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Introduction: Critical Friends and the Choreographies of Care

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Care is in Trouble

 "Care" has been defined by feminist thinkers as "a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible."[1] This concept of care has been widely deployed to critique how capitalist societies devalue and erase the mundane emotional and physical labour necessary for living the "good life.'[2] It is argued that practices of care such as child-rearing, eldercare, housekeeping, schooling, nursing and community-building are essential for sustaining a thriving society, yet are poorly remunerated and often delegated to women and persons of color.[3] Joan Tronto contends that the "questions that have traditionally informed the lives of women, and servants, slaves, and workers" have not been considered seriously in Western philosophy and political theory.[4] She has therefore advanced a moral and political theory of care that incorporates "as part of our definition of a good society, the values of caring – attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion, meeting others' needs – traditionally associated with women and traditionally excluded from public consideration."[5]

This enduring feminist commitment to "care" has been taken up by scholars of Science and Technology Studies (STS). Their work attends to what Maria Puig de la Bellacasa describes as the "fragile" and "neglected things" in technoscience.[6] Studies of care

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[1] Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 103.

[2] See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Massachussetts: Harvard University Press, 1982); Hilary Graham, "The Concept of Caring in Feminist Research: The Case of Domestic Service:," *Sociology* 25, no. 1 (February 1991): 61–78; Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, "Towards a Feminist Theory of Caring," in *Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives*, ed. Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1990).

[3] Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," *New Left Review* 100, July August (2016): 99–117.

[4] Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 3.

[5] Tronto, 2–3.

[6] "Matters of Care in Technoscience: Assembling Neglected Things," *Social Studies of Science* 41, no. 1 (2011): 85–106.

in homes, clinics and farms have foregrounded the small acts of "tinkering" that individuals perform to continuously adapt technologies to their situations, while adapting such situations back to their technologies.[7] Other studies of care highlight wider power structures in the design, production and use of science and technology, asking "what kinds of social relations are assumed to be desirable in these scenarios, whose interests are represented, and whose labours are erased."[8] STS researchers have also taken a more reflexive stance, examining how their own routine practices of researching and writing might strengthen certain technoscientific worlds at the expense of others.[9] This concern with "care-full" academic practice has led to new analytic approaches and experimental forms of writing and visual communication, all aimed at capturing the affective, embodied and material webs of practice that constitute care in technoscience.[10]

The turbulence of the contemporary moment has led to a surge in the number of calls for "care" across the humanities and social sciences, as well as in popular and political discourse. While this momentum could be expected to help subvert and resist the oppressive formations brought about through science and technology, Duclos and Criado have made a compelling argument to the contrary. They claim that care may be losing its political potency due to its conflation with affection and positive attachment, serving instead as "a placeholder for a shared desire for comfort and protection" which is all too easily coopted by reactionary politics.[11] The authors have urged researchers to devote more attention to methodologies that support Murphy's call for the "vexation of care", in order to foreground how "positive feelings, sympathy, and other forms of attachment can work with and through the grain of hegemonic structures, rather than against them."[12] Such methodologies in Critical Care studies are better attuned to the ambivalent, contextual and relational aspects of care in

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[7] Annemarie Mol, Ingunn Moser, and Jeannette Pols, eds., *Care in Practice: On Tinkering in Clinics, Homes and Farms* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript-Verlag, 2010).

[8] Lucy Suchman, *Human-Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions*, 2 edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 224.

[9] Martha Kenney, "Counting, Accounting, and Accountability: Helen Verran's Relational Empiricism," *Social Studies of Science*, 45, no. 5 (2015): 749-771.

[10] Vicky Singleton and Steve Mee, "Critical Compassion: Affect, Discretion and Policy–Care Relations," *The Sociological Review* 65, no. 2_suppl (2017): 130–49; Martha Kenney, "Fables of Response-Ability: Feminist Science Studies as Didactic Literature," *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1–39; Laura Watts, *Energy at the End of the World: An Orkney Islands Saga*, Infrastructures (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2018).

[11] "Care in Trouble: Ecologies of Support from Below and Beyond," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2020), 153-154.

[12] Michelle Murphy, "Unsettling Care: Troubling Transnational Itineraries of Care in Feminist Health Practices," *Social Studies of Science* 45, no. 5 (2015): 719.

technoscience,[13] and can thereby generate scholarship that "stays with the trouble."[14]

Thinking Critically with Care

Aligned with this call to reanimate the ethico-political commitments of feminist critical thinking, our Collection will revisit what it means for feminist scholars to "think critically with care". How do feminist scholars conduct critical studies about care practices? How are such methods "care-full"? How might this strand of scholarship "relate" with wider constellations of critical research traditions across the academy? To explore these questions, we present three reflexive, methodological papers which draw upon our encounters and conversations within this Stream and across the 2019 London Conference of Critical Thought. Each of these contributions demonstrate how care is deployed as a critical analytic, and how the author balances her interrogation *about care* practices, with a commitment *to care* about the human and non-human actors, concepts and relations that she studies. We wish to highlight here three key dimensions of these papers: (1) their attention to lived experience; (2) their fleeting and shifting objects of study; and (3) their reflexive methodological concern with the affective and embodied subjectivities of researchers.

Lived Experience

Gathered together at the closing of the 2019 London Conference in Critical Thought, the authors of this collection discussed how our Stream was heavily empirical in comparison with the rest of the Conference presentations. We noted how most presenters in our group had looked to fine-grained ethnographic data to develop their critical research on care practices. As Denzin describes, ethnography aims to "capture the voices of lived experience…details, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another."[15] It is a methodological approach for engaging with "empirical social worlds" which are understood as multi-sited, embodied, affective, sensual and material.[16]

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[13] Aryn Martin, Natasha Myers, and Ana Viseu, "The Politics of Care in Technoscience," *Social Studies of Science* 45, no. 5 (2015): 625–41.

[14] Donna Haraway, "When Species Meet: Staying with the Trouble," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28, no. 1 (2010): 53–55.

[15] "The Art and Politics of Interpretation," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994), 83.

[16] See Sarah Pink et al., *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (London: SAGE, 2015); Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011); George E. Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (1995): 95–117.

This attunement to such complex and messy worlds is illustrated in the first contribution of the Collection, where Lisa Lindén recounts the lived experiences of gynaecological cancer patients and their families, and how such experiences matter for their involvement in patient activist practices. The second paper by Andrea Núñez Casal documents intimate entanglements of patient, microbe, physician, and researcher in microbiome science, and Keely Macarow's contribution is similarly attentive to the rhythms of everyday life within eldercare residences. It is through such fine-grained ethnographic case studies that exclusions, ambivalences, and injustices are rendered visible. Rather than "a moral value added to the thinking of things,"[17] these papers aim to avoid abstractions about marginalization and justice, and instead perform their critical emancipatory work through ethnographic engagements with the empirical world.[18]

Fleeting and Shifting Research Objects

Thinking critically with care does not end with the foregrounding of marginalized lived experiences, but extends into investigations of how wider "ecologies of practices" enact such exclusions. As Duclos and Criado describe, this approach to critique can generate dynamic "cartographies of the many intersections and frictions between the enveloping and the diverging, the protecting and the containing, the enduring and the engendering, as they play out in care practices".[19] A second theme emerging from the discussions was the methodological attention to movement and change, and to the *choreographies* that were performed and reified by these feminist scholars as they worked to follow shifting and fleeting objects of study.

In the first contribution, Lindén refers to "choreographies of affect" in researcher practices[20] when describing how she "zoomed in and out", altering her scale of analysis to "hold on to differences". The new "feminist para-ethnography" proposed in the second paper by Núñez Casal can also be read as a choreography of the author's own shifting subjectivities as a woman, patient, microbiologist, cultural theorist and mother. In the third contribution, Macarow looks to the literature in performance and dance studies to define choreography as "the organisation of movement through time and space" as well as the written inscription of

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[17] Puig de la Bellacasa, "Matters of Care in Technoscience," 86.

[18] See also, John Law and Vicky Singleton, "ANT and Politics: Working in and on the World," *Qualitative Sociology* 36, no. 4 (2013): 485–502.

[19] Duclos and Criado, "Care in Trouble," 3.

