

Discussion Session Report

Care, Conviviality and Collaboration

My group and I decided to explore the concept of care through the lens of collaboration and conviviality. As we gathered our thoughts around the two set readings for that week: Park McArthur and Constantina Tavitsanos “Other Forms of Conviviality: The Best and Least of Which is Our Daily Care and the host of which is our collaborative work” (2013) and Massimo de Angelis and Silvia Federici “Preface: Care Work and the Commons,”(2012) we began to realized how multifaceted the term “care” actually is (i.e. care work, care for the environment, care for the disabled etc.). As we proceeded in our discussion, one particular sentence from McArthur’s text drew the attention of us all: ‘ non-disabled people are “temporarily abled” in recognition of the fact that dependency is a reality for all bodies.’¹ Hence we began to think of a way in which we could have shed light upon the notion of care through the interdependency of our bodies.

We decided that our discussion session would have taken the form of an experiment: inspired by socio-political movements such as *Somatherapy* - founded by the Brazilian writer Paulo Freire in the 70s - and the *Nanopolitics Group* founded in London in 2010, which both explore what bodies can do with curiosity, courage and care, we brought forth the idea of paying attention to each other by sensing our bodily movements. As a means to facilitate an acknowledgement of everyday care (i.e. listening), which one tends to underestimate or give for granted, two physical exercises², proposed by the aforementioned movements were selected. These were meant to enable the class to observe, approach and consider different aspects and forms of interacting and being together.

As mentioned by the *Nanopolitics Handbook*, contemporary society is characterized by a voracious and naturalized competitiveness, whereby not only, due to the fear of wasting time, everything has

¹ Park McArthur & Constantina Tavitsanos, “Other Forms of Conviviality: The Best and Least of Which is Our Daily Care and the host of which is our collaborative work,” *Women & Performance* 23. 1 (2013), p. 132.

² The first exercise consisted in letting oneself fall, “blindly”, in the arms of the person standing behind.

The second exercise consisted in an action of mutual collaboration. Two people sitting on the floor, shoulder to shoulder and mutually hooked through their arms, would conjointly try to stand up.

to be useful; but in order to demonstrate whom we are, we are constantly led to compare ourselves and our performances against that of everyone else.³ Through the exercises that we selected we wanted to explore the possibility of demolishing this naturalised competitiveness and bring forth, without fear of judgement, the vulnerabilities of our bodies and their interdependence. Following the physical activity, which aimed at constructing a collaborative platform based on mutual trust, we all sat on the floor to initiate a circle discussion. Here each member of the class was invited to express or simply listen to thoughts and feelings about the process we had just gone through and ultimately expose one object related to his/her understanding of care, conviviality and collaboration. The circle discussion was meant to foster a notion of horizontality whereby, through the practice of listening to each others voices and bodies, we could have abandoned interpretation and judgement, and facilitated the construction of a collaborative platform. This idea derives from Freire's argument that, 'a good listener is someone who makes the other feel fluent, bright and inspired when he/she talks to them.'⁴ Listening is a form of care; it infuses both a sense of equality (i.e. all have the same right to speak and to be listened at) and a sense of trust (i.e. the speaker, if confronted with a good listener, might feel freer to expose his vulnerabilities as well as his desires).

During the circle discussion we decided not to focus too much on our individually chosen objects for two reasons: firstly we proposed the session itself as an object of enquiry; secondly we believed that in order to facilitate discussion and the possibility of horizontality the exposition of our objects should have not taken the form of a lecture; on the contrary we aimed at keeping everybody in the same position as to conjointly construct a broader understanding of the notion of care. My "object" was the Canadian indigenous collective *IdleNoMore*. The latter tries to protect the lands and the waters from corporate destruction by means of raising awareness through pacific collective actions. They believe that everything is connected and related, that nature needs to be envisioned as a

³ The Nanopolitics Group, *The Nanopolitics Handbook*, Minor Compositions, 2014, p. 34.

⁴ Goia, Jorge, 'Soma an Anarchist Experiment' in *The Nanopolitics Handbook*, p. 100.

subject like any other and therefore protected and taken care of. Care, in this case, is understood as an attitude and action towards the affirmation and defence of life as such whether it is human, animal or environmental.

Though having established that we would have explored collaboration and care through bodily exercises, we have to acknowledge that this proposition presents some limitations in regard to its accessibility. First of all, people with disabilities would have not been able to participate and this would have been intrinsically paradoxical considering our aim; secondly we had to face and accept the fact that not all the members of the class were inclined to take part. The latter was a delicate situation to handle for it could have led to the emergence of feelings of exclusions.

Despite initial worry, we “listened” and accepted these members’ decisions and proceeded with our plan. Suddenly, something unexpected occurred: as the exercises unfolded, those who had decided not to take part ultimately joined. The ice had been broken and the energy emanated by the unconventionality of these practices allowed us to disclose both notions of anxiety and laughter. The externalization of such feelings, I would argue, immediately created a sense of shared intimacy. It is however worth mentioning that limitations also arose in regard to our desire to reach horizontality: first of all, the teacher, due to health and safety regulations, might have felt less tranquil and more cautious to abandon her responsibilities as head of the class; moreover my group members and I, could still have been perceived as “leading” the session - even though we took part to all the exercises we were the ones explaining them. To limit this possibility, we appositely decided not to try the exercises beforehand and allow the lesson to unfold as naturally as possible.

The experiment itself, despite the aforementioned problematics, allowed all of us to reflect and discuss our sensations and feelings; whether it be fear or amusement, anxiety or laughter, it did, in some way dissolve the “distance” which defines our everyday relationships. The body became a vehicle for facilitating relational skills and instilling a sense of intimacy. Even though one of our

initial aims was to oppose interpretation, the latter became a constant in the circle discussion. We all began to “read” each other’s reactions and movements. Nevertheless, I believe this process to have successfully created an alternative platform of interaction. We mutually exchanged thoughts as a means to construct and develop our personal reflections, and expand the spectrum of our understanding of “care. ” Each member of the class was revealed equally fundamental to the construction of a shared meaning. As for my Group and I, we created a very similar environment to the one experienced in class. At each meeting we passionately exhibited our ideas and curiously listened to one another. It was an intrinsically dialogical collaboration, a sort of commons of ideas, in which nothing is possessed but all ideas rich with anonymous potentialities.

Bibliography

(Including Further Readings and videos read and watched specifically for the Session)

Books

The Nanopolitics Group, *The Nanopolitics Handbook*, Minor Compositions, 2014.

Mcarthur, Park & Constantina Tavitsanos, “Other Forms of Conviviality: The Best and Least of Which is Our Daily Care and the host of which is our collaborative work,” *Women & Performance* 23. 1, 2013.

Journals

Massimo de Angelis “Preface: care Work and the Commons” and Camille Barbagallo and Silvia Federici, *The Commoner* no. 15 special issue *Care Work and the Commons* (Winter 2012), <<http://www.commoner.org.uk/>>.

Videos

Soma - *Uma Terapia Anarquista Completo*

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qZlV44mxL4>>.

Websites

European Youth Forest Action Caringlabour website

<<https://caringlabor.wordpress.com/>>.

No border network

<<http://noborder.org/about.php.html>>.

Idle No More

<<http://www.idlenomore.ca/story>>.