and along the personal reality of Post COVID symptoms as well as the independent performing arts scene as it is informed by time-based aesthetic forms and project temporality, the question of temporality comes sharp into focus. Discussing different artistic practices and projects that question and challenge the relation of time and care, this research comes to conclude: To take the necessity of care seriously is not about "taking a break" or "slowing down" – it is crucially, to take inspiration from Alison Kafer's concept of Crip time, about bending time. Bending time requires not just tenderness but a forceful counteracting of how time is valued socially. It is only when we pay attention to this disruptive dimension of care that it can become more than an empty signifier in structurally uncaring societies.

Research Problem: Why care?

There is currently no escaping the notion of *care* – especially not within the art world. When looking at current themes of exhibitions, festivals, conferences, publications, it seems as if not a single art institution in Europe might have refrained from creating a programme on care or related concepts such as healing, resilience, vulnerability, relationality, reproduction. This also applies to the independent performing arts: the research field of this project. Here, the turn towards care can not only be observed in the discursive framings of art events but also within artistic practices. We can increasingly witness performances taking the form of rituals or other participatory formats in which questions around how to be with each other, human and non-human, are in focus. Tender voices caring for the audience, calming lavender oil being diffused on stage, somatic scores inviting the audience to sense their bodies, soft and fluffy stage designs full of comfort – soft and tender aesthetics are on a rise, suggesting a shift from confrontation and critique to wellness and care within the sphere of performance and theatre. This observation is the starting point of this research project. And to be transparent, I want to note that such an observation does not necessarily come without unease. As with any concept that seems to circulate too readily within the creative and cultural sector, there is a danger of emphasising an empty signifier that everyone seems to agree upon without questioning or working on its actual use, meaning or political significance. So, in this sense, I understand this project as a theoretical intervention that pauses to ask: What does this focus on care within the arts tell us about our current moment? How does the term "care" promise to act as a tool capable of addressing today's crises? And under which conditions can these promises transform into practices that might change the conditions under which we care? Within the context of CIRCE, it also becomes important to ask how practices of care within the performing arts can be supported infrastructurally through funding and policy.

To approach these questions, I first want to map out some thoughts on the notion of care and the many meanings it entails. Why has it become such an important term within the performing arts especially in relation to the precarious working conditions within the field?

The English word *care* holds a spectrum of meanings, encompassing its affective, ethical and material registers. In order to map these out, it is instructive to look at potential German translations of the term. In German, *care* could translate to *Sorge* – the sorrow, worry or simply feeling of concern for someone; it could also mean *Fürsorge* – which would name the form of nurturing care or aid being performed by relatives, friends or public services; it could translate to *Versorgung* or *Pflege* as forms of nursery care, the labour of care with those, who need assistance, or also as the attention we give to things to maintain them; it could also describe a certain quality, with which we attend to the world around us: *Sorgfalt* or *Umsicht* – as in careful- and attentiveness. Precisely because the English term seems to encompass all these meanings, it is used widely within German academia and art as well (cf. Binder/Hess 2019). While the current excessive use of the notion of care seems to point to its promise of nurture and maintenance, it might be interesting to consider that its etymology suggests less optimistic connotations as well. The Old English world *caru* means "sorrow, anxiety, grief" but also "serious mental attention", indexing a proximity between sorrow and care, *dem Kummer und dem Kümmern.* So, if I want to describe the promises of care within the arts, one entry-point might be to ask what sorrow this promise carries.

In their essay "The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times", the cultural theorist Lauren Berlant writes: "All times are transitional. But at some crisis times like this one, politics is defined by a collectively held sense that a glitch has appeared in the reproduction of life." (Berlant 2016: 393) Berlant writes these lines before the global Covid-19 pandemic but I think this account of a seemingly shared public hunch that the reproduction of life is glitching has since become more accurate. This, of course, does not mean that there is also a shared *understanding* of which resources and ways of living would secure it, rather on the contrary. The reproduction of life generally falls into the sphere of care. This is also the case in Joan Tronto's generic definition of care: "Everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all that we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web" (Tronto 1993: 103) This is the ideal of care, in which a generic *we* collectively participates in securing the liveability of life through careful practices – especially in times where this liveability is perceived as becoming more and more precarious. It is this ideal that is optimistically interpellated when *care* comes into focus on stages, panel discussions,

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publications. Care becomes an optimistic answer to the crises of social reproduction which seem to be hitting the middle class as "crises tend to become general in mass political terms" (Berlant in Puar 2012: 166) even if they have been a reality for people in the margins for a long time. There is a stark contrast between these ethical life-sustaining promises that care entails when it is interpellated in the arts, and the conditions under which the work of care unfolds day to day.

