

Ambivalences of Care/Curare: Solidarity Networks and Curatorial Practices as a Form of Collective Resistance

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The paper seeks to redefine curatorial practices through the lens of care and solidarity, particularly in times of war. By examining the ongoing work of Ukrainian artists and curators, the authors aim to highlight how curating, as a practice of care, can serve as a vital tool for preserving cultural heritage, fostering community, and resisting geopolitical violence. By positioning curatorial care within the framework of solidarity, the contribution explores how curating can act as a form of collective resistance and survival. In this context, curating is no longer just about representing art but also about protecting and sustaining it in times of crisis. The feminist dimensions of this discussion further emphasize the need for curatorial practices that are attentive to the social, economic, and gendered contexts in which they operate.

Keywords: curatorial work as care work, preserving artworks, Ukrainian art, feminist curating, Asortymentna Kimnata.

“Care is the antidote to violence.”

Saidiya Hartman

“Curatorial action as mourning work and care for the future.”

Elke Krasny

Introduction

In recent years, it has often been emphasized that the etymology of the verb *curate* traces back to the Latin *curare* (to care for, take care of, administer, treat, look after).¹ Museum practices such as collecting, administering, caring, and mediating create relationships “in which names and things are linked.”² For the purposes of this paper, we will seek to activate the relationship-creating imperative inherent in the term *curare*. The English word *care*, which shares this root, underlines the caring relationships between people and things, people and systems, people and media, or between infrastructures and institutions. Against this background, our paper critically examines the various entanglements of *care/curare* in the context of curating and exhibiting. We explore the extent to which curatorial work has shifted towards a practice of care. Following the work of the feminist Marxist theorist Silvia Federici, we find it relevant to question the historically produced invisibility of care work.

The starting point of our reflections are the community-building practices of Ukrainian artists in the context of the Russian war of aggression—one of the ongoing crises of the present. The destruction of infrastructures, villages, and cities, along with the associated extermination, death, and displacement of the people and ecosystems remains omnipresent. Nevertheless, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not new. February 24, 2022, marked the beginning of the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, but not the beginning of Russia’s assault on Ukraine’s territorial integrity. In 2014, Russia annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea in the

1 Helena Reckitt, “Support Acts: Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction,” *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 5, no. 1 (2016): 7, https://doi.org/10.1386/jcs.5.1.6_1.

2 Sigrid Schade and Silke Wenk, “Strategien des ‚Zu-Sehen-Gebens‘: Geschlechterpositionen in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte,” in *Genus: Geschlechterforschung / Gender Studies in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften: Ein Handbuch*, ed. Hadumod von Bußmann and Renate Hof (Kröner, 1995), 146 (own translation).

Black Sea and provoked war in eastern Ukraine.³ By February 2022 alone, more than 14,000 people had died as a result of the Russian-led war in the Donbas. These attacks—carried out through invasion and violence—have continued since 2014 and escalated dramatically since February 2022. The destruction of social, cultural, and economic foundations of life is closely intertwined with war, which also affects art, artistic practices, and sites of artistic production.

Against this background, Ukrainian artists started (again) to build networks at the beginning of the 2022 invasion. They modified existing structures and/or created new ones that enabled artistic exchange and production despite the state of emergency—for example, when artists shifted their responsibilities from exhibiting artworks to securing the safety of fellow artists.⁴ Since 2014, Ukrainian artists have addressed the military conflicts and displacement within the country, forming networks and art spaces that they are now reactivating and developing further. The exhibition *Art and Life in Times of War* (June 17–August 13, 2023) at Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart highlighted these developments and took into account the ongoing processes of solidarity and networking in times of war and crisis. The initial networks that emerged in 2014 have been reactivated since the beginning of the current war of aggression. In response to the 2014 conflict, Alona Karavai, together with other artists, initiated the residency project *Asortymentna Kimnata* (translated: Sorting Room) in Ivano-Frankivsk, western Ukraine, as a place of retreat.

Since the beginning of the war, many (inter)national museums, art institutions and cultural initiatives have shown solidarity with—and alongside—the initiative of *Asortymentna Kimnata*. Funding programs for Ukrainian artists and/or exhibition spaces have been established to create opportunities for studio work and platforms for thematic exchange. For example, the aforementioned exhibition at the Württembergischer

3 On this topic and the context of the war, see Belinda Nüssel, “Russlands Krieg gegen die Ukraine,” *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, February 23, 2023, <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/518560/russlands-krieg-gegen-die-ukraine/>.

4 Various residency programs have been initiated in Ukraine in response to the current situation, and new methods have been implemented to address the war of aggression. For example, Darya Tsymbulyuk has used artistic research to investigate the history of plants in the context of Russia’s war against Ukraine, while Lesia Kulchynska employs forensic methods to explore the limits of witnessing and the role of art in networked warfare.

Kunstverein Stuttgart or the exhibition *6 ½ Weeks—Asortymentna Kimnata—What Is Depicted Here?* at Museum Folkwang (September 15, 2022 – October 30, 2022) presented works, projects, and networks by Ukrainian artists currently in Ukraine, living abroad, or working across multiple locations.

The Asortymentna Kimnata residency project, which has also been supported by curator and artist Lesia Khomenko since February 2022, not only creates spaces for exchange, but has also developed new strategies of care in the context of the war of aggression. According to Khomenko, the activist work of the collective behind the Asortymentna Kimnata residency project centers on the collection and preservation of artworks. However, collecting and preserving here does not mean preserving and maintaining institutional collections as national cultural assets. Rather, the practice of care associated with this work consists in rescuing and safeguarding artworks that have not yet been institutionalized. This includes works by artists who are not represented in museum and/or gallery collections. For example, the collective has established several storage bunkers at undisclosed locations to protect artworks by individual artists, project spaces, and galleries from destruction.

Asortymentna Kimnata was originally “founded to support the independent art scene and now we not only have to support it, but also protect it,” the collective stated in an interview.⁵ Against this backdrop, this form of care work in—or rather for—art enters the public sphere in the literal sense: caring for art is no longer rendered invisible but instead taken to the streets. Firstly, it receives heightened visibility through increased media attention (especially at the onset of the war); secondly, the tension inherent in curating as a practice of care expands to encompass the entire institution of art. Thirdly, a distinction emerges between nation-state and activist modes of care, which are becoming increasingly visible. According to our thesis, these practices can be understood as curatorial care work, as they make clear that curating does not need to be limited to the representation of intersubjective or interobjective relations but can also function as a practice of solidarity. Within this context, the museum’s mandate of “caring” and “preserving,” which has been critically negotiated from a post- and decolonial perspectives, is reframed as a survival strategy. Here, the “preservation” of cultural

5 Stuart Braun, “Wie die Ukraine versucht, Kunstwerke zu retten,” *DW*, March 17, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/de/wie-die-ukraine-versucht-kunstwerke-zu-retten/a-61164766> (own translation).

assets is not deconstructed, nor are colonial logics of power foregrounded, as is common in the context of world cultural museums in recent years. Rather, the first step is the literal “preservation” of artworks, alongside the development and adaptation of networks to create a solidarity-based space for artistic production.

In this article, we take a critical look at these different relations of care. Our contribution is divided into four parts: (1) economies of care, (2) economies of care work in the arts, (3) curating as care, and (4) concluding thoughts. To highlight the invisibilization and gendered dimension of care work, we will analyze practices of care in more detail, especially in relation to their social devaluation and the economic interests involved, drawing on Silvia Federici’s theories. This shift in perspective allows us to understand curating as a process of care, while also recognizing its entanglement with the neoliberal logic of project-based work, which we address in the final section. Here, the guiding questions are: How can differentiated practices of care from curatorial studies be translated into the current political situation and further developed? And does Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine shift the focus of care work—and if so, how?

Economies of Care

During the COVID pandemic, Silvia Federici’s work reemerged in public discourse around unpaid care work and gained renewed relevance: “I am surprised that people call me today to talk about things I wrote 20 or 30 years ago,”⁶ she remarked. This resurgence can be attributed to the pandemic, which brought care work back to the center of feminist interests, particularly in light of wage discrepancy between men and women and the high number of job losses suffered by women. Federici, who has been writing about these issues since the 1970s, consistently emphasizes the relevance and relationship between care work and capitalist enclosures and accumulations.⁷ For example, in a joint research project with the feminist

6 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Penguin Classics, 2022), 12.

7 Federici continues to develop her ideas on questions of care. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she gave numerous interviews elaborating on and updating her concept of care in response to the pandemic situation. In addition, her latest book *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (2018), which focuses on the role of the commons, also offers insights on questions of care and reproduction.

theorist Leopoldina Fortunati, Federici examined the role of women in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Their findings were first published in 1984 under the title *Il Grande Calibano*—a text that later gained international recognition when the English translation, *Caliban and the Witch*, appeared in 2004. Twenty years after its first publication, the book has been translated into seven languages.⁸ The title characters are drawn from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611): Caliban, the son of a witch who lives on an island, is forced into servitude by Prospero, the magician who rules the island and forces Caliban to work. Federici uses this narrative allegorically—reading Caliban as an image for the populations colonized under capitalism and, more broadly, for the proletarian body, which capitalist relations instrumentalize as a resource for labor power. The figure of the witch, Caliban's mother, represents the many women persecuted, burned, or hanged during the 16th and 17th centuries, accused of witchcraft by both church and state in the context of emerging capitalist societies.⁹

Federici argues that this violence against body and mind laid the groundwork for two fundamental principles of modern social organization: the development of labor power and the disposition of the self. In her historical analysis of the European witch hunts, she examines the gendered division of labor and its associated subject positions, concluding that the transition from feudalism to capitalism involved a reorganization of domestic work, family life, and gender relations—fundamentally transforming the relationship between production and reproduction.¹⁰ In her analysis, she shows how the enclosures of early capitalism displaced women from their professions (such as midwives or healers) by visibly reducing the commons and other communal places where reproductive labor had been shared and exchange took place. As a result, women were increasingly confined to domestic work and rendered socially invisible. Against this historical backdrop, Federici argues in *Caliban and the Witch* that care-based relationships—especially housework and social reproduction in all its forms—are inseparable from capitalism.

Federici's discussion invites us to reflect on the emergence and functioning of capitalist relations—an inquiry we take up below in the context of our central question: how can curating be understood as a practice of

8 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 12.

9 Ibid., 168.

10 Ibid., 9.

solidarity and care? Federici's main thesis, as outlined above, is that to understand the history of women in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, we need to analyze the changes capitalism brought to social reproduction—especially the reproduction of labor power. Her focus lies in examining how church and state actively controlled women's bodies through the systematic persecution of witches, and how this disciplining of gendered bodies produced a gendered division of labor. As Federici writes, "The witch hunts also served to establish a new patriarchal order under which women's bodies, their labor and their reproductive assets were placed under state control and transformed into economic resources."¹¹ According to Federici, over the centuries, women were increasingly pushed into the private and caregiving sphere. As a result, "housework, family life, child-rearing, sexuality, gender relations and the relationship between production and reproduction" were reorganized.¹² This historical process gave rise to the "feminization of poverty" and "housewifeization"—terms that remain relevant in contemporary debates about unpaid care work, especially during the COVID pandemic.¹³ The raises the questions: What do we understand by work? Which forms of work are structurally visible and remunerated, and which are rendered invisible and remain unpaid? For example, a recent Oxfam study estimates that care work, if compensated at minimum wage, would be worth 10.9 million dollars globally.¹⁴ Yet this work is absent from any gross domestic product in the world. It is well known that this situation has been denounced through both art and activism since the 1970s. And yet, the fact that care work, mostly performed by women, is not remunerated has not changed, even though it ensures the accumulation of capitalist surplus value. Without social reproduction, there can be no labor power; without labor power, no commodity production; and without commodities, no capital accumulation. Or to put it another way: social reproduction represents the indispensable link in the chain of capitalist value creation—one that remains both unpaid and invisible.

¹¹ Ibid., 213.

¹² Ibid., 9.

¹³ Brigitte Bargetz and Jana Günther, "Armut als Baustelle: intersektional feministische Interventionen. Einleitung," *Femina Politica – Zeitschrift für feministische Politikwissenschaft* 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3224/feminapolitica.v31i1.02>.

¹⁴ Jordan Kisner, "The Lockdown Showed How the Economy Exploits Women," *New York Times*, February 17, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/17/magazine/waged-housework.html>.

Economies of Care Work in the Arts

Criticism of care work practices also extends to institutional critique. As public discourse around care has evolved, a corresponding shift has taken place both in curatorial practice and in theory. This shift stems from a critique of the concept of the so-called “exhibition maker”—a term coined by Harald Szeemann, curator of Documenta 5, which frames the curator as someone who claims authorship over an exhibition.¹⁵ Accordingly, curators not only select artworks, documents, and everyday objects, arrange and exhibit them, but also develop thesis-driven concepts aimed at generating relevant discursive contexts of meaning. In addition, under the ongoing neo-liberalization of art institutions, curators also assume managerial roles, acting as networkers within the international art market. This practice of curating has not only been formalized and academized through a growing number of training and education programs but has also contributed to the differentiation of curatorial work that produces curatorial subjects with a claim to singular authorship.

In the competition for the few paid positions and topics suitable for discourse, curators are expected to develop a distinctive signature style—one that becomes associated with them as subjects. From the 2010s onwards, however, the idea and goal of the large-scale curator shaped by this logic has come under growing criticism. Thus, the format of the curator as the sole creator of meaning in exhibitions is now contested as it not only renders invisible the team involved in the exhibition’s preparation and follow-up but also obscures division of labor through which relationships between objects, people, places, and discourses are produced—often extending beyond the exhibition itself.¹⁶ First of all, this critique has shifted the focus away from the practice of collecting towards the act of assembling institutions, subjects, and objects. In this view, curating no longer appears as the work of a single individual, but ideally as a networked practice that collectively researches forms of coexistence. Secondly, from Walter Benjamin’s perspective of Marxist theory, curating must also be understood as work

15 Szeemann often staged himself as a kind of artist, thereby enhancing the visibility and prestige of his exhibitions. In his exhibitions, he assumed an auteur-like position, likening the curator to omniscient narrator in a novel. Cf. Katja Molis, *Kuratorische Subjekte: Praktiken Der Subjektivierung in der Aus- und Weiterbildung im Kunstbetrieb* (Transcript, 2019).

16 Beatrice von Bismarck, *Das Kuratorische* (Spector Books, 2021).

performed on the means of production themselves. In his 1934 lecture “The Author as Producer,” Benjamin reminds us that cultural work must always position itself within the general “relations of production”—if only because it is not just a matter of “working on the products,” “but always at the same time on the means of production.”¹⁷ This reflection remains relevant not only regarding the end of artistic autonomy but also for advancing an understanding of artistic practice that places itself in an active relationship to society. In this context, theorists such as Nora Sternfeld and Elke Krasny describe the shift from curatorial work to curatorial practice as an act of care. They argue that curating should be understood as a post-representative act—one that is both interventionist and solidaristic. This shift is also reflected in the new responsibilities assigned to curators. As theorist Sascia Bailer puts it, “it is no longer primarily a matter of caring for and preserving art objects, but of questioning the extent to which curating can function as a critical practice of caring for artistic and socio-political processes.”¹⁸

Such an approach not only rejects the paradigm of artistic autonomy, but also derives its genealogies from the participatory and collaborative art practices which, since the 1960s, have positioned themselves rather as “work on the community.”¹⁹ This orientation aligns with the concept of care as defined by political scientists Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, who reject the notion of the autonomous subject in favor of recognizing connectedness, which consists in the need for care of the planet and all species that inhabit it: “At the most general level, we propose to view care as a species activity that encompasses everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. This world includes our bodies, ourselves and our environment, all of which we try to weave into a complex, life-sustaining web.”²⁰

17 Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (Verso, 1998), 86.

18 Sascia Bailer, “How to Curate with Care?” *Lerchenfeld* 55 (2020): 17, https://sasciabailer.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/lerchenfeld_55_how-to-curate-with-care_sascia-bailer_2020.pdf (own translation).

19 Christian Kravagna, “Arbeit an der Gemeinschaft: Modelle partizipatorischer Praxis,” *Transversal*, January 1999, <https://transversal.at/transversal/1204/kravagna/de>.

20 Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality and Justice* (New York University Press, 2013), 15.

In contrast to the neoliberal paradigm of self-care, this model does not promote a more satisfied or happier self that is capitalized here, as the concept of self-care can be thought of as the antithesis of care and nurturing. The former is closely related to capitalist value-creation processes in highly individualized societies, where self-care is linked to individual self-worth and progress.²¹ Care as a collective practice, by contrast, finds little traction in the so-called industrialized countries of the global North and is often even actively opposed, precisely because it runs counter to the logic of capital accumulation, as seen, for example, in practices of commoning.²² Lind and Sternfeld also critique these types of self-care, which tend to transform economic capital into the capital of the optimized self. Their visions of curating as a form of care do not focus on individual subjects or objects, but rather on networks of relationships and the cultivation of community. Therefore, the emphasis lies in fostering low-hierarchy meeting spaces, enhancing the visibility of social connections, and expanding support networks, rather than creating spaces for representation.²³ Against this background, we argue that curating should be understood as a practice that intervenes in social structures and shows solidarity with existing political movements—such as feminist collectives.

The exhibition *Gastarbajteri*, curated by Arif Akkilic and Ljubomir Bratic at the Vienna Museum in Austria in 2002, serves as an example of how curating fosters forms of solidarity network-building. The exhibition explored the 1950s recruitment agreements for temporary labor migration to Austria, focusing on a post-Yugoslav perspective.²⁴ By highlighting the limited obligations toward migrant workers, *Gastarbajteri* was the first

21 “Over recent years the concept of ‘self-care’ has been mobilised by policy makers and governments in the deepening of neoliberal objectives to dismantle public welfare resources and shift responsibility for care onto individual citizens.” Cf. Lizzie Ward, “Caring for Ourselves? Self-Care and Neoliberalism,” in *Ethics of Care: Critical Advances in International Perspective*, ed. Marian Barnes et al. (Bristol University Press, 2015), 45–56.

22 Federici, *Re-Enchanting the World*, 23, 134.

23 Nora Sternfeld, “Dass etwas geschehen kann ... Postrepräsentatives Kuratieren,” in *Kritische Szenografie*, ed. Kai-Uwe Henken (Transcript, 2014).

24 These were bilateral treaties intended to regulate the temporary migration of labor between countries. However, the term only refers to the temporal aspect of the stay, while the host country’s obligations to migrants remain undefined. See Arif Akkilic and Ljubomir Bratic, “Für ein Archiv der Migration. Jetzt!” in *Sich mit Sammlungen anlegen*, ed. Martina Griesser-Stermscheg, Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja (De Gruyter, 2020), 174.

Austrian museum exhibition to include the perspective of migrant workers themselves. Akkilic and Bratic were surprised to find that, at the time, Austria lacked a collection of objects related to migration and that there were no contact persons within state institutions connected to this history. Accordingly, they took it upon themselves to assemble objects which testify to an anti-racist history of migration. From their position in the “extra-parliamentary political field,” Akkilic and Bratic stated: “At the time, we were concerned with equality and freedom, with politics and power, with demands and their justification.”²⁵ Their work with the collection was premised on using these objects to negotiate the fact that migrant subjects remain largely immobile in terms of social advancement and that the history of migration is discontinuous—not as “fates,” but as “two end results of a process aimed precisely at this.”²⁶ Accordingly, they see their work as a solidarity-based intervention that aims to update the “democratic ideas of freedom and equality” in a historically grounded manner.²⁷ However, another deficiency emerges in this context: within the nation-state framework, there is not only a lack of a collection of migration-related objects but also a lack of migrant subject positions in cultural work. This absence has concrete effects on historiography, where specific migrant knowledge about society achieves little visibility in museum contexts. This issue has been widely discussed in recent years, leading to concrete institutional innovations such as the establishment of archives, documentation centers, and shifts in museal priorities. Nevertheless, the care and preservation of Akkilic and Bratic’s migrant collection remain a solidarity-driven, interventionist practice, which itself must navigate the unstable demands of project-based capitalism to continue, thereby engaging with the highly limited and precarious structures of third-party funding within the cultural sector.

It is therefore questionable whether the discourse of care merely masks the critique of singular authorship and unpaid labor, while simultaneously rendering curatorial work precarious through project-based contracts. This raises the question of whether curatorial theory can credibly critique forms of care work and their use in the museum space if it ignores its own working conditions and conforms to the institutionalized practices

25 Ibid., 174.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

of late capitalist corporate structures. Addressing care work requires not only advocating for fair compensation but also demanding improved working conditions in the places where this work is carried out. Furthermore, a familiar critical objection to collaborative and participatory artistic practices can be reframed here: is curating as a form of care—itself mostly performed in precarious labor contexts—merely a substitute service for responsibilities abandoned by the shrinking welfare state? This prompts further discussion about how the practices of care embedded within the framework of corporate institutional logics might be protected against the flexibilized working conditions that dominate these environments, and how they might resist becoming predominantly event-driven. Ultimately, the challenge is to cultivate sustainable practices of care.²⁸

