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RESEARCH ARTICLE

REVISED Ecologies of care: Assembling situated artistic practices

[version 2; peer review: 6 approved with reservations]

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Abstract

Background

This article examines contemporary debates linking care and socially situated artistic practices, proposing care as an ethical-political framework which fosters collective support, repair, interdependence, and vulnerability. Drawing on feminist care theory and interdisciplinary perspectives, it argues for integrating *care* into institutional cultural contexts in order to cultivate collective and relational modes of creation often overlooked by dominant aesthetic paradigms. In the context of global crises, artistic practices are positioned as tools for material, emotional, and communal care that respond to inequality, violence, and the erosion of care ethics.

Methods

Through the case study of the *(Un) Open Archive* project, the article investigates how the ethics of care can transform artistic methodologies and contribute to broader social change.

Results

The interdisciplinary analysis identifies care as a generative principle which sustains collective creation, mitigates institutional precarity, and nurtures new relational and affective modes of production. These practices reveal care as both a material and symbolic framework for reshaping artistic and social relationships.

Conclusions

Integrating the ethics of care into artistic practice reorients art

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aesthetically, ethically, and politically in response to systemic crises. By positioning care at the centre of creation and coexistence, art emerges as a site of collective maintenance, repair, and transformation, offering renewed pathways for community engagement and institutional resilience.

Keywords
Care, Socially engaged art, Community, Interdependence

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REVISED **Amendments from Version 1**

The manuscript has undergone substantial revision in both its writing and conceptual articulation. Several sections have been rewritten in response to the reviewers' suggestions. The theoretical framework has been more clearly integrated with the themes that connect care and socially situated artistic practices, ensuring greater coherence between the conceptual references and the empirical material. The methodology has been specified in more detail, clarifying the connection between the selected case studies and the theoretical foundations of the article. This revised version seeks to strengthen the synergy between theory and practice throughout the text. Additionally, some new references have been incorporated to reinforce key arguments and to support the newly added paragraphs.

Any further responses from the reviewers can be found at the end of the article

Introduction

Many of the organisations and agents involved in the professionalisation of artistic practices focus on care as a set of values which should be central to the processes of these practices, both from the perspective of interpersonal interactions, and from the standpoint of individual relations with institutions. Care becomes an ethical framework, an attempt to improve the mechanisms by which the material relationships of artistic production are structured, considering the performativity of bodies, the dealings and interactions between the agents who participate in these relationships, and their approaches to content creation.

This text addresses the relationship between care and socially situated artistic practices, emphasising those practices linked to the social sphere. In contrast to artistic tradition which has privileged autonomy and individualised expression, we propose foregrounding practices which focus on collective support, repair, interdependence and vulnerability, drawing on feminist care theory (Gilligan, 1982; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993). These practices are understood not as a private or subordinate activity, but as an ethical-political framework fundamental for community life. Considering artistic practices from this perspective means opening the field in order to recognise the need for incorporating care into the institutional cultural context. It also means encouraging forms of collective support and interrelational modes of creation that are often rendered invisible within dominant aesthetic paradigms.

As authors, researchers and creative agents engaged in defining contexts and activating artistic processes, we have participated in the proliferation of artistic residency programmes, and accordingly, we have contributed to the exponential growth of calls. From the perspective of care, this leads us to consider whether we are on the right track, in the sense of opening up spaces of possibility in artistic research and in the development of ideas, or whether, on the other hand, due to budgetary constraints, policy dependencies, and the oversaturation of programming, we are contributing to the activation of precarious processes. Often, we ask ourselves these questions from critical and self-critical perspectives, and that is why in this text we will attempt to exercise transparent reflection, to evaluate how collectivised spaces of care sustain and activate artistic projects.

When art takes a stance on socially and politically pressing issues, in many cases it does so in order to legitimise its role, justify its actions, and contribute transdisciplinary knowledge to causes which fight for the transformation of community life. Socially engaged art, beyond raising awareness, requires a deeper commitment to collective action, which calls for a change in attitude and a much-needed transition in the face of the multiple crises emerging in our social context. These crises arise both from the need for and the absence of care, from growing inequalities, and from related forms of violence. Together, these factors shape what Homer-Dixon *et al.* (2022) describe as a *polycrisis,* a condition of interlinked global risks resulting from synchronised and accelerated shocks, including the climate emergency, migration, democratic fragility, and geopolitical instability.

We may consider this *polycrisis* manifests as a lack of ethics of care, marked by territorial tensions, geostrategic conflicts, forced displacements, deepening inequalities, and difficulties in coexisting within diversity. In this context of multiple and synchronised crises, the lack of a care ethic produces not only social and political consequences but also cultural and aesthetic ones. Judith Butler (2020) points out that inequality and violence are fuelled by racism, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and contempt for poverty. Artistic projects, therefore, not only render these issues visible but also foster material, emotional, and communal forms of care.

This article is organised in three main sections. The first deals with the notion of care, drawing on transversal and interdisciplinary contributions. From this standpoint, artistic thinking emerges as a field that challenges and interconnects ethics, politics, and activism. The second part focuses on the intersection between the ethics of care and artistic practice. The third draws on reflections distilled from the *(Un)Open Archive* project, developed within the framework of Care

Ecologies (Idensitat, 2024), where multiple voices contribute perspectives, seeking to exemplify what the ethics of care means within artistic practice and in relation to the agents involved.

In this sense, in a context of explicit violence, we suggest two guiding questions: *What does it mean to consider art through the ethics of care?* and *How do we create processes of assemblage through situated artistic practices?* These questions open a field of discussion regarding the role of art in times of systemic crises and structural violence, proposing care as an axis of aesthetic, ethical, and political transformation.

Methodology

This article demonstrates Idensitat's approach to case-studies based upon critical reflection and practice-based research, grounded upon Idensitat's long-term curatorial and artistic practice. The study analyses the ways in which the ethics of care operates within situated artistic practices through the device of the *Un(Open) Archive* (2023–2025), and three selected cases: Larre/Te(n) Cuidado (care as infrastructural reconfiguration), Racco & Egaña/Museums as Gardens (care as critical grammar and equity), and LICC – Mindful Open Calls (care as protocols and accessibility).

Data sources include: the *Un(Open) Archive's* curated video-interviews and glossary; public project materials and toolkits; the authors' observations based upon practice.

This analysis was developed on the basis of core principles linked to key concepts in the ethics of care for example interdependence, vulnerability, institutionalisation, examining how each case translates these into methods, tools, or organisational models, and identifying cross-case patterns that illustrate how care moves from discourse to operativity.

The authors write as practitioner-researchers, adopting a reflexive stance and triangulating curated material with publicly available documentation. No approval was required from human-subjects; referenced interviews were part of the curatorial device and were used with consent. Limitations stem from the context-specific nature of the cases, addressed through transparent criteria and comparative analysis.

Ethics of care: definitions, axes, and controversies

"Care itself is a political reality, a practice that institutes the possibility of living together in an ordered way." (Vosman, 2020, p.19).

Controversies surrounding the concept of care are expressed through two broad positions: on the one hand, an understanding of care as a relational, situated, and politically transformative practice; on the other, its interpretation based upon institutionalised logics of management, preservation, or control. Within this framework, Frans Vosman (2020) proposes ethics of care with feminist, relational, and political roots, which emphasise vulnerability, interdependence, and contextuality as central dimensions of social life. From this perspective, he explicitly criticises neoliberalism, systemic injustices, and the commodification of care, advocating instead for collective responsibility and solidarity as the foundations for sustaining life.

The ethics of care proposed by Vosman are based on concrete practices and call for interdisciplinary research, dialogue with social movements, and attention to issues which remain unresolved such as intersectionality and ways of building community. Their goal is to transform social attitudes towards care, dependency, and relationality, moving towards more just and caring societies. In his words, 'If afflicted democracy is to survive, autonomous movements are required that can offer resistance to managerial practices, and corresponding inquiry is needed.' (p.20). In this sense, he asks what role the ethics of care should play in supporting individuals, groups, and organisations facing complex, structural, and "wicked problems".

This perspective contrasts with the view, widely held in neoliberal capitalist contexts, which understands care as an act aimed at maintaining the physical body, protecting it from deterioration, and maximising individual well-being. When this individualistic conception is projected onto the collective, care is progressively shifted towards institutional spaces. Physical and mental health—in a broader sense that includes contexts and factors which condition our ways of living or surviving—ceases to be solely the responsibility of the individual and becomes a right claimed in the institutional sphere. It is on the basis of this shift from the individual to the collective that Boris Groys (2022) addresses the care of physical and symbolic bodies; symbolic not in the sense of immaterial, but as bodies integrated into extended mechanisms of contemporary preservation. For Groys, the care and health of the physical body are "integrated into a much bigger system of surveillance and care that controls our symbolic bodies" (p.11). From this perspective, the collection, conservation, and memory of these symbolic bodies would be impossible without the intervention of institutions such as cemeteries, libraries or museums (p.49). His approach places care within a socialised metabolism with nature, mediated

by institutions responsible for regulating and administering that which deserves to be preserved. This includes the materialisation of artistic practice.

This emphasis on the institutionalisation of care conflicts with the ethics proposed by Vosman, in which care is a fundamental tool for tackling wicked problems, necessarily through the active participation of citizens, and from intersectional frameworks capable of addressing the complexity of human experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2019), and more-than-human communities (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2023). Often, institutions, operating as executors of power structures, tend to ignore or directly reproduce discrimination based upon social axes such as race, class, gender, ability, or age. It would be naive to think that the institution only includes the paternalistic perspective related to the figure of public administration, as there are other community, cooperative, or self-managed care institutions.

In the context of this text, which is orientated towards and from certain artistic practices, it is a matter of interest to shift the issue of care away from a paternalistic perspective focused on the institutionalised preservation of deterioration. Instead, we propose to approach the issue of care from the proactive political action formulated by feminist and environmentalist theories, placing interdependence in a more-than-human world at the centre, and understanding the artistic gesture not as aesthetic autonomy, but as a situated political practice (Millner, 2024). Within the framework of a precarious artistic context, in which many projects oscillate between the alternative and dependence upon the public system, the concept of care has gained greater presence and visibility. Attempts have been made to socialise this concept and bring it into the mainstream, calling for institutional spaces to adopt it and put it into practice. This aspect is examined in the second part of this text, in relation to various voices participating in the *Un(Open) Archive* project. This project analyses the necessary role of institutions, and the definition of a new institutionalism which incorporates relevant elements from an expanded perspective of care, revisiting the idea of 'care work' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 4). "Care work" refers to the activities and practices involved in maintaining, supporting, and nurturing individuals, communities, and systems to ensure their well-being and survival. It encompasses both physical and emotional efforts, including caregiving, attending to needs, fostering relationships, and maintaining infrastructure. It is perhaps at this point that we may understand the idea of the ethics of care as a political tool proposed by Vosman, or, failing that, how the absence of such ethics has consequences which are not only social and political, but also cultural and aesthetic.

The implementation of the ethics of care is not always related to equity or equality, as it may form the basis for paternalistic attitudes or the exclusion of those who are most vulnerable or in need of care. The tension between Vosman and Groys is not merely conceptual, as it reveals two possible directions for contemporary care. While Vosman emphasises its democratic and participatory potential, Groys shows how care is embedded in mechanisms of control, classification, and preservation of the symbolic. The relationship between Vosman's and Groys's approaches is an analytical idea which needs to be nuanced, given that Groys does not engage in feminist debates on care or the ethics of care, but rather in a theory of contemporary preservation, in which care is conceptualised in a more instrumental way. The question that arises is whether care work in the institutional context, orientated towards the most vulnerable people, and wicked problems, strengthens the common good or, on the contrary, captures this common good under the logic of hierarchical preservation.

Feminist Genealogies of Care in Situated Artistic Practices

It is necessary to return to the feminist genealogy of the ethics of care in order to reposition ourselves in the exercise of linking situated artistic practice and care work. In her book In a Different Voice (1982), Carol Gilligan introduces a decisive critique of models of moral development focused exclusively upon autonomy and abstract justice. In contrast, she suggests the recognition of a "voice of care" based upon relationality, contextual responsibility, and interdependence. The ethics of care complements justice rather than denying it, by emphasising that moral life is anchored in concrete bonds. Gilligan identifies three moments—caring for oneself, caring for others, and caring for oneself and others—which make it possible to overcome the false dichotomy between selfishness and self-sacrifice. This moral evolution introduces a fundamental principle of the ethics of care which, challenging traditional frameworks, recognises interdependence as a constitutive element of life in common, so that caring relationships are more balanced, dialogical, and inclusive.

On this basis, Joan C. Tronto (1993) introduces an explicitly politicised concept of care, defining it as that which sustains life, as an "activity of the species" which encompasses all the practices necessary to maintain, continue, and repair the world in which we live, understood as a network of interdependent bodies, subjects, and environments. Care is presented as a criterion of ethical sufficiency, a practice fraught with tensions and conflicts, and a universal necessity, albeit culturally situated. It challenges dominant normative frameworks by emphasising the constitutive interdependence of social life and the urgency of addressing real needs beyond formal abstractions. Along with Fisher and Tronto (1987), she identifies four phases—caring about, taking care of, care giving, and care receiving—which show the processual, relational, and evaluative nature of care. Tronto shifts care from the private to the public sphere, pointing out that its unequal distribution reproduces hierarchies of gender, class, and race.

This politicisation is further expanded upon in the work of María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), who introduces a posthumanist and ecological dimension. If in Tronto care sustains the human world, in Puig de la Bellacasa it extends to more-than-human worlds. Her three-dimensional proposal—work, affection, and ethics/politics—shows that care is neither harmonious nor pure, but rather that it is a field of tensions in which material labour, emotional involvement, and normative commitment are intertwined. Thus, care ceases to be anthropocentric and becomes a practice situated in ecological and material networks. Her approach combines posthumanist, feminist, and materialist thinking: "Feminist care ethics understands the world in a state of relationship, where no part is isolated and autonomous, and where small and intimate acts are connected to a broader politics.' (Millner 2024, 105).

In line with this ecofeminist approach, focused upon human interdependence, Yayo Herrero (2023) insists that sustaining life requires reorganising social metabolisms, and abandoning the centrality of economic profit. Material degrowth, interdependence, redistribution, and ecological urgency are key elements in reorienting politics towards dignified survival. Care is no longer just an ethical category, but a principle of civilisational reorganisation.

These perspectives allow us to understand that the ethics of care is not intrinsically emancipatory. It can become paternalism, exclusion, or a control mechanism, if it is decoupled from intersectional frameworks (Collins & Bilge, 2019), or if it is captured by institutional structures which reproduce inequalities. Here, the initial tension reappears: is care a democratising practice, or is it a technique for managing vulnerability?

In connection with the evident *polycrisis*, understood as a lack of ethics of care, Anastasia Kavada (2024) speaks of the 'crisis of care' in reference to the current situation, highlighting a general inability to properly care for various aspects of society and the environment, including examples such as the increase in marginalised groups, the loss of biodiversity, environmental destruction, hate speech, and the erosion of democratic values. A set of interconnected crises that originate in systems of oppression and injustice, and which affect production, reproduction, and governance. From a perspective which reconnects us to Vosman, Tronto, Puig de la Bellacasa, and Herrero, care is a means of addressing these crises, fostering solidarity, interdependence, and recognition of vulnerability within democratic systems.

In the artistic sphere, this controversy assumes a particular relevance. Iliana Fokianaki (2020) shows how various types of care which previously belonged to the welfare state have recently been dismantled: healthcare, protection against poverty, care for the elderly, labour rights, social justice, environmental justice, and collective rights, among others. The author contrasts the constant growth of the multi-million 'body care' industry with the progressive dismantling of the responsibilities assumed by public institutions. Capitalist society, always orientated towards the cult of the individual, expands the spaces in which the market can operate freely, while those spaces intended for socialised care are eroded by devastating neoliberal policies.

In this sense, Fokianaki proposes that artistic practices could establish self-organised structures which integrate care collectively, not from a paternalistic perspective of "caring for the other", but by incorporating the other into collective practices which address care from cross-cutting and intersectoral perspectives.

The concept of *radical care*, developed by Hobart and Kneese (2020), broadens this political dimension. In dialogue with anarchist traditions (Gordon, 2017) and with Ernst Bloch's notion of concrete utopia, radical care appears as a prefigurative practice, creating in the present the relationships we desire for the future. Radical care is not limited to responding to immediate crises such as state violence, inequality, and environmental collapse, but embodies alternative possibilities through mutual aid, solidarity, and non-hierarchical action. These forms of care, often invisible or mundane (Kallio *et al.*, 2020), show that political agency does not always take institutionally recognisable forms. However, they are not without risks: they can be exploited or co-opted by the very structures they seek to transform. Although certain theories of care offer structured analytical frameworks applicable to the institutional context, it is also crucial to consider alternative approaches, such as those formulated by ecofeminism (Herrero, 2023), or hydrofeminism (Neimanis, 2016), which challenge dominant values and ways of life in the West.

Within the framework of situated artistic practices, care can work in two ways, 'caring for' and 'caring within' the community. This implies shifting from a paternalistic logic of preservation to a political practice which sustains human and more-than-human interdependencies. In precarious artistic contexts, in which the alternative coexists with institutional dependence, there is a need for imagining a new institutionalism capable of integrating an expanded ethics of care.

Ultimately, the controversy surrounding the ethics of care is not resolved by opposing institution and community, but by questioning what configurations of power sustain each form of care. Freeing care from heteropatriarchal and extractivist structures means recognising it as the foundation of a policy geared towards the sustainability of life. In this sense, artistic practice is not an external sphere; it is a laboratory in which these possibilities are tested and materialised, or neutralised.

Thus, the ethics of care appears as a field of dispute, between management and transformation, between preservation and justice, between the administration of vulnerability and the reorganisation of common life. The meaning of care remains controversial precisely because it determines the very form of our future coexistence. It remains controversial because it describes both the practices that sustain life and those which manage vulnerability. The meaning of care is fought over on the same terrain as power is fought over.

Art and Care: Critical Intersections

"The bar we have set for judging our actions, which should be acts of decency or ordinary humanity, is so high that any behaviour that is not mean, petty, or destructive, becomes an anomaly worthy of praise" (Duval, 2025).

The intersections between art and care became more prominent in the artistic sphere following the COVID-19 lockdown. Following the abrupt interruption of institutional programmes, the health crisis highlighted the fragility of cultural ecosystems and the need to rethink the material and emotional conditions which sustain artistic practices. This shift led numerous institutions to incorporate the ethics of care into their agendas, promoting a transition from the private to the public and from the personal to the collective, in accordance with Boris Groys thesis (2022). However, the accelerated adoption ran the risk of trivialising the concept by limiting it to immediate responses linked to the pandemic and preventing deeper connections with previous structural processes.

It is worth remembering that the ethics of care has been consolidating itself for decades as a framework capable of questioning the normative models which underpin both contemporary politics and cultural practices. In contrast to hegemonic discourses focused upon individual autonomy and abstract rights, this perspective suggests an alternative moral language that places interdependence, shared vulnerability, and collective responsibility at its centre (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Tronto, 1993). A care-based society fosters trust, mutual consideration, and cooperation, prioritising collective well-being over individual interests and reducing dependence upon the strict application of legal norms (Held 2006, 136). Its strength lies in shifting attention from universalist principles to concrete relationships, situated knowledge, and embodied experiences. The ethics of care extended to a global scale can promote international cooperation, reduce violence, and address issues such as poverty, hunger, inequality, and environmental sustainability (Held 2006, Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

The artistic field is a privileged space for exploring these issues. Jackeline Millner (2024) highlights that art and the ethics of care share an emphasis on connection, common vulnerability, and the transformative potential of care practices. The moral imagination of the feminisms of care is reflected in art's capacity to promote listening, attention, and affective resonance in the face of contemporary crises. Thus, the principles of the ethics of care (principles such as interdependence, solidarity, criticism of neoliberalism, and recognition of alternative ways of life) are intertwined with art's function of imagining possible futures, and its ability to prevent concepts related to 'care' from being stripped of their political dimension and their capacity to form part of transformative initiatives and processes (Egaña & Racco, 2024).

From this perspective, multiple contemporary artistic practices have adopted measures which embody modes of care. These practices create spaces for encounter and accompaniment, recalibrate perceptions, and activate forms of agency in the face of social, ecological, or political tensions (Kester, 2011). Feminist curatorial practices have been decisive in promoting co-presence, mutual support, and communities of solidarity which destabilise institutional hierarchies (Millner, 2024).

A key precedent for these strategies is the Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969! and Mierle Laderman Ukeles's exhibition CARE (Ukeles, 1969). From a feminist perspective, Ukeles denounces the devaluation of reproductive work, whether paid or unpaid, and its organisation according to gender hierarchies (Ponzio, 2020). Her notion of maintenance art elevates everyday activities—cleaning, cooking, repairing—to the realm of the artistic, and contrasts the paradigm of 'development' (creation, progress) with that of 'maintenance' (preservation, renewal), making visible the invisible work which sustains life. In CARE, Ukeles opens up three dimensions: personal maintenance (performing daily tasks in the museum as public art), general maintenance (interviews about maintenance, freedom and desire), and terrestrial maintenance (displaying and rehabilitating waste to highlight environmental care). In doing so, she blurs the boundaries between art and life and reclaims maintenance as a vital and creative act.[1]

Ukeles's career evolved from individual performance art to collaborative and community-based projects, in line with collectives such as Group Material, which in the late 1980s launched a series of projects involving the neighbourhood

[1]Ukeles performed her Maintenance Art at Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford in 1973 as part of the exhibition C.7500 curated by Lucy Lippard (Ponzio, 2020).

community in processes of co-creation (Wallis, 1990); or artists such as Tania Bruguera, who coined the concept of 'useful art', seeking to define a type of artistic practice that serves the community (Bishop, 2025). This transition converges with the approaches of Radical Care, which delve into the political dimension of care as a form of resistance and mutual support. Her work dialogues with the critique of Fokianaki (2020), for whom care work has historically been feminised, undervalued, and rendered precarious, especially for migrant women.

Here, the concept of interdependence formulated by Shannon Jackson (2011) becomes relevant. Jackson questions the traditional notion of autonomy in art, politics, and social life, and highlights the collaborative and relational nature of all artistic practice, especially in social and participatory art. Recognising human limitations and the need for support infrastructures does not weaken agency, but rather, makes it possible. According to Giordano (2016), Jackson connects this idea with disability studies and feminist theory, dismantling the neoliberal illusion of self-sufficiency, and advocating for an ethics of care and cooperation orientated towards inclusive and resilient communities.

Art which operates on these premises not only represents care, but also performs and materialises it, becoming a laboratory of relationships which questions the dominant social organisation, and opens up possibilities for imagining other forms of coexistence and collective action. Thus, the ethics of care offers a powerful theoretical and practical tool for rethinking the role of art and culture in contemporary society. Its emphasis on interdependence, shared responsibility, and attention to the particular, enables fairer, more sustainable, and more supportive ways of inhabiting the world, and drives curatorial and creative transformations towards inclusive and emancipatory horizons (Held, 2006; Tronto, 2008). In terms of recent practices, initiatives such as Idensitat's *Un(Open) Archive* show how research/creation can function as a laboratory of care, both in its methodologies and in its exhibitory devices (Idensitat, 2024; Kester, 2011). Even so, risks of instrumentalisation, co-optation, or conceptual hollowing-out persist, especially under neoliberal management logic, which requires critical vigilance over the use of the concept and the embodiment of care in concrete structures, times, and infrastructures.

Care, community, assemblage, interdependence

During a round-table discussion in which Idensitat participated at the XI Encuentro de Cultura y Ciudadanía (2025), attention was drawn to how certain artistic practices engage in processes of positioning, contestation, and collective articulation. The projects discussed exemplify situated practices embedded in specific social contexts, where action emerges not from isolated individuals but from relational configurations. In this sense, agency can be understood as an emergent property of heterogeneous constellations—comprising people, institutions, objects, discourses, and affects—that temporarily converge to produce new forms of action.

This understanding resonates with the notion of *agencement*, developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and commonly translated as *assemblage*. Rather than referring to a stable structure, assemblage designates a dynamic and relational arrangement in which diverse elements are provisionally linked, generating forms of organisation, subjectivity, and resistance. As Jane Bennett (2010) suggests, agency in this context ceases to be an individual capacity and instead becomes distributed across a network of interacting forces. Each component retains a degree of autonomy while contributing to a collective process that is open-ended, non-totalising, and temporally contingent. Within such assemblages, interdependence is not a secondary condition but a constitutive one.

Approaching these dynamics through the lens of care highlights the centrality of relationality in the constitution of both cultural practices and forms of collective organisation. At first glance, the concept of community takes us to a complex territory, where the importance of a group of people who share common elements which give the group a distinctive character is emphasised. Identity, location, ideology, belief, all help to establish a sense of belonging to a collective. They help to express the maintenance of bonds of connection between group members, and to mark members as being different from other groups, creating a union that strengthens and immunises them in relation to an "other", who can be defined as foreign, migrant, enemy, or simply different.

As Roberto Esposito (2009) argues, community should be understood not as a closed entity grounded in identity, but as a condition of exposure to others, a space of plurality, difference, and relational openness. In contrast, immunity functions as a protective mechanism that limits this exposure, withdrawing subjects into self-contained identities and reducing the transformative potential of relationality. Extending this framework, María Puig de la Bellacasa (2023) advocates for a more than human community to create a new sense of common material vitality, a new ecological culture of care for the non-human world, as well as more caring human-soil relationships.

It is due to this idea of community, one which is open to the participation and the assemblage of multiple agents, and which comes together as a concatenation of various actions projected over time, that several artistic projects configure

their space of agency. The experiences shared at the round table discussion by – A Estación Cultural, Mòdul Red de Cultura Urbana, Balmaceda Arte Joven, and ERIAC (European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture)[2] – demonstrate how culture intertwines with the political, the territorial, and the everyday. Each embodies a critical practice that promotes processes of *assemblage*, allowing participants to generate their own narratives, construct alternative worlds, and actively contribute to programmes that strengthen open and inclusive communities.

Two of these initiatives, A Estación Cultural (in an abandoned station in the town of Vedras in Galicia) and Mòdul Red de Cultura Urbana (in an abandoned site in the city of Hospitalet), originated from acts of taking a stand. In these two projects, the occupation of space has unleashed the debate, and with it the creation of collective involvement, and the construction of cultural models in which participating agents influence and try to improve their local context. Conversely, Balmaceda Arte Joven and ERIAC, it was because of young people or various Roma groups taking hold of the debate that it became possible to make a stand for, or to create spaces for difference, diversity, education, demands, opportunities, political action, or networking.

Within this broader framework, the European project EXPECT_Art can be understood as an educational assemblage in which care, interdependence, and cultural literacy intersect. Developed in primary school contexts and grounded in a critical and decolonial perspective, the project approaches everyday practices as spaces of knowledge production in which care operates as both a methodological principle and a relational infrastructure. Through fieldwork carried out in schools and local communities across several European countries, EXPECT_Art weaves networks between research institutions and cultural agents, activating a notion of community aligned with Esposito's understanding of plurality, openness, and relational exposure. In Barcelona, the project is implemented through collaboration between researchers from the University of Barcelona, the collective *Experimentem amb l'Art*, and teaching teams at the primary schools Drassanes and Mirades, building on a longstanding trajectory of joint work that includes training activities, research projects, and pedagogical initiatives linked to the Master's Degree in Visual Arts and Education (Esbrina Research Group, 2024; Experimentem amb l'Art, n.d.). Although its implementation is temporally delimited (2024–2026), EXPECT_Art forms part of an extended process of cooperation, allowing it to be conceived not as a discrete intervention but as a sustained inquiry into how care-based pedagogies and artistic practices can transform educational environments, foster cultural literacy, and consolidate open and inclusive communities.

From this perspective, community and immunity create a unitary tension: while communities seek protection through cohesion and self-definition, they also risk isolation by rejecting alterity. Yet within this friction lies the potential for redefinition. Hybrid forms of community—ecological, digital, dissident, interspecies—emerge as activist spaces which resist homogenisation and globalisation, foregrounding collective survival and shared responsibility.

In this context, Franco "Bifo" Berardi (2019) argues that one of the effects of globalism has been the annulment of modern universalism, since what circulates freely is capital, while neither the free circulation of people, nor the affirmation of the universal reason of the world, have managed to establish themselves. To counteract this period of "obscurantism", he advocates for solidarity among cognitive workers of the world and the creation of *techno-poetic platforms* liberated from both economic and ideological dogmas (p.155). Reclaiming this idea of communities of cooperation which emerge from concrete affinities, and which counteract the inertia of competitiveness that has been strongly established in the contemporary neoliberal context, is one of the ways that nourishes the horizon of possibility that this author suggests. However, the idea of building 'techno-poetic platforms' is relevant to the creative communities previously described in the aforementioned projects.

This pathway between community, immunity, and cooperation leads us to consider the ethical and political dimensions of care from the perspective of non-violence, as proposed by Butler (2020), who frames nonviolence as a commitment to equality grounded in interdependence. Butler proposes abandoning individualism and adopting a perspective based on interdependence, recognising that our lives are connected and that equality must arise from these social relationships. In this way, non-violence becomes an ethical and political practice which seeks to transform the conditions that make violence and inequality possible, imagining a future based on social equality and justice: 'non-violence is meaningless without a commitment to equality' (p. 33).

Positioned within Idensitat's broader research framework—including projects such as *Un(Open) Archive*—this article examines how care operates across assemblages of community, cultural practice, and institutional structures, particularly

[2]For more information about each of the projects, see their respective websites: A Estación Cultural (https://www.concellodevedra.es/gl/content/estaci%C3%B3n-cultural), Modul (https://contornourbano.com/modul-main-proba/), Balmaceda Arte Joven (https://www.balmacedartejoven.cl/), ERIAC (https://eriac.org).

in contexts marked by precarity and social fragmentation. The following section extends this analysis by exploring how contemporary artistic practices translate the ethics of care into operational forms.

(Un)Open Archive: Exploring Practices of Care

Continuing from the previous section, this third section introduces Un(Open) Archive (Idensitat, 2024), a research device based on artistic and curatorial processes. Using theoretical sampling, we selected three case studies which embody a distinct operational approach to care: infrastructural and organisational reconfiguration (Larre/Te(n) Cuidado), critical grammar and equity (Racco & Egaña/Museums as Gardens), and protocols and accessibility standards (LICC – Mindful Open Calls). Taken together, they enable cross-case comparison of complementary modalities through which care translates ethical discourses into tools, policies, and institutional procedures.

This device analyses how the principles of the ethics of care contribute to the fields of art and culture. Far from exhausting the concept in their rhetorical or circumstantial dimensions, a risk highlighted after its rapid institutional adoption in the post-pandemic period, this project aims to situate, problematise, and diversify the meaning of "care" through a curated anthology of video interviews. In these interviews, various voices involved in cultural and social practices critically examine the growing use of the term, contributing nuances, tensions, and strategies (Idensitat, 2024).

Un(Open) Archive is not conceived as a repository of documents, but as a relational and discursive assemblage. It foregrounds care as both a situated political practice and a form of relational infrastructure, engaging with concepts such as interdependence, shared responsibility, critiques of neoliberalism, and the destabilisation of the public/private divide (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Tronto, 1993; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Its methodology is rooted in the artistic and curatorial practice developed by Idensitat within the European project *Care Ecologies*, which brought together case studies and invited contributors to expand the notion of care in relation to situated artistic practices (Idensitat, 2024).

By connecting concepts contributed by multiple voices, *Un(Open) Archive* opens a multifaceted debate around care, highlighting its complexity and depth in contemporary society. The practices of representation and expression of the participants function as vehicles for problematisation. They question professional roles, spaces for relationship and interaction, ways of sharing responsibilities, and procedures for critical analysis; that is, they connect ways of making art with management mechanisms and with the need for the reconfiguration of institutions (Idensitat, 2024). Rather than a closed taxonomy, *Un(Open) Archive* offers a living lexicon, a grammar of care practices, which dialogues directly with the theoretical lines deployed in the previous chapter (Jackson, 2011; Held, 2006; Kester, 2011).

It is an ongoing project, from which three specific cases have been selected for presentation as a synthesis in the present article: Colectivo Larre with the project *Te(n) Cuidado*; Giuliana Racco, who together with Lucía Egaña promoted the project/book *La cultura no es una autopista, los museos podrían ser jardines* (Culture is not a motorway, museums could be gardens); and Natalia Carminati, co-author of the project *Guia para unas convocatoria cuidadas* (Guide for mindful open calls). These projects were produced in the context of Barcelona, although their processes were the result of connections which transcend this territorial framework. The aim is to illustrate, by an examination of these cases, how *Un(Open) Archive* materialises the intersections between care, community, assemblage, and interdependence.

Larre collective introduces the idea of circlusion as a means of repairing the excessive use of the term 'care' in the context contemporary art. Circlusión is a concept previously defined by Bini Adamczak (2016), through which she proposes a speculative change in the dynamics of sexual and political power. The author uses this sexual metaphor of penetration, in which circlusion, through the agency of embracing, encircling, or engulfing, reverses the relationship between the active and the passive: "Circlusion and penetration describe roughly the same material process, but from opposite perspectives. Penetration means to insert or stick in. Circlusion means to enclose or put over" (Adamczak, 2016).

For the Larre collective, the act of "circluding", spurs them to reflect upon other positions and modes of action on the concept of care applied to cultural organisations, agents and collectives, with regard to the transformation of institutions. The act of circluding is proposed as a way of actively addressing processes, needs, and operational dynamics, in which care, rather than cutting across institutions, should embrace or encircle them, thereby proposing a paradigm shift. This approach was put into practice between 2020 and 2022 within the framework of the *Te(n) cuidado* project (Larre, 2021), in relation to several fields, which include public space, economics, and forms of sustainability through collective and collaborative practices. With the implementation of this project, using various working groups, a toolbox aiming to catalyse other citizen projects was created. Finally, for Larre, the concept of care is a device for problematisation, for focusing upon issues which have not been adequately addressed, in order to place them front and centre. In this way, care becomes a catalyst for processes which attempt to agitate in order to generate change. In relation to the previous section, Larre shifts care from representation to infrastructure, from rhetoric to institutional engineering, engaging with the

critique of the precarisation of care work (Fokianakis, 2020), and with the interdependent dimension of agency (Jackson, 2011).

Giuliana Racco, in her contribution to the *(Un)Open Archive*, refers to the book *La cultura no es una autopista, los museos podrían ser jardines* (Egaña & Racco, 2024) which examines the much-needed transformation of cultural institutions. She points out that the work of institutions must extend far beyond the increasing overproduction of so-called 'diversity' (p. 13). In other words, artistic institutions should not limit themselves to being permeable to 'difference', but should abandon the colonialist, racist, capitalist, ableist, heterocentric paradigms which still permeate them. It is not a question of addressing these issues as mere themes, thus stripping them of their political and transformative potential.

In this context, Racco discusses the relationship between 'equality and equity' as a way of addressing inequality from the perspective of care ethics. Equality and equity are terms which have gained relevance in the struggle for social justice. Equality implies access to the same resources or opportunities, while equity recognises the diversity of circumstances and allocates the resources and opportunities necessary to achieve truly equal outcomes. While equality is built on the idea of comparison, equity approaches a more progressive notion of justice. It also problematises the term 'integration'. This term is associated with 'inclusion', understood as the ability to integrate or assimilate into a given social context. From the migrant experience, the process of adaptation to achieve integration is almost impossible to accomplish, as there is a persistent barrier that cannot be overcome. "There is always a perpetual threat of exclusion or expulsion for those who are applying for or awaiting integration" (p.75). This integration is a vague political concept, which blurs differences, establishing a demarcation which tends to lead to the expulsion of migrants.

The book edited by Egaña and Racco is the result of a collective artistic project carried out in 2022, in which numerous voices from the fields of art and social action participated. In it, they decided to address issues related to 'care and justice from the perspective of (mainly) migrant women working in the care sector' (p.15). The interview with Giuliana Racco for *(Un)Open Archive* was conducted in 2024, drawing upon some of the entries in the glossary which form part of the book. This critical point of view connects with a discussion from the previous chapter: care as the material recognition of differences (rather than homogenisation), redistribution, and nonviolence understood as a commitment to equality within interdependence (Butler, 2020).

Finally, the last case study is the project *Laboratorio de Ideas para Convocatorias Cuidadas- LICC*, organised by Tau Luna Acosta, Paula Bruna, Natalia Carminati, and Rosa Lendínez within the framework of *DIES, Devices of Artistic Activation and Digital Spaces* (Idensitat, 2021). This project began with a workshop during the time of Covid-19 and culminated in the publication of the book of the same title (Carminati *et al.*, 2023), aiming to craft a tool which would help shape open calls which are conscious and mindful of the effort and work that artists must invest in them. The project was initially created to respond to "the need to activate new structures for production and visibility in the cultural and creative sector; to research and reflect upon the production and formalisation of contemporary artistic practices; and to take into account the paradigm shift brought about by situations arising from isolation, control, and eco-social crisis" (Idensitat, 2021).

Natalia Carminati, in her contribution to *(Un) Open Archive*, comments that one of the fundamental aspects of care is listening, which subsequently gives way to fruitful dialogue. In the case of mindful open calls, in order to be consistent, this dialogue must take place between institutions and artists, taking into account the positions of both parties. It is necessary to clarify the fears and concerns which must be addressed between them in order to generate a collaborative dialogue when devising open calls for production or research.

One of the concepts she contributes is *justice of care*, as a necessity in building structures based upon trust. In this sense, the book functions as a tool which helps protect both the rights and the processes or results of artistic practice. The care created by bonds makes everything which has been built more sustainable, and justice helps to consolidate these structures. The result would be the creation of more accessible open calls, which also consider the work of people with disabilities, people of diverse origins, of different age groups, or with diverse functional conditions. The main objective of this tool was to integrate this diversity of perspectives into the open call's design. In line with the previous chapter, LICC translates the ethics of care into institutional design, operational criteria, and standards of accessibility, reinforcing the connection between care, collective agency, and sustainability (Idensitat, 2021; Carminati *et al.*, 2023).

These case studies highlight the need to decentralise artistic practices towards ideas of redistribution, equality, non-tokenised diversity, or healing. They declare that artists are a fundamental voice, championing a creative approach for sustainable transformation, focusing upon the collective, criticising a system which prays on those who challenge societal norms and traditional and exclusive structures of thought. They are premised upon imagining possible futures in which

mutual care, and care for our environment, are foregrounded; futures in which there is an improvement in subjective relationships, and a recovery of the community as a res publica, as a space of the commons, of emotion and learning. They also warn of the dangers of creating difference and/or exclusion when care becomes instrumentalised.

By drawing a connection between what was developed previously in *Intersections between Art and Care* with *Un (Open) Archive*, we find that care shifts from theory to operativity: from discourse to tools (Larre), protocols (LICC), and critical grammars (Racco/Egaña). We understand this shift as a way of grounding interdependence (Jackson, 2011) in assemblages of agents and support, in which care becomes a relational infrastructure for distributed agency. Care is activated as an institutional policy (transformation, redistribution, accessibility), in line with agency, ceasing to be an individual capability and becoming a collective action (Bennett, 2016), and with an ethics of nonviolence as a commitment to equality (Butler, 2020). Care also opens up to more-than-human communities (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, 2023), advancing frameworks of material sustainability, attention to infrastructures and environments, and territorial embeddedness.

Un(Open) Archive centres the debate upon care, in a choral experience which defines how a diversity of visions on this concept, whether from institutional structures, independent organisations, or autonomous artistic practices, foreground issues such as involvement, commitment, or mutual support, responding to present concerns by through connection, co-responsibility, and situated and proactive reflection. It strengthens the argument that art not only represents care but also enacts it as an infrastructure for designing open, equitable, and resilient communities.

Conclusion

We began this text with two intertwined questions: What does it mean to consider art through the ethics of care? How do we create processes of assemblage through situated artistic practices? In response, this article has been structured as an exercise in reflection across three sections.

The first section addresses the theoretical foundations of the ethics of care, drawing on feminist and eco-social contributions which conceive it as a political, relational, and transformative practice. The second section delves into the connection between artistic practices and care, emphasising the commons, community, assemblage, and the interdependence among various agents involved in situated creative processes. Finally, the third section focuses on the case study of *Un(Open) Archive* which introduces new conceptual dimensions of care through collaborative and participatory methodologies. Taken together, these sections attempt to respond to the initial questions, while also generating further inquiries shaped by the reflective nature of artistic production activated between 2021 and 2025.

As Vosman (2020) points out, care is a political reality that enables orderly communal living. Yet, in a contemporary world marked by explicit violence, it is necessary to ask: What space is left for care? Moreover: What place does care occupy within artistic practices committed to social issues?

Throughout this text, we have examined the relationship between care and socially situated artistic practices, emphasising the importance of care as an ethical-political framework for collective support, reparation, eco-social interdependence, and the recognition of vulnerability. Drawing upon feminist care theory and interdisciplinary approaches, we propose integrating care into institutional cultural spaces to foster collective and interrelational modes of creation, which are often neglected by dominant aesthetic frameworks. Understood in this way, artistic practice becomes a tool for advancing material, emotional, and community care, and for addressing issues arising from inequality, violence, and the absence of ethics of care. Moreover, many of these practices confront the limits of temporality: sustaining situated projects requires both institutional and self-managed structures capable of maintaining the relationships generated beyond the duration of the project itself. Only through such sustained commitment can care transcend its temporal boundaries.

The experience with *(Un)Open Archive* exemplifies how the ethics of care can transform artistic practices and contribute to foster structures oriented towards social change. Socially committed art thus emerges as a catalyst for aesthetic, ethical, and political transformation in times of system-wide crises. Art that organically integrates care contributes to the creation of more just social and ecological structures, emphasising collective action and solidarity in the face of structural inequality and institutional neglect, and crises.

As Groys (2022) notes, the public, symbolic, and mediatised body is beginning to coincide with the physical, private, and intimate body. This loss of privacy, amplified by contemporary social media, provokes a desire for restoration, but also shows that a return to strict privacy would imply the dismantling of the care system, which has been transferred to public and private institutions. Making the symbolic body of the project visible involves considering the desire for visibility – or invisibility – of those who participate in it; a decision that cannot be made unilaterally. Immunity, understood as

protection of the physical body, mirrors the immunity of the social and political body: in both cases, protection can become isolation. As Esposito (2009) argues, it is through the risk of contagion that the *commons* or the *communal* expands.

In this regard, the projects discussed highlight the need to incorporate others and learn from shared experiences. Fokianaki (2020) advocates for integrating others into collective practices that approach care from more transversal and intersectoral perspectives.

It is therefore essential to reimagine and revise the intergenerational frameworks that shape relationships within cultural institutions, incorporating a wider range of voices into decision-making processes. At the same time, we must redefine notions such as instability, ethics, inclusion, transparency, the value of work, rights and obligations, community and immunity. These perspectives together configure an expanded understanding of care—as a foundational ethical principle that should guide professional, artistic, and institutional relationships grounded in respect, equality, and mutual support.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

No data associated with this article.

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Ali FitzGibbon
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This paper draws from successive EU-supported research projects interrogating care in social engaged practice and makes a timely and relevant contribution to the growing body of research on ethics of care in arts practice. It is theoretically well suited in feminist ethics of care theory and deploys a range of literature to articulate the radical care, political and activist nature of care-based arts practices. Additionally, it highlights the significance of interdependence and relationality often rendered invisible through dominant aesthetic concerns within the arts field. The practitioner-researchers evidence their dual status as a framing of their inquiry and the article centers its empirical work on a single case study – the (Un)Open Archive – and three cases within that project; each of which embodies a different mode of care embedded; as critical grammar and equity, as infrastructural reconfiguration, and as protocols and accessibility.
Overall, this work highlights the significant reframing of and rush to care practices post-pandemic but articulates the next step of the discourse and field as translating this theoretical frame into embedded practices and embodied care.
Where I find this work does not realize its ambition and its valuable contribution (which it most certainly can make) is in a number of key points of articulation and explanation:

1. The work establishes an extended articulation of theoretical understanding of feminist care ethics, and this might be more effectively condensed and synthesized as it seems to be attempting to deliver both a theoretical essay and learning from an empirical case study. If it is to be the latter, it needs to have the theoretical discussion compressed and the different concepts better synthesized and reordered to arrive before the methodology. This would also allow some of the key terms deployed (i.e. assemblage) to be articulated before arriving at the research decisions and empirical findings. If not, the work would be better reframed as purely a theoretical essay that might be informed by the project in which the authors worked but without the case study component.
2. Often individual points of theory and single authors are interrogated independently which while interesting leaves less space for the empirical work (as noted above) and also leaves an isolation of these theories from each other (theoretical dialogue to advance the discourse) and distances them from the question of what is art as a care practice (or rather what is unique about it). This is particularly the case in the section on ‘Art and Care; Critical

Intersections'. I would recommend the authors reconsider how they are integrating or converging some of the concepts to make these less isolated in the writing. Equally some of the historical examples might be better synthesized into these wider conceptual discussions.

3. The case study and three sub-cases (as I understand this) are not particularly clearly articulated either methodologically or in the explanation in the findings. While data sources are explained there is very little rationale as to how these were selected by their concepts/approaches to care, how these approaches were defined or arrived at within or in advance of the wider case study, what actual embodied practices or reconfigurations these cases or the case study adopted, when, to what effect. There is no explanation of how many other cases might have been chosen, and the findings are descriptive rather than analytic, often appearing to be summarized from a book or a discussion record of the wider project. This means the reader cannot see what the authors see in these cases and as a result the contributions and conclusion are weakened. The paper should provide some stronger contextualization of the project and its cases and articulate a stronger explanation of how each case was conceptually identified and analyzed.
4. While implicit, it is not made explicit for the reader how some of the terminologies are defined. It would appear that this research is situated in the visual arts dimension of social arts practice and therefore a duality is set up that establishes the individual/autonomy versus the collective/interdependence. However, for the theoretical value of the work to be felt it is worth reflecting this explicitly early in the paper and/or to consider that there are many other forms of social arts/social engaged arts practices (in drama, music, etc.) that are by form collective and collaborative while still wrestling with questions of autonomy, vulnerability, relationality. Similarly, the article centers care but never really explains care of/for whom in the empirical work? Implicitly the concern expressed by the authors suggests it is the artists who need care, but it is not clear. As Belfiore (2021) notes care for one group such as community may detract care from another (the artist). Equally as practitioner: researchers, it is worth explaining for the reader if the institutional systems and structures being examined in this article, the case study and its subcases are academic, cultural, community or all of the above. Again, there is an implicit conceptual understanding, but it is not explicitly stated, leaving too much ambiguity. In this last recommendation, it is not to ask for all of these concepts, institutions and practices to be brought in but simply for the authors to be clearer in defining the terms of their research.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?

Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?

Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?

Partly

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?

Partly

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?

No source data required

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: cultural labour; ethics in arts & cultural management; cultural and creative ecosystems; artists and COVID19

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

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Anastasia Kavada
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This version of the article has been substantially revised based on the reviewers' comments on the first version of the article. The key themes of the literature review are now clearer as is the discussion of the three case studies and the reasons why these were selected for analysis. However, I have some suggestions for further clarifying the argument advanced in this article.

Firstly, the article would need a stronger introduction that clearly outlines the topic, the key research questions and the rationale of the article. I would suggest removing the first paragraph and starting from the second paragraph that is clearer and punchier. In the introduction, the authors would need to make a stronger statement about the core concerns of the article and state clearly their research questions. They should also connect this analysis with the Identisat project. Rather than foregrounding their own personal experience as artists, the rationale for this article could foreground the more general dynamics that drive the need for this analysis.

Secondly, I think that the section on Methodology should be moved right before the analysis of the three case studies as this would improve the flow of the argument.

Thirdly, since the section on 'Feminist Genealogies of Care in Situated Artistic Practices' includes broader discussions around care (this section includes in the beginning a review of the work of Tronto, Gilligan etc.), I suggest bringing it together with the previous section to avoid repetition of key themes.

Fourthly, although significantly revised and clearer than the previous version, I think that some more work needs to be done in structuring the literature review per theme rather than per author as I suggested in my previous review. For instance, the theme of interdependence could be developed by using insights from different authors or that of situatedness or embodiment or vulnerability. I would also start the literature review with a clear definition of care (such as the one by Fisher and Tronto).

Fifthly, the section outlining the connection between art and care ethics could be clearer. It seems from this section that art can advance care ethics both through cultural practices (i.e. through care work within/of artistic practice) and through its content and what it highlights. Yet, if so, this needs to be stated more explicitly in the text. This would create a more concrete basis for the analysis of the case studies.

Finally, the article now introduces the notion of assemblages and of distributed agency without explaining them in depth or connecting them directly with the discussion of care ethics or care work. While I understand the authors' approach and agree with them what these two approaches have many affinities (particularly with regards to parallels between relationality and interdependence), I do not think that this discussion around assemblage and agency, introduced so late in the article and in a section talking about a workshop organized by Identisat, is necessary to the theoretical framing advanced here. Since these are complicated concepts, that would need further explanation, I wonder whether the authors could analyze the case studies without them as indeed they did in the previous version of the article.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: social movements, democracy, care, digital media

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 15 June 2026

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Gretchen Coombs
Adelaide University, Adelaide, Australia

Summary
This article examines the relationship between feminist care ethics and socially situated artistic practices, proposing care as an ethical-political framework that foregrounds collective support, repair, interdependence, and vulnerability. Drawing primarily on feminist care theorists (Gilligan,

Tronto, Puig de la Bellacasa) alongside political philosophers (Butler, Esposito, Groys), the article argues for integrating care into institutional cultural contexts in order to cultivate relational and collective modes of creation that are often eclipsed by dominant aesthetic paradigms.
The central case study is the (Un)Open Archive (2023–2025), developed through Idensitat's Care Ecologies project, with three sub-cases: Larre/Te(n) Cuidado (care as infrastructural reconfiguration), Racco and Egaña/Museums as Gardens (care as critical grammar and equity), and LICC–Mindful Open Calls (care as protocols and accessibility). The article concludes that integrating care ethics into artistic practice reorients art ethically and politically, positioning art as care as collective maintenance, repair, and transformation.
This is a timely and relevant contribution to the growing field of socially engaged art and the growing body of work framing artistic practices within care ethics. The authors write from a position of practitioner-researcher investment in their subject, and the theoretical ambition is commendable. The article makes a meaningful case for care as both discourse and operational practice within cultural institutions, and the (Un)Open Archive project provides a sound case study for the kind of inquiry the authors are pursuing. With stronger engagement with the care aesthetics discourse, particularly the work of James Thompson and the broader field from which the Millner chapter draws, and with more detailed and grounded description of the case study projects, the article would be considerably more persuasive.
These revisions would also help the article fulfil its own ambition: to show that care in artistic practice is not merely rhetorical, but operational, material, and felt.

Major Points
1. More engagement with the care aesthetics discourse
The most significant gap in this article is its limited engagement with the emerging body of scholarship that sits specifically at the intersection of art practice and care ethics, "care aesthetics." The article draws extensively on feminist care ethics (Gilligan, Tronto, Puig de la Bellacasa, Held) and on socially engaged art theory (Kester, Jackson), but it does not adequately situate itself within the more specific discourse that connects these two fields. Millner (2024) is cited, and her work is clearly relevant, but it is used selectively rather than as an entry point into a broader conversation. James Thompson's work on care and performance, for example, represents a substantial body of thought on how care operates aesthetically and affectively within arts practice contexts, not merely as an ethical framework applied to art, but as a quality of the artistic encounter itself. This distinction matters for the claims the article makes in its later sections. Without this engagement, the theoretical bridge between feminist care ethics and the specific aesthetic and relational qualities of the case study projects remains underdeveloped. The authors should at minimum acknowledge this discourse, position their argument in relation to it, and clarify what their contribution adds to or departs from it.

2. Add more description of the case study projects
After reading the article in full, I remain uncertain about what the three case study projects actually looked or felt like as artistic and relational experiences. The descriptions of Larre/Te(n) Cuidado, Racco and Egaña/Museums as Gardens, and LICC–Mindful Open Calls are largely conceptual and discursive. We are told what each project argues or proposes, but we are given very little sense of the material, spatial, temporal, or affective dimensions of the work. Since the article's central claim is that these projects enact care, not merely represent or theorise it, this gap is consequential. What did a Te(n) Cuidado working group session involve? What does a "mindful open call" look like in practice, and how did artists respond to it? What was the experience of engaging with the (Un)Open Archive as a curatorial device? Thicker description of these projects

would not only strengthen the empirical dimension of the article but would also make the argument more persuasive to readers unfamiliar with the Barcelona-based context in which these projects were developed.

3. The art-specific theoretical framework needs strengthening
Related to the first point, the article's second section ("Art and Care: Critical Intersections") moves relatively quickly through a series of references, Ukeles, Group Material, Bruguera, Kester, Jackson, without developing a sustained theoretical account of what is distinctive about art as a site of care. The feminist care ethics framework is well established in the first section, but the art-specific theory does not achieve the same depth. This creates an imbalance that affects the credibility of the case study analysis: the projects are asked to carry more theoretical weight than the preceding framework has prepared the reader for. A more developed account of how artistic practice specifically, as distinct from community organising, social work, or institutional policy, enacts care would strengthen the article considerably.

Minor Points
1. Reflexivity about the authors' own institutional position
The authors acknowledge their dual role as practitioner-researchers and raise important self-critical questions about whether their involvement in residency programming contributes to precarity. This reflexive gesture is welcome, but it could be developed further, particularly in relation to the case studies. The projects discussed are embedded within European-funded research programmes (Horizon Europe, Creative Europe), which raises questions about the relationship between care ethics and the institutional and funding structures that make such projects possible. A brief acknowledgement of this tension would strengthen the article's critical credibility.

2. Minor editorial note
Please correct the spelling of Jaqueline on page 7 (currently spelled Jackeline)

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?
Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?
Partly

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?
Yes

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
No source data required

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: socially engaged art

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 02 June 2026

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Karina Donald
Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, USA

The manuscript explores the relationship between ethics of care and socially engaged artistic practices through feminist care theory, eco-social thought, and contemporary curatorial practices. Using the (Un)Open Archive project as its principal case study, the article argues that care should function as an ethical-political framework capable of reshaping artistic production, institutional structures, and community engagement. The manuscript situates artistic practice within broader contexts of interdependence, vulnerability, social justice, and collective responsibility, particularly in response to contemporary “polycrisis” conditions.

The manuscript makes a meaningful contribution to debates on socially engaged art, institutional critique, and care ethics. The topic is timely and potentially valuable, particularly in connecting feminist theories of care with artistic and curatorial practice. However, there are areas of weaknesses regarding conceptual precision, methodological clarity, evidentiary support, and argumentative structure. I must note that the manuscript contains strong theoretical ambitions, however, several sections continue to rely on broad assertions and abstract language that are insufficiently grounded in evidence or systematic analysis. These issues should be addressed before the article can be considered fully scientifically sound.

One of the main concerns relates to the introduction. The opening section contains numerous large claims about institutions, artistic practices, care, neoliberalism, and crisis that are presented as established truths without sufficient citation or empirical grounding. For example, the manuscript claims that many artistic organisations now place care at the centre of artistic processes and institutional relations, yet this assertion is not supported with references or concrete examples. Similar broad claims appear throughout the introductory discussion of socially engaged art, crisis, and institutional transformation. The introduction would be considerably stronger if it began with a clearer definition of the manuscript's main concepts and a more focused statement of the research problem. Rather than moving immediately into abstract claims,

the authors should first define what they mean by “care,” “situated artistic practices,” “care work,” “assemblage,” and “wicked problems,” and explain how these concepts relate to one another within the scope of the article.

This issue of conceptual ambiguity continues throughout the manuscript. Although definitions are eventually introduced later in the text, key concepts are often used before being clearly established. For instance, “wicked problems” appears in relation to Vosman’s work without explanation until much later, leaving readers unfamiliar with the term uncertain about its meaning or relevance. Also, “care work” is introduced in passing before receiving a brief explanation connected to Puig de la Bellacasa. The manuscript would benefit from a dedicated conceptual framing section early in the manuscript that systematically defines these central terms and explains their theoretical genealogy. This would improve coherence and accessibility, particularly for interdisciplinary readers outside philosophy, cultural studies, or feminist theory.

The methodology section remains underdeveloped despite revisions. The authors state that the study is grounded in practice-based research and critical reflections. However, the methodology does not sufficiently explain how the analysis was conducted. The manuscript states that “theoretical sampling” was used, but the criteria for selecting the three cases are not adequately justified. Why were these particular projects chosen over others? What specific analytical dimensions distinguished them? How were themes identified across cases? What procedures were used to compare and interpret the materials? The current description remains largely descriptive rather than methodological.

At present, the manuscript reads more like an extended theoretical essay than a case study. Greater transparency regarding analytical procedures is essential for evaluating the validity and reproducibility of the findings.

The discussion of the tension between Vosman and Groys is another area requiring substantial improvement. The manuscript repeatedly asserts that Groys’s institutional conception of care conflicts with Vosman’s relational and participatory ethics of care. However, this tension is largely asserted rather than demonstrated through close textual analysis or sustained comparison. The argument would be much more persuasive if the authors directly analysed specific passages from both thinkers and systematically compared their positions regarding institutions, preservation, vulnerability, and collective agency. Currently, the article tends to simplify Groys into a representative of institutional control while aligning Vosman with emancipatory care ethics, but the nuances of these theoretical positions are not fully explored.

In particular, the manuscript should avoid overstating incompatibilities without sufficient evidence. The authors themselves acknowledge that Groys is not directly engaging feminist care ethics. This acknowledgement is important, but it also reveals the need for a more careful explanation of why these theorists are being placed into dialogue in the first place.

Another weakness concerns the balance between theory and empirical material. The manuscript includes detailed theoretical discussion, yet, the case studies themselves are treated descriptively and are not always analysed deeply enough in relation to the theoretical framework. For example, the discussions of Larre, Racco and Egaña, and the LICC project contain interesting observations, but the analysis frequently remains at the level of summarising project aims rather than critically examining how these initiatives operationalise care ethics in practice. The manuscript would be

strengthened if the authors systematically connected each case study back to the specific conceptual debates introduced earlier in the manuscript. More direct evidence from interviews, participant observations, project documentation, or concrete examples of institutional transformation would help support the broader claims being made.

Despite these critiques, the manuscript has important strengths. The interdisciplinary engagement with feminist care ethics, eco-social thought, institutional critique, and artistic practice is ambitious and potentially valuable. The discussion of care as both a material and symbolic infrastructure for collective life is compelling, particularly when connected to contemporary artistic and curatorial practices. The manuscript also raises timely questions regarding institutional precarity, collective responsibility, and the political dimensions of artistic labour in contexts of social crisis.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?
Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?
Partly

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Partly

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?
Partly

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
Partly

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Arts-based research; feminist and social justice theories; qualitative research; artmaking processes.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 13 May 2026

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Kathryn Snyder
Temple University,, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

This manuscript is an important contribution to socially-engaged arts, community practices, and art within the larger ecosystem of health, wellness, care, community development, and equity. However, much of the writing continues to rely heavily on insider language such as philosophy and social theory rather than accessible language. It would be improved with some consideration to breaking down some concepts into more digestible form with a clear pathway into contemporary practice and meaning.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?
Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?
Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Partly

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?
Yes

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Art Therapy with an emphasis on community-based practices, ethics of care, developmental design, and integrative healthcare practices

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Version 1

Reviewer Report 06 February 2026

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Anastasia Kavada
University of Westminster, Westminster, UK

This is a theoretically engaged and insightful article on the relation between care and situated artistic practices. It provides a thorough literature review on the notion of care and on care ethics and a thought-provoking reflection on how care connects with art practices. I have however a few suggestions for clarifying the argument and for connecting it more directly with the evidence.

Section 1 offers a thorough literature review, but I suggest that this section is restructured so that it highlights the key themes in the literature on care ethics such as vulnerability and interdependence. In the current manuscript, the literature review is structured per author, providing a competent summary of each scholar's perspective. However, this structure does not serve in highlighting the similarities and differences between these scholars with regards to key themes. Hence, structuring this review by theme would provide a clearer sense of the literature. For instance, the authors could explain the notion of interdependence in one or consecutive paragraphs, bringing together different voices and outlining common concerns or points of divergence.

This section would also need a more robust definition of the notion of care. The authors mention a definition by Groys in the beginning of this section and the one by Fisher and Tronto much later in the review. I would suggest bringing these two definitions together for clarity and also because Fisher and Tronto's definition is more fitting to the approach of this article (and indeed it is a major touchpoint for the work of Puig della Bellacasa that is a major influence for the analysis in this article). Beginning this section with a clearer and more thorough definition will help in setting the argument on a more concrete basis.

What also seems to be missing in this discussion is the emphasis that many authors place on care as a practice or action – 'care-work' as Puig della Bellacasa calls it. I think this could be explained further since the article focuses on 'situated art practices'.

This section could also include a more thorough discussion of the limitations of care as a concept and as a practice. Authors like Tronto show how care is not always related with equity and equality. Care can form the basis for paternalistic relationships or for the exclusion from the polis of those who need to be cared for. The work of Judith Butler on vulnerability and injury offers further support to this view. Care, in this respect, can be considered as lens to investigate power relationships – whose needs are being cared for? Who is responsible for the labour of care? Who is erased? And what are the power dynamics between care-givers and care-receivers?

This more critical understanding of the notion of care can then inform the analysis on the

institutionalisation of care relationships. What happens when care is institutionalised? What is being lost and what is being gained in terms of care as an ethic and practice?
The following section, on care in relation to art, could also be restructured a bit so that instead of summarising the work of different authors in separate paragraphs, it, again, highlights the key themes. Care can connect with art practice in various ways as this section argues: through assembly and bringