

Take Care

PRELIMINARY PROJECT STATEMENT¹

Because care is not a domestic question but rather a public matter and generator of conflict.

- Precarias a la Deriva

Take Care

Curated by Letters & Handshakes

Blackwood Gallery

September 2017–March 2018

take care: to tend to; to sustain; to express empathy; to caution against risks; to appropriate or extract, with no or little compensation, a human capacity perceived as an infinitely replenishable gift; to politicize, reclaim, organize, or revalorize care...

Take Care is a curatorial project involving over 100 artists, activists, curators, and researchers critically engaging the “crisis of care.”² Encompassing a five-month exhibition series, performances, workshops, and a publication program, *Take Care* is conceived as a follow-up to a 2016 group exhibition, initiated by Letters & Handshakes, for the Blackwood Gallery. That exhibition, *I stood before the source*, featured artists confronting the aesthetic problem of representing contemporary capitalism, and concluded with this impulse: to imagine a “shift from the metrics of accumulation to the requirements of care as an ordering principle of social relations.”³

Capitalism’s current crisis of care is theorized by Nancy Fraser as an outcome of an intensifying contradiction between, on one side, capitalism’s dependence for its perpetuation on the performance of manifold caring activities, and, on the other side, the evident strain on and neglect of caring capacities and the people who provide care, where care is broadly understood as the work of tending, paid or unpaid, to social bonds.⁴ Among the myriad manifestations of care crisis is widespread precarious work in the “global care chain,”⁵ in which the workforce is segmented by class, gender, race, status, and geography; the attack on established institutions of social support and models of collective security by forces of dispossession under

settler colonialism and neo-liberalism; insufficient state funding to adequately satisfy mounting needs for healthcare, eldercare, and childcare, with the void filled by the commodification of care “services” to which access is stratified by income power; a squeeze on the time and attention available for care in the context of stagnating wages, rising living costs, escalating productivity demands, and perpetual digital connectivity; the undervaluing of care, both culturally and monetarily, through well-worn gendered narratives in which care is framed as a “labour of love”; and, beyond the realm of social reproduction specifically, the sustained disregard for the nonhuman, a policy of carelessness whose consequences are climate change, species extinction, and water toxicity.

Anatomizing the crisis of care and its systemic underpinnings, *Take Care* pushes back against both the low cultural visibility of care work and the prevailing extractivist attitude toward care, which, as Fraser puts it, treats care, like nature, as a free, infinite resource—a logic to which this project’s title signals.⁶ *Take Care* joins ongoing collective efforts⁷ to “[enhance] the status of care,” as Isabell Lorey⁸ describes an aim of activist-researchers *Precarias a la Deriva*. Rather than take care for granted, we embark on this project as a transdisciplinary inquiry into care, setting out to explore care’s heterogeneous and contested meanings, practices, and sites, as well as the political, economic, and technological forces currently shaping care. Although we strive to elevate care, the intention is not to position care as cure or panacea or even as benign: care involves relations of power in which concern and control, empathy and exhaustion, dependence and interdependence, the systemic and the intimate, responsibility and obligation are entangled.

The exhibition, workshops, and publishing program comprising *Take Care* are organized around five themes, or circuits⁹ of care. Recalling the etymology of curate (*curare*: “to take care of”), **Labour of Curation** views cultures of work and interaction in art institutions through a care lens, and reflects on art’s implication in, rather than detached observation of, the crisis of care. Traversing care as a social gesture, a job, and a political site, **Care Work** presents counter-narratives of the provision of care, care workers’ struggles, and caring labour’s transformation through marketization, migration, and technology. **Infrastructures and Aesthetics of Mutual Aid** turns to support structures and collaborative practices beyond institutional spaces that are conventionally associated with care, such as hospitals and long-term residential care facilities, to consider care as a disposition, a system of reciprocity, a radical act, and an elusive goal within communities¹⁰ of art and activism alert to the challenge of sustainability. **Stewardship** decentres the human as the privileged recipient or scene of care, and forefronts “epistemically-diverse”¹¹ conceptions and practices of care that centre upon relationships to land and nonhumans. And **Collective Welfare** addresses the “welfare state” as the contested dominant public channel of differentially distributed care and evaluates design, whether of policy or of places, as integral to “centring care”¹² in social relations.