[20] Anne Kerr and Lisa Garforth, "Affective Practices, Care and Bioscience: A Study of Two Laboratories," *The Sociological Review* 64, no. 1 (2016): 3–20.

that movement. Her exploration of the choreography of care opens up possibilities for connecting the humanities to social science research through the concept of "performance",[21] and points to the non-representational forms of ethnographic writing championed by anthropologists who "assume that academic and literary genres interpenetrate and that the writing of cultural descriptions is properly experimental and ethical."[22] In all three papers of this Collection, choreographies of care were adopted by the researchers to capture ambivalences and complexities as well as circulating practices of power and domination.[23]

Embodied and Affective Researchers

An ethnographic engagement with the marginalized - in the spaces between life and death - draws feminist scholars of care into embodied and affective relations with their study participants. All three contributors to this Collection make those accountabilities and responsibilities explicit in their research and writing, and reflect upon the authors' positionalities and the politics of their critical research methods. Lindén asserts that it is precisely in the careful manner that she choreographs her analysis, in the way she deliberately shifts her mode of attention, that she expresses and enacts her ethico-political commitments to the worlds of gynaecological cancer. Macarow pushes these embodied and affective relationalities a step further. She reflects on how "signs and failings of our own bodies" might converge in solidarity with our fragile objects of study, via sensual research methods emphasizing "the haptic, sensory, emotional and physical". This form of solidarity resonates with Núñez Casal's account of how decolonialised "critical friendships"[24] are formed between embodied experiences and the sciences, through the process of 'becoming available' described by Vinciane Despret - whereby "the experimenter, far from keeping himself in the background, involves himself: he involves his body, he involves his knowledge, his responsibility and his future."[25]

Critical Friends and the Choreographies of Care

This Collection aims to show how, in the words of Puig de la Bellacasa, thinking critically with care is an "ethically and politically charged practice" and a "material vital doing" which

[21] Nigel Thrift, "Performance and ….," *Environment and Planning A* 35, no. 11 (2003): 2019–2024.
[22] James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1986), 2.
[23] Haraway, "When Species Meet."
[24] Nikolas Rose, "The Human Sciences in a Biological Age," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 1 (2013): 3–34.
[25] "The Body We Care for: Figures of Anthropo-Zoo-Genesis," *Body & Society* 10, no. 2–3 (2004): 130.

involves tracing empirically how socio-material assemblages gather around "fragile, cherished things"[26]. It is grounded in empirical settings where caring relations are practiced. It requires complex choreography to analyze fleeting and shifting registers of care, and to negotiate the embodied and affective interdependencies between researchers and the "researched". Through such choreographies of care, feminist scholars can also generate "critical friendships" that connect together lived experience, the social and natural sciences, and the humanities.

The event organizers have described how The London Conference in Critical Thought grew from an initial "conversation among friends" who all wished to "embrace emergent thought" in an interdisciplinary community of critical scholars.[27] In this closing section, we would therefore like to reflect briefly on how we, as feminist scholars "thinking critically with care", might "become available" for "critical friendships" with other traditions of critical thought. That is to say, we wish to close with a vision of how we might "involve" ourselves in the manner described above by Despret: involve our bodies, our knowledges, our responsibilities and our futures, in the making of a larger, collective apparatus for thinking about power, emancipation, and freedom. How might we connect the research in our Collection with other strands of critical thought presented at the 2019 Conference?

To approach these questions, we look to Amy Allen's discussion of utopia, normativity, subjection and the decolonization of critical theory.[28] She argues that post-structural strands of feminist scholarship (such as the ones described in this Collection) can enrich our understanding of emancipation by generating a:

> precise and specific analysis of domination that illuminates the intersecting and overlapping structures of gender, sexuality, and race with those of class, culture, and postcolonial imperialism, theorized in a transnational frame.[29]

Allen then asserts that the abstract concepts of liberation that are derived from the normative foundations of critical theory can in turn give meaning and hope to these empirical analyses of power, by interpreting "actual lived crises and protests in the light of an anticipated future."[30] While preparing this Collection, we, as feminist scholars of care, have collectively experienced catastrophic fires in Australia, national strikes for UK academics, the unfolding

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[26] Puig de la Bellacasa, "Matters of Care in Technoscience," 90.
[27] "LCCT – LondonCritical," accessed July 1, 2020, http://londoncritical.org/about-the-lcct.
[28] "Emancipation without Utopia: Subjection, Modernity, and the Normative Claims of Feminist Critical Theory," *Hypatia* 30, no. 3 (2015): 513–29.
[29] Allen, 514.
[30] Benhabib, 1986, as cited in Allen, 514.

of a global pandemic and the birth of a baby boy. "Making ourselves available" through such affective and embodied experiences, we wish to advocate vigorously for new critical friendships across academia which might care-fully choreograph our "explanatory-diagnostics" of power with the alternative, more "anticipatory-utopian" moments in critical thought.