To theorise the labour of reproduction, Marxist feminist scholars (Federici 2004, 2012; Bhattacharya 2017) have directed their analyses to the beginnings of industrial modernity and its separation of the spheres of reproduction and production, and thus their gendering. The paradigmatic form for this gendered division of life is the nuclear family, in which wage labour outside the home falls to men, while the unpaid care work is performed by women[1]. The responsibility for care activities (household management, rearing the offspring, affective and physical care) and thus the task of reproducing life has historically been borne by women even if they also participate in wage work, as it has always been the case for poor and racialized women. Pointing out that the reproduction of life under capitalism always serves the reproduction of labour power and therefore its exploitation, was a central concern of feminist movements in the 1970s such as the "Wages for Housework" campaign. In contemporary discourses on care and reproductive labour, that is to say the context in which scholars such as Silvia Federici have been institutionally rediscovered, one encounters a common misunderstanding: the notion that these feminist movements fought for the affirmative recognition of care work as work. For the perspectives this research project wants to open up, however, it is important to note that feminist Marxist scholars and activists such as Federici indeed wanted to show the mechanisms that position care work as socially devalued and invisible as labour. But they were less interested in the positive revaluation of care work – rather, they wanted to analyse how the naturalisation of care work as women's work and the accompanying devaluation function as techniques of sexist capitalist exploitation. Demanding wages was not a liberal claim to inclusion; it was posed as a revolutionary claim. Paying proper wages for care work, according to the analysis of these activists and scholars, would be incompatible with the current mode of production and thus, ultimately lead to the collapse of capitalist value extraction.

In today's globalised late capitalism, where a large proportion of women find themselves integrated into the labour market, albeit with lower earnings, this is perhaps even

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[1] Lives outside this binary have always existed. Here, I forgo using a gender-neutral or gender-inclusive use of the terms men and women as I am describing their socially produced and assigned roles within the historical division of labour within the socially constructed gender binary.

more visible: More care work is paid work in the Global North[2]. However, it is usually delegated to poorer, often racialized women, often immigrants from the Global South – usually underpaid and performed in the gaps of social security or labour legislation (Lutz 2008; Parreñas 2005). When contemporary societies in the Global North are being diagnosed with a "care crisis," the corresponding analysis often includes the observation of a lack of skilled labour in the care and health sector. This is seen as especially alarming since it indexes insufficient infrastructures to attend to the ageing societies in the Global North while at the same time, family systems are becoming more and more flexible and less willing or able to perform the necessary care for family members in need of care. Through phenomena such as transnational motherhood – when a caregiver relocates to a richer country to work as a caregiver (e.g., as a nurse or nanny) in order to provide for their own family which stays behind – the shortage of care is then delegated to countries of the Global South. So, if we look at the term *care* against the backdrop of the history and current organisation of reproductive labour, care appears as a lacking resource, extracted through the mobilisation of gendered and racialized bodies. Through its gendered historicity, care, understood as a resource, remains tied to the affective capacity of the bodies that perform it, thus showing continuities with what can be understood as affective and feminised labour in the context of the service economy and post-Fordist labour (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2012, Precarias 2005). This is a materialist discourse through which care has been making its way into feminist public spheres – already before the pandemic. With the pandemic, it has just become more apparent to which degree societies depend on functioning infrastructures of care.

But when Berlant describes, as cited above, the affective sphere within which the reproduction of life is perceived to be in crisis, this is not primarily about the unequal distribution and exploitation of care work but about a publicly shared sense that the liveability of life has shifted for the worse. In the Global North, burn-out and depression are described as affective symptoms of this crisis (Cvetkovich 2012) which are variously attributed to precarisation and the perceived loss of life time through the dissolution of the boundaries between life and work (see Virno 2005, or in a more popular version: Hochschild 2001). This shared sense might also be evoked by the lack of action, the presumed powerlessness in facing the climate crisis which is becoming a heightened threat day by day. In these affective states (which are generally shared by cultural workers and artists as well), the lack of care is not only experienced through the scarcity of therapeutic treatment but in the social isolation, the lack of community or continuous social relations patterning our lives. It might be here that care turns into a promise. If there was just *more* care (for the planet, non-human and human beings, within communities,

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[2] I don't use the notion of Global North and South here as geographical terms, but as terms that describe hegemonic relations between countries and regions which are embedded in the unequal distribution of wealth and extractivist practices.

in working relationships, in families and friendships, from the state, for ourselves), the concept often seems to imply, life would be more liveable. But care – this is a central presumption of this research project – can only be transformative if its practices transform the conditions under which we care. Otherwise, care in its maintaining, repairing, repetitive qualities, its necessities and therefore production of dependencies, is rather complicit in stabilising existing systems of exploitation and inequality. This is equally true for self-care which can be so easily integrated into commodified forms of relaxation. Few of us can deny the necessity of our personal self-care routines, but often their function is to allow us to keep going within lives structured by a world that we doubt. Of course, there is also a legacy of self-care as a form of resistance from marginalised perspectives. Here, we might think of Audre Lord's famous quote from her memoir on battling cancer, *A Burst of Light* (1988): "*Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare",* which was also quoted during the Care Sessions at the CIRCE network meetings. When lives are deemed not worthy of life, i.e. by direct violence or structural neglect, i.e. through health care systems, racial inequalities or geopolitical action, survival can be a form of resistance and self-care, under certain circumstances, might be a tool for survival. This, however, is the tricky part in engaging with the notion of care – it is hard to distinguish when it becomes complicit with systems of power vs. when it has the potential to intervene in transformative ways. This brings me back to the core problem of this project: It is an attempt to be honest with care and our contemporary yearnings for it. This means to not repeat the ethical and idealist promise the notion of care holds in the way that it is currently circulating through arts and public discourse but rather, to think about the material consequences for artistic practice when wishing for a proximity to care.

Research Methods: Thinking along artistic practice and sickness

In order to frame my methodological approach, I want to briefly outline a general account of my field of research. When I talk about the independent performing arts in Europe, I am referring to an internationalised field of artists, collectives and companies working in the context of dance and performance and the institutions such as theatres, production houses and festivals circulating their work. In Germany in particular, we can witness aesthetic and organisational differences between the so-called state-theatres (Staats- und Stadttheater) and the independent scene ("freie Szene"). State theatres usually focus on a specific, classical form within the performing arts (i.e. dramatic theatre, ballet or opera), mostly as communal or federal institutions, relying on employed ensembles working within a traditional division of labour (either you are an actor or a director or a dramaturg etc.). The independent performing

arts scene, on the other hand, consists of self-organised artists and collectives who often stage trans-disciplinary works across various genres, highly dependent on project funding. Such a departure from traditional genres and institutions comes with a high degree of self-reflexivity in regards to aesthetic form, working methods and social relevance. This is what makes this art form particularly interesting in the context of CIRCE. Here, the relationship of art and life is not one of representation. Rather, the relationship of life and art could be described as an *entanglement* that is continuously questioned and re-imagined (cf. Kunst 2023). If the promise of care within the arts is to transform how life is sustained, this must also have consequences for the research approach to artistic practice. For my analysis, it is therefore important to not describe and discuss aesthetic qualities of artistic practice isolated from the conditions in which they emerge. Consequently, I understand my research field as a complex, infrastructural environment, in which the arts are deeply entangled with socio-political struggles, public discourse, economic conditions, funding policies, institutions and trans-local publics. Describing this entanglement and following its movement through writing became the methodology of my research.

In this sense, I am not interested in research *about* art but in the knowledge that becomes tangible when thinking *with* and *along* artistic practices. In this process, engaging theoretically with the concepts of care does not function as an inductive theoretical framework that is then applied to a research object (i.e. a performance). Thinking with rather than about artistic practices, the conditions they are entangled with and exploring the imaginative, sensorial and embodied knowledge they can produce, weaving into these insights feminist and decolonial theories on care, allowing them informed each other reciprocally – these became the practices of this research project.

Originally, I imagined that for this research project I would do field work – I planned to thoroughly look at different artistic projects and (para-)institutional practices within the performing arts field, doing participant observation and conducting interviews. Engaging theoretically with the notion of care was supposed to be a beginning to sharpen the research interest. As with most research projects that are conceived before they start, the plans had to change.

First of all, my health condition interfered with the original plan. Suffering from Post-Covid symptoms, which can worsen through mental and physical exertion, the price my body would pay for attending events, travelling, conducting focused interviews increased, forcing me to consequently reduce travels and performance sightings. Engaging with my research interest through reading, thinking, writing from home while profiting from my broad archive of knowledge and experience within the performing arts, simply became a more accessible

research methodology. But being sick was not only an obstacle in this process that I had to adapt the methodology to. As my dependence on various forms of care intensified, it also became more urgent to consider: What is actually at stake when we talk about care? Why is there a discursive agreement within the arts field that care is simply good? And how do the ever-present discursive interpellations of care relate to practices that organise or provide it? Pausing to stick with the notion of care and its analysis became the focus of this project. In the process, sickness also affected the movements of interest in the research in ways that I want to elaborate on here.

There is a specific temporal quality to being sick with Post-Covid. The most severe symptoms occur after physical and mental exertion – for me, this exertion can be attending a performance that has many sensory stimuli or participating in a conference for a day, for others it might be vacuuming the apartment or engaging in a conversation. To avoid the worsening of symptoms you have to speculatively avoid exertions, even if you can never be sure what will act as an exertion and trigger a crash. While there is a dramatic lack of research, the current most efficient treatment for Post-Covid is a self-disciplinary behavioural strategy called *Pacing*. Pacing is an activity managing technique that has been developed for other, closely related chronic illnesses and disabilities associated with fatigue and pain (the overwhelming majority of which have alarmingly been ignored by medical research for decades such as ME/CFS, which Post-Covid might be a form of). Here, caring for this sickness means putting yourself on a schedule of limited activities, alternating with rest and relaxation in order to be able to continue your activities at all. In order to get better, time must be bent towards this personal clock of rest, stress levels must be kept low, and time must be made for regular sleep and meals. In the few weeks in which I am succeeding with pacing, I often think, I should have always lived like this. Other times, I terribly miss the high intensity parts of my life, even if they have mostly existed in a constant bounce with exhaustion – a quite typical dynamic for workers within the cultural sphere. In this working environment structured by projects and deadlines, *pacing is doomed to fail*. Often, the only option to not get worse seems to be to stop working indefinitely which for financial and likely also identificatory reasons is not actually an option. Thus, if we consider the statistics – the enormous numbers of people living with Post-Covid and other physical and mental health conditions that make stress reduction and working within the limits of capacity an existential necessity (and not an abstract self-care goal), *work under these conditions is doomed to fail*.

In the process of this research project, while struggling to establish my pacing routines, I began to engage more and more with the relationship of care and time. It became particularly interesting to me to think about the temporalities of care in relation to the temporal organisation of work within the arts. Thinking through the temporalities of care opened a path to tackle the

divide between on the one hand, the optimistic interpellation of care and on the other hand, those practices of care described in the previous part of the report. I will elaborate more on my findings in this regard in the next section.

Hence, in my research process, I decided to focus on artists and pieces or projects which revolve around the relationship of time and care. I visited Theaterformen Festival in Hannover where I could engage with the work of Claire Cunningham, a choreographer and performer and pioneer within disability arts. I also let my research be informed by an Artist Lab format that I participated in during the fellowship, in which we reflected on the work experiences during the pandemic. When thinking about temporalities of care, it became important for me to also take into consideration some of the shifts that happened during the pandemic.

In the process, the network of CIRCE proved to be a vivid context for the research, assembling many actors from different fields in the cultural sector. I could engage in various discussions with other fellows, who, speaking for their respective contexts, shared the observation of an omnipresence of a rhetoric of care. Some of them also shared their unease that this rhetoric could obscure the power relations and actual conditions in the field. Within the CIRCE events as well, care was present, both rhetorically and in formats such as the Care Session, inviting somatic exercises into the events – this encouraged me that shifting the focus of my project towards a theoretical intervention in the notion of care might be relevant beyond my specific field of expertise.

Analysis and Main Insight: The Time of Care

In the first section of this report, I have mapped out how within the notion of care, the potential affective, ethical and material meanings of the word collide. In this way, care is prone to become an empty signifier. To touch upon the material qualities of care, it might be helpful to think with the temporalities practices of care produce. Time, in this sense, it not an abstract concept but produced through material practices. (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017)

When I think of the work of maintenance, I think of repetition. In a domestic imaginary, I think of tuning in to the specific time the work needs – tending to a garden, stitching a broken garment, oiling the kitchen countertop. I also think about how a lack of maintenance is so often closely connected to the challenge *of making time* for it. When I think of caring for my children when they were babies, I think of the urgency in which their needs needed attention. This urgency, though, was not characterised by the timing of emergency but of continuity. Care is continuous in the sense that it cannot end, cannot be paused. This is also apparent in the history of feminist perspectives on general strikes – for people with care obligations in the

home and/or their professional lives, it is impossible to participate in a strike that requires to disrupt this work. (Precarias 2005) When I think of informal infrastructures of care in neighbourhoods or communities, which are increasingly hard to maintain within post-Fordist societies, I think about endurance and persistence, regularity and continuity – "militant preservation", as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013) have described the temporal resistance of marginalised life forms "carried out by and on the means of social reproduction".

And although the work of care cannot be paused and is enacted persistently, care in its reproductive qualities can also mean to actively make time for recreation – even though a heightened need for recreation cannot be disentangled from the productionist temporalities that contribute to the longing for easily consumable relaxation in the first place. Within the discourses on care in the performing arts, a number of installations and performances have been developed around the topic of rest. In their work "Black Power Naps", the artists Navild Acosta and Fannie Sosa have created an experience of resting and slowing down to address the "Sleep Gap." The "Sleep Gap" is a term associated with a set of US studies which found that the amount of quality sleep a person is able to get in their life is co-determined by race. Black people and people of colour, these studies emphasise, have less access to quality sleep. (Resnick 2015) By providing a performative space of relaxation, the immersive setting of Acosta's and Sosa's work politicises rest, calling for a redistribution of recreation. In Angela Alves' performative work "Rest Rebellion," the particular expertise sick and disabled artists have developed in regards to resting and quitting is offered to the audience, in order to train, collectively, how to refuse "grinding the body for capitalism."

I think it cannot be underestimated how much the contemporary longing for care, articulated in the arts and beyond, is related to a longing for a reworking of the relationship to time. If we think of the time of care as pausing and slowing down to rest as well as care as the urgent ongoingness and continuity of social reproduction and maintenance, care promises a temporal diversity that is contradictory to the temporalities of artistic production in the independent performing arts. It might be precisely this contradiction though that has given rise to concepts of care, rest and resilience gaining so much traction in this specific field.

The prevailing temporal form in which work in the independent performing arts and most sectors in the creative sphere is organised, is the project. As the word itself suggests, the project encapsulates a specific relationship to time – it projects the future while already being oriented towards its own end, its completion or, one might say, death (as in: the deadline). The temporal modus operandi of project work is the future perfect. Here, the relationship to the present is marked by debt, a promise that has been made towards the future, the completion of the project that is always already anticipated. In her book *Artist at Work. Proximity of Art and Capitalism* (2012), the philosopher and performance theorist Bojana Kunst has named this

temporal form of work "projective temporality." In the book, she also raises the question whether this relationship to the future, a relationship in which we always have to work towards our anticipated version of it while it simultaneously stays insecure, also contributes to our current moment's lack of imagination – a future that is radically different from the present tends to become unimaginable.

When, beginning with its first conception, the project will have been finished in the future, the temporal cycles of project work overlap: While you are rehearsing for the upcoming premiere, you are most likely already working on the concept for the next project to meet the upcoming application deadline for funding. While you are awaiting letters of approval or rejection from the funding body, you engage in already funded projects, work in projects of other people, participate in residencies or other forms of temporary work commitments, like working as a guest lecturer in a study program. The temporal limits of project work sentence you to keep yourself busy with more and more temporary work, usually spread out geographically, so maintaining the everyday becomes challenging as well as maintaining a continuous artistic practice that is not ruptured or over-determined by the project form, for which artistic practice always has to promote itself as something new. In most German funding applications, the artist has to assure that the project has not yet started. Rather than emphasising that one has been continuously developing a method, an aesthetic, an idea, a practice-, the artist (or cultural worker) has to frame their proposal as original even within their own career. The emphasis on "innovation" within the creative economies follows a similar logic.

Projective temporality makes centring care a challenge. In regards to artistic work, it not only makes it hard to sustain a continuous practice, it also becomes a strenuous effort to sustain an artistic team over a longer period of time as projective temporality produces highly individualised schedules. Committing to care responsibilities for friends, family, children or animals also becomes an almost impossible task that might even endanger careers. The constant precarity of the future also challenges the mental health situations of many actors in the field, producing anxiety and depression while work schedules make organising regular support systems such as therapy sessions difficult. This precarity also intensifies the conditions of inequality in the arts as it advantages those who can afford to not know what their income will be in the coming months.

During this research for CIRCE, I also reflected on the shifts of projective temporality in the performing arts during the Covid-19 pandemic. From mid-2020 to mid-2023, and this is specific to Germany, a lot of funding became available in the independent performing arts that supported continuous forms of artistic practices, research funding, process funding, funding for collective reflection processes, etc. While there were still exclusionary mechanisms regarding eligibility for this funding, there was less competition between the eligible artists as

the number of stipends exceeded the usual scope of funding. Most artists that I talked to had a bigger and more stable income in these years than they did before and do now. This time provided a glimpse of what it could feel like to work in the performing arts in continuous formats while having a guaranteed basic income. At the same time, it also put into perspective that temporary workers outside of the art world, i.e. actually working in the care sector where work was deemed "systemrelevant," did not have the same political lobby to improve their working conditions. While care workers were the ones exposed to potential infection day by day, artists were finally paid decently to stay at home and often, to think about "care."

Still, in this time of cancelled shows, but with somewhat stable funds and care infrastructures proving to be insufficient and volatile, a space seemed to open up in which temporalities of making art could be re-imagined. In Berlin it seemed that during this time, self-organised and community-oriented art spaces gained some traction again. During the fellowship I participated in an Artist Lab[3] on social choreographies hosted by the PSR collective at Heizhaus, Uferstudios in Wedding – one of those artist-run spaces. Among the participants was a member of Social Pleasure Center (SPC), an initiative of artists organising gatherings for somatic healing and community events in a former Casino in Berlin-Neukölln. In one of our conversations, she called SPC her *master piece* – a strategic appropriation of that term for an artistic practice that does not produce a piece but a social process. In the pandemic, the three founding members of SPC used some of the pandemic funding they received for their individual artistic research processes to pay the rent for the Casino and host gatherings. It took two years of continuously facilitating SPC until it reached a level of continuity with which it could actually establish itself as an infrastructure of care for those participating. Here, following Berlant (2016), I would understand an infrastructure as something that is shaping the movements and patterns of social form. The activities are mostly donation-based and strongly rooted in what SPC calls somatic activism.

In the context of contemporary dance and performance, when care rhetoric is on the rise, it is often connected to practices of embodiment and somatics. Here, the promise of care is projected onto the body as a site of relationality that exceeds the cogito. It is interesting to see that at this point, somatic practices have become an established part of many dance training and education programs. In a way, they can be understood as a counter-movement to the disciplining of the classically trained dancer's body, which pursues its virtuosity by surrendering to technique to achieve a specific outer form. There are countless somatic methods, many of which, such as Feldenkrais, Alexander technique or

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[3] The so-called Artist Labs were formats of a funding program from the federal fund for performing arts in Germany, Fonds Darstellende Künste, supported by the extra funding provided by the federal government for the arts in the pandemic (Neustart Kultur). Artists were invited to create a workshop setting among peers to reflect on the effects of the pandemic on their work.

Body Mind Centering, have been developed as healing techniques, i.e. to help the body to move without pain after injury or to strengthen the autonomous nervous system. What these methods share is the conviction that movement should not orient itself towards the outer shape it wants to achieve but should start from within the individual body. The focus on somatics in dance and performance has contributed to a practice-oriented choreography that often produces slow and organic movements, revolving around qualities which might be felt from the inside, when practising it, but not necessarily perceptible to an audience. Part of my discomfort with care aesthetic and rhetoric is indeed related to experiencing countless projects over the last years that have seemed to be content with these developing highly individualised somatic methods, inviting an audience to perceive or participate in them and charging this with emancipatory rhetoric around care. To make this more imaginable for a reader that does not regularly participate in dance performances in the independent scene, I want to briefly share the following account of a performance I participated in some years ago and that has, in a way, initiated my interest on engaging critically with care: Here, we, as an audience, were invited to lie down and to imagine ourselves in a state of decay. Somatic scores asked us to sense where our different body parts touched the floor and to imagine decomposing into it. In a soft-spoken performative voice, this invitation was then presented as a practice of imagination to common and decolonize soil and ground. In this scene, to me, there is a politically deceptive optimism that sensing your body in relation to the world around you is enough to open up a political imagination of more just material circumstances that produce different forms of relating.

Doctors specialising in Post Covid have been telling me to practise somatic exercises that restore the vegetative nervous system, so, like a contemporary dancer, I have been doing them every day. It helps to contain some of the symptoms and it helps to become more resilient in accepting being sick. But this resilience also tames the anger over the disastrous medical infrastructure and lack of research in treating this sickness – it can also temporarily give me the false security of needing them less. In their essay on infrastructures, Berlant (2016: 393f.) writes:

> "All one can say is, first, that an infrastructure is defined by use and movement; second, that resilience and repair don't necessarily neutralize the problem that generated the need for them, but might reproduce them."

This is to say that one important part of the analysis of my project is to show that the desire for care and practices of healing, resilience and repair is closely connected to the constant glitching of the infrastructures of care within the precarious temporalities of the organisation of work and life in the field. This desire and the practices it produces have a tendency to stabilise the status quo as long as they do not provide new patterns of relating to be used and transformed. The Social Pleasure Center is one example of how artistic practice radically

turned away from the project form and temporality to institute a social infrastructure collectivising artistic healing methods that in other contexts can be highly individualising. At the moment, however, the artist space hosting SPC is trying to secure itself while facing an increase in rent. Sustaining infrastructures of care is also strongly connected to the need of inventing alternative economies or hacking existing ones (like re-directed individual funding to community projects).

But of course, artistic shifts towards temporalities of care do not exclusively take place where artistic practices start providing social infrastructures. They can also unfold on stage, within the limited time of a show. One scene that accompanied my research throughout the process is the final scene in "Thank You Very Much" by Claire Cunningham. In this glamorous and tender piece, the performers reenact and share what they have learned in training with Elvis Presley tribute artists. In the final scene, Claire Cunningham sings "Love Me Tender" while walking across the stage and along the audience, which is partly seated at round bar tables on the sides of the stage. As she is using crutches, in order to sing into a mic while walking, she needs assistance. Due to the pandemic and the changing contact regulations, there are several versions of this scene. In one version, the spectators are asked to pass the mic along synchronising with the pace of Claire's movement. In order for them to enjoy the scene, they have to assist in making it happen – a training in relationality. In another version that does not involve haptic audience involvement, it is the other Elvis performers on stage who carry the mic for Claire alternately. As they all move with different disabilities, this scene turns into a beautiful choreography of assistance, challenging dichotomies of dependency and autonomy. The temporal alignment of the singing voice and the assisted movement create an aesthetic experience of time that characterises the whole show: In this piece, every action takes the time it needs. "Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds," this is how the feminist theorist Alison Kafer (2013) describes the concept of crip time. I think the concept of bending the clock is very useful in thinking about the temporalities of care. Care is not necessarily about slowing down but about bending time to meet the needs (of an action, a body, a relation…). Shaping and making time are really at the heart of performance-making. Here, a political imagination of how to bend time towards sustainable forms of relating can be sown. But political imagination of care can only happen within art when it is not approached with an aesthetics and rhetoric that presuppose what care looks, feels and sounds like.

Linking back to CIRCE: Never trust the funding guideline

While the crises in the world are piling up and impinging upon each other, we see a turn towards care, resilience and repair – not only in the performing arts but more broadly in the cultural sector and economies. I hope what my project can offer here is a discursive invitation to look closely: Is this interpellation of care or project of repair simply offering tools to make an unbearable situation more bearable and therefore stabilising it? Or is it breaking open our political imagination for social relations to unfold differently? Is it maybe even creating an infrastructure that allows for this – even on a small scale?

On a bigger scale, I think, it is also crucial for us as actors in the cultural sector in the EU to be critical observers of how the practices we engage in can act as a form of care for a democratic self-conception of European nation states, one that they are not actually living up to. Within CIRCE, we had the chance to engage with a range of meaningful projects that react to the crises of social reproduction, that offer solutions for ecological transformation, that stand in for diverse and pluralist societies and political visions for social relations beyond exploitation and extraction. But receiving governmental funding as cultural and artistic innovation projects for this work is a double-edged sword. Oftentimes, we are repairing the infrastructural glitches, without being granted the access to transform the infrastructures themselves. We often reassure the capitalist-democratic state, which is our funding body, of its plurality and democratic capacity within the cultural sphere, so the Ministries of Economy, Foreign and Internal Affairs can implement policies which are at odds with precisely this democratic capacity. In this way, debates on decolonization, socio-economic inequalities, accessibility and ecological justice can be tamed on state-institutional levels while they roam through the feuilletons. This is not a call for disengaging from such work, but for staying with this problem.

Projective temporality produces precarity – even though, whether this precarity actually makes our lives precarious strongly depends on individual class backgrounds and socially determined material support systems that we can or can not fall back on to. As has been thoroughly discussed within political theory, the precarisation of social security also acts as a form of governance (cf. Lorey 2015). That this holds very true also in relation to the arts, has become extremely palpable in Germany in the past months. We have seen funding being suspended, exhibitions, shows and conferences cancelled over political disagreement. With authoritarianism on the rise, the project form based on terminable funding reveals itself to be keeping the infrastructures of care that we build within the arts dangerously volatile. In Germany, the performing arts are predominantly state-funded, lacking alternative economies or funding through private foundations (as it is more usual i.e. in the United States). While it is a defendable democratic value that art and especially theatre, as a place of assembly, are

public goods and should therefore be financed publicly, the centralisation of funding infrastructures produces a material dependency on the side of art institutions, artists and other actors in the field that can impede on their capacity for political dissent – a capacity that needs to be trained, protected and fought for.

So, if I ask myself, if any form of policy recommendation does result from my research, it could only take the form of an appeal to myself that might be useful for other actors in the cultural sector. Please do not read them as primarily antagonistic, but as a training for the capacity of political dissent that is vital to a democratic, publicly funded and caring arts sphere:

Never trust the funding guideline. Stay aware and critical towards the official requirements – and those between the lines – that funding comes with. Reflect on the productive and potentially difficult aspects of complicity of your practice when working in state funded structures. Demand art funding that breaks with the project form in favour of funding structures that allow for temporalities oriented towards the needs of the work you want to do and the relations the work should enable. Imagine and create materially and socially resilient infrastructures with alternative economies, a place, a pattern, a movement in which your work can be continuously sustained and evolve.

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