Following recent post-humanist theoretical developments, the questioning of the museum as an institution and the care-bearing strategies outlined above becomes increasingly complex. In her 2021 essay *The Modern Museum as Anthropocene Institution*, Elke Krasny revisits the questions of feminist curating of care. Krasny writes: “The preposition ‘for’ has a temporal dimension that expresses that this specific feminist curating does not yet exist, that it is only to be developed in the future as mourning work and care for the future.”²⁹ Building on postcolonial critiques that have deconstructed the museum as an “institution of nation-statehood and coloniality,” Krasny frames it as a site of epistemic violence.³⁰ She defines “feminist” as “attitudes and practices of thinking, feeling and acting that are committed to solidarity with the ability to exist in peace between human and non-human living beings and their shared planet Earth.”³¹ Thus, feminist curating is discussed here in direct dialogue with the critique of the museum as an Anthropocene institution.

To put it differently: “The museum is the repository of the non-living.”³² Although Krasny’s reflections are situated in the context of the

28 Nina Möntmann, “Das Unternehmen Kunstinstitution im Spätkapitalismus,” *Transversal*, January, 1996, <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0106/moentmann/de.html>.

29 Elke Krasny, “Das moderne Museum als Anthropozän-Institution: Für feministisches Kuratieren im Zeitalter des Massensterbens,” in *Kunstpädagogische Positionen* 57, ed. Andrea Sabisch, Torsten Meyer, and Heinrich Lüber (Universität Köln, 2021), 10 (own translation).

30 Ibid., 11.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 29.

museum as an Anthropocene institution, emphasizing and critiquing its role as a place of dying, there remain some points of contact. For example, she states, “Feminist curating imagines care for the future.”³³ Elsewhere, Krasny calls for the development of a “new historiography of curating” that “raises awareness of the fact that the practice of curating today must grapple with historical responsibility [...]”.³⁴ Here, we argue for a simultaneity of feminist practices and a plural historiography of curating. In times of war and destruction, diverse and solidarizing strategies are needed to collectively bear responsibility. What unites postcolonial and posthumanist critiques of the museum is their demand for practices of care. These could also be described using the concept of “response-ability” by science theorist Donna Haraway³⁵—the responsibility, or capacity to respond beyond a prior or autonomously and intentionally conceived subjectivity as the basis of caring curatorial practices.³⁶ In the context of war, this practice means to store artworks temporarily in hidden bunkers. When considering the museum as an Anthropocene institution, other forms of response-ability become productive: mourning can foster new ways of making visible, naming responsibilities, and developing novel approaches to curating. Feminist curating thus cultivates concern for futures and imagines cultures “of the living, in which human and non-human living beings can breathe again with their planet Earth.”³⁷

Curating as Care

In light of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the question of feminist curating takes on new significance. While care work, including curating as care work, as we argued with reference to Federici, typically remains invisible, forms of care in art—or rather, care for art—literally entered the public sphere at the beginning of the war in spring 2022. With the support of civil society, numerous institutions, donors, and patrons, the Ukrainian collective Asortymentna Kimnata set up several storage bunkers in undisclosed

33 Ibid., 31.

34 Ibid., 23.

35 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), 115.

36 Katharina Hoppe and Thomas Lemke, *Neue Materialismen zur Einführung* (Junius, 2021), 248–49.

37 Krasny, “Das moderne Museum,” 31 (own translation).

locations to save works of art from destruction. Their aim was to preserve the livelihoods of artists, as they had done previously during the war in 2014. On the one hand, this involved relocating artworks to places unlikely to be destroyed and, on the other, creating new places for art production—for example studios, exhibition spaces, and archives. The original aim of the collective—to support the independent art scene—gradually faded into the background, transformed into “protecting.” The aim of resisting institutional power logics and creating alternative spaces for artistic production has shifted, under current political pressures, towards “nurturing” and “preserving” in the sense of a survival strategy.

Elke Krasny hints at the urgency of such caring activism: “This is of importance for decolonizing and depatriarchalizing the museum collection and for practicing assembly to highlight new features of citizenship no longer bound to the nation-state or defined only through legal formal status.”³⁸ Accordingly, the work of the collective consists of assembling, communicating, and preserving differentiated knowledge—the logic that is not primarily regulated institutionally, thus offering alternative epistemologies. On the one hand, caring is given maximum visibility in the (media) public sphere. On the other, curating as a caring activity extends across the entire museum institution, revealing a field of tension. Simultaneously, the boundary between national and activist practices of care work becomes blurred. While the primary concern of museums is the “safeguarding” of cultural assets, at first glance, the critical examination of concepts such as “state,” “nation,” or “citizenship” appears to be suspended. Against the backdrop of the 2022 war, questions arise regarding whose art is being saved, archived, collected and cared for—and, crucially, by whom? Given that Ukrainian artists are obliged to serve in the military, an above-average number of female artists have relocated to Berlin and other cities, where they benefit from increased opportunities for networking, cooperation, and visibility.³⁹ An interview with Ukrainian artist Anna Scherbyna, who fled to Berlin because of the war, reveals how this attention also exposes entanglements of citizenship and nationalism. She reports experiencing “positive

38 Elke Krasny, “Caring Activism: Assembly, Collection, and the Museum,” *OnCurating* 29 (2016): 2.

39 Ina Hildebrandt, “Ukrainische Künstler:innen: Plötzlich in Berlin,” *tipBerlin*, September 8, 2022, 17.

discrimination” in favor of “Ukrainian women artists,” whose access to the art world has been facilitated by their nationality, although they themselves “never had any connection to the idea of national representation,” as the interview reveals.⁴⁰

It becomes clear that state-funded measures, which initially appear to be grounded in solidarity, reveal the underlying connection between nationalism and the associated structural economy of artistic institutions—a connection that also points to the origins of the museum as an institution rooted in inequality and exclusivity. As Krasny reminds us, the foundation of the prototype of the modern museum, the Louvre, is directly linked to the modern idea of citizenship. During the French Revolution, the Louvre was declared the property of all citizens—initially defined as white, predominantly male citizens—and thus also established as a national collection. Within this connection between free citizens and their access to art, as Krasny points out, museums served as sites for rituals of citizenship based on exclusivity and exclusion. Against this backdrop of an imperial, colonial, and patriarchal culture of collecting, Krasny argues that museums should be framed as places of assembly where new rituals of citizenship can be tested. Beyond the representation of nation-state interests, curating as care in our understanding would need to produce acts and assemblies through which new forms of solidarity between citizens and non-citizens, regardless of their citizenship status, can be realized. Because these acts and assemblies relate to the principle of the “right to have rights,” as formulated by Engin Isin, a right to care for art could be demanded.⁴¹ Furthermore, it seems crucial to explore how a right to care for art might be enacted in curatorial practice that not only resists institutionalized nationalism but also aims for sustainability.

Summarizing Thoughts

Our contribution sought to redefine curatorial practices through the lens of care and solidarity, particularly in times of war. By examining the practices of Ukrainian artists and curators, we highlighted how curating as a form of care supports the preservation of cultural heritage and community building while resisting geopolitical violence. Against the backdrop of the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Engin F. Isin, “Citizenship in Flux: The Figure of the Activist Citizen,” *Subjectivity* 29, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2009.25>.

ongoing war in Ukraine, this paper argues for rethinking curating within a geopolitical context, showing how war can shift our understanding of curatorial work itself. Thereby, we understand curatorial care as crucial within the framework of solidarity, suggesting that curating can function as a form of collective resistance and survival. By focusing on the feminist dimensions of this discussion, the paper emphasizes curatorial practices attentive to the social, economic, and gendered contexts in which they operate. Through highlighting the curatorial practices of the Ukrainian artists' collective Asortymentna Kimnata, we showed how curating as a form of care work serves as a tool for resistance and survival in times of crisis, thus enabling a vibrant art scene despite ongoing war. As Lesya Khomenko, a member of the collective, states: "In a time of physical destruction, we will physically create. Culture and art are important at all times, I have already tested this during the Revolution of Dignity. This is not a matter of necessity, it has nothing to do with survival, but it is very important at the diplomatic and geopolitical levels."⁴² As argued earlier, the collective does exactly that—namely, "to physically create." It not only produces artworks and networks but also engages in acts of survival, rescue, and preservation of artworks. In other words, this form of care work encompasses various dimensions of care/*curare* to protect artworks from destruction. Against this background, we understand the collective's work itself as a challenging practice of resistance, care, and hope in times of war. In contrast to care work that often remains invisible and unpaid, in this case, the work of the collective is highly visible and must position itself in relation to the neoliberal logics of the art market. Thereby, the ambivalences of this visibility should not be overlooked, as seen in the aforementioned "positive discrimination" of Ukrainian artists. In times of multiple crises and ongoing conflict, the question remains as to how the political work of the artist collective Asortymentna Kimnata and curating as care work more broadly can persist as a genuine practice of resistance without being appropriated as unpaid work by the hegemonic art market and its frameworks. Following Krasny's vision of cultures of the living, curating as caring must also be understood as a form of mourning work

42 "Spendenaufuf für das ukrainische Künstlerhaus Asortymentna Kimnata," accessed July 29, 2025, <https://m1-hohenlockstedt.de/dringender-spendenaufuf-des-netzwerks-der-kunstlerhauser-norddeutschland-nkn-fur-das-kunstlerhaus-asortymentna-kimnata-der-westukraine/asortymentna-kimnata-assortment-room/>.

that holds the potential to creating spaces for mourning. To conclude with the words of Saidiya Hartman, “Care is the antidote to violence”—even if care remains a challenging practice.⁴³

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43 In a salon on Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake*, Saidiya Hartman said, “Care is the antidote to violence.” See “In the Wake: A Salon in Honor of Christina Sharpe,” Barnard Center for Research on Women, YouTube, February 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGE9oiZr3VM>.

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Santrauka

Rūpesčio (*care, curare*) ambivalencijos: solidarumo tinklai ir kuratorinės praktikos kaip kolektyvinio pasipriešinimo forma

Thari Jungen ir Friederike Nastold

Reikšminiai žodžiai: kuratorinis darbas kaip rūpesčiu pagrįsta veikla, meno kūrinių išsaugojimas, Ukrainos menas, feministinis kuravimas, Asortymentna Kimnata.

Šiame straipsnyje siekiama naujai pažvelgti į kuratorines praktikas ir apibrėžti jas kaip rūpesčio ir solidarumo formas, ypač Ukrainoje vykstančio karo kontekste. Autorės teigia, kad kuravimas nėra vien tik meno pristatymas, bet gali tapti socialiniu įsipareigojimu, palaikančiu kultūros išsaugojimą, bendruomenių gerovę ir pasipriešinimą smurtui. Šiuo požiūriu kuratorystė tampa išgyvenimo ir gijimo įrankiu krizės metu. Įtraukdamos feministinę perspektyvą, autorės pabrėžia, kad kuratorinės praktikos turi atsižvelgti į socialinę, ekonominę ir lyčių galios dinamiką, siekiant kurti labiau įtraukią ir teisingesnę solidarumo praktiką. Straipsnyje taip pat nagrinėjamos nepastovios kuratorių darbo sąlygos ir keliamas klausimas, ar rūpesčiu grindžiamos kuratorinės praktikos gali būti tvarios institucijose, kurios vis labiau priklauso nuo lankstaus išnaudojamo darbo modelių. Aptariama ir įtampa tarp institucinio kuravimo bei bendruomeniškų praktikų „iš apačios“, teigiant, kad pastarosios gali labiau atitikti rūpesčio ir solidarumo filosofiją. Straipsnio ašis – Noros Sternfeld „postrepresentacinio kuravimo“ idėja, pabrėžianti kuratorystę kaip aktyvią, transformuojančią praktiką, kuri kuria erdves solidarumui ir socialiniams pokyčiams, o ne vien tik atstovauja esamoms struktūroms. Tai taip pat leidžia nagrinėti „matomumo ambivalencijas“, t. y. etines komplikacijas, susijusias su tam tikrų klausimų ar grupių matomumo didinimu krizės metu. Be to, autorės remiasi Elke Krasny mintimis apie kuratorystę kaip „gedulo darbą“, kur kuratorinės erdvės tampa gedėjimo ir gijimo vietomis ne tik dėl žmonių gyvybių netekčių, bet ir dėl kultūros paveldo, ekosistemų bei kitų gyvybės formų praradimo. Galiausiai straipsnyje siūloma pergaltoti kuratorines praktikas kaip rūpesčio ir solidarumo formas, pabrėžiant, kad kuratoriai gali transformuoti kultūros institucijas į pasipriešinimo, gijimo ir kolektyvinio veiksmo erdves krizės metu.