Circling this inquiry, then, are various questions: What meanings are assigned to care, and by whom? Who speaks for care? What ways of knowing, representing, or performing care are erased or marginalized by dominant medical or public health framings of care? Who cares, and under what conditions? How are the perceptions of care and the conditions of care work mutually reinforcing? Where are the spaces of learning to care? What is care’s fate under neoliberal capitalism when competition and individual responsibility are

governing ideals? How is the attentiveness necessary to care affected by the demands of contemporary work and always-on media life? How is care enacted or neglected in the affective economies of art and activism? What is the relationship between care and resilience in communities of dissent? What forms and strategies of collective organization are emerging from care work? What would it mean for the exercise of care to be self-determined? What wider political-economic and social transformations are begged by calls to democratize the burden of care and establish a “care-centered economy”¹³? How does, and how might, the category of care function politically? Could an expansive conception of care open common discursive ground toward linking multiple struggles in the domain of social reproduction? And finally, how can we work against the tendency of “curatorial and institutional initiatives that perform radicalism on a discursive or representational level, without addressing or transforming the political conditions under which they operate”?¹⁴

It is within this final question that the organizing strategies for the exhibition series emerge. *Take Care* strives to take on the challenges posed by the program and will attempt to:

- rethink affective dimensions of (curatorial) labour
- decentre individual authorship
- profile radical communities of care
- reallocate cultural and institutional resources
- cut through apathy and empathy
- invite “multiplicity and complication”¹⁵
- practice collective resiliency
- respect existing initiatives and historical precedents
- facilitate connective bonds
- explore care as a concept for catalyzing recomposition, or catalyzing linkages across conflicts and contexts

In short, this is a connective project.

The dates for the exhibition series are:

Labour of Curation

September 11–30, 2017

Care Work

October 16–November 4, 2017

Infrastructures and

Aesthetics of Mutual Aid

November 20–December 9, 2017

Stewardship

January 8–27, 2018

Collective Welfare

February 12–March 10, 2018

The project will launch in July 2017 with the first issue of *The Blackwood*, a serial broadsheet publication of the Blackwood Gallery designed to circulate research and support creative inquiry in advance of an exhibition program. A distributed conference in the form of intermittent workshops will be featured throughout the exhibition series, which will enable collective conversations within and across the five circuits of care. A selection of presentations and work from the exhibition series will be featured in an edited book to be published in 2019.

Curators

Take Care is curated by Letters & Handshakes. A collaboration of Greig de Peuter (Department of Communication Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University) and Christine Shaw (Blackwood Gallery and Department of Visual Studies, University of Toronto Mississauga), Letters & Handshakes' past projects include the exhibitions *I stood before the source* (2016) and *Precarious: Carole Condé + Karl Beveridge* (2014), the forum *Fighting Foreclosed Futures: The Politics of Student Debt* (2012), and the symposium and micropublication *Surplus³: Labour and the Digital* (2015/16).

- 1 This is an iterative document, which we anticipate will be modified as the process of producing *Take Care* unfolds; we welcome comments and conversations to inform subsequent versions.
- 2 On the crisis of care, see, for example, Precarias a la Deriva, "A Very Careful Strike: Four Hypotheses" (2005), trans. by Franco Ingrassia and Nate Holdren: http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/antigua_casa/precarias/cuidados/verycarefulstrike.htm. We are indebted to Precarias a la Deriva's fourfold elaboration of care as encompassing the elements of "affective virtuosity", "interdependence", "transversality", and "everydayness". Also on the crisis of care, see Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care", *New Left Review* 100 (2016): 99-117, and "Capitalism's Crisis of Care: A Conversation with Nancy Fraser", *Dissent* Fall (2016): 30-37; Emma Dowling, "Love's Labour's Cost: The Political Economy of Intimacy", Verso blog, 13 February, 2016: <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2499-love-s-labour-s-cost-the-political-economy-of-intimacy>; "Healing Justice", MICE 02 (Fall 2016), ed. Radiodress in consultation with Syrus Marcus Ware, <http://micemagazine.ca/issue-two>.
- 3 Letters & Handshakes (2016) "*I stood before the source.*" In *I stood before the source*, pg. 32. (C.f. Precarias a la Deriva, "A Very Careful Strike: Four Hypotheses".)
- 4 Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care".
- 5 Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value", in *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, ed. Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 130-146.
- 6 "In capitalist societies, the capacities available for social reproduction are accorded no monetized value. They are taken for granted, treated as free, and infinitely available as 'gifts', which require no attention or replenishment.
- It's assumed that there will always be sufficient energies to sustain social connections on which economic production, and society more generally, depend. This is very similar to the way that nature is treated in capitalist societies, as an infinite reservoir from which we can take as much as we want and into which we can dump any amount of waste. In fact, neither nature nor social reproduction are infinite; both of them can be stretched to the breaking point" (Fraser, "Capitalism's Crisis of Care," 2016: 91).
- 7 Here we note previous exhibitions such as *Skills Exchange: Urban Transformation and the Politics of Care* (2007-2012, Serpentine, London), *Grand Domestic Revolution* (2009-2012, Casco, Utrecht), *Care Crisis* (2012, Futura, Prague), *Episode 7: We Can't Live Without Our Lives* (2015, Tramway, Glasgow), and *Universal Hospitality* (2016); and organizations such as Caring Across Generations, Service Employees International Union, Domestic Workers United, Care Revolution Network, and many more.
- 8 Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 2015: 91.
- 9 The terminology of "circuits" is favoured in part because it underscores interdependence; the possibility that "circuits" connotes a technological rationality is intentional, given emerging experiments in, for example, the automation of care work (e.g. robot care), and also acknowledges the heightened digital mediation of care generally.
- 10 Self-care, in particular, courses through the exhibition circuitry. On the politics of self-care, especially as mobilized by Audre Lorde, see, for example, Sara Ahmed, "Selfcare as Warfare", *feministkilljoys* (August 25, 2014): <https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/>; Billy-Ray Belcourt, *Masturbatory Ethics, Anarchic Objects: Notes on Decolonial Love*, unpublished thesis (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2016); Sarah Mirk and Evette Dion, "Audre Lorde Thought of Self-Care as an Act of Political Warfare", *Bitch Media* (February 18, 2016): <https://bitchmedia.org/article/audre-lorde-thought-self-care-act-political-warfare>.
- 11 Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin, "Reassembling the Natural", <http://reassemblingnature.org/verschwindende-vermaechtnisse/>. On forms of knowing and ways of being in relation to humans, nonhumans, communities, and territories that exceed colonial frameworks, see, for example, Deborah Bird Rose, "Anthropocene Noir", *Arena Journal* 41/42 (2013): 206-219; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation", *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 1-25; David Garneau, "Migration as Territory: Performing Domain with a Non-Colonial Aesthetic Attitude", in *VOZ-À-VOZ/VOICE-À-VOICE*, eds. Maria Alejandrina Coates and Julieta Maria, e-fagia (September 18, 2015): [, eds. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin \(London: Open Humanities Press, 2015\), 241-254; Audre Simpson cited in Tarah Hogue, "#callresponse", *Art21 Magazine* \(December 26, 2016\): <http://magazine.art21.org/2016/12/26/callresponse/#>.](http://www.vozavoz.ca/feature/david-garneau; Zoe Todd,)
- 12 Albert Banerjee and Pat Armstrong, "Centering Care: Explaining Regulatory Tensions in Residential Care for Older Persons", *Studies in Political Economy* 95 (Spring, 2015), 7-27.
- 13 Ina Praetorius, *The Care-Centered Economy: Rediscovering What Has Been Taken for Granted*, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Publication Series Economy + Social Issues, 16 (2015): https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/the_care-centered_economy.pdf.
- 14 Helena Reckitt, "Support Acts: Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction", in *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 5, no. 1 (2016), 25. Here, Reckitt draws on Marion von Osten and Andrea Phillips, among others.
- 15 Radiodress, "we begin with our bodies", *MICE* 02 (Fall, 2016): <http://micemagazine.ca/issue-two/we-begin-our-bodies-mice-issue-2>.



Blackwood Gallery

University of Toronto Mississauga
3359 Mississauga Road
Mississauga, ON L5L 1C6
905-828-3789
blackwoodgallery.ca

Gallery Hours

Monday–Friday: 12–5pm
Wednesday: 12–9pm
Saturday: 12–3pm

The gallery is FREE, open to the public, and barrier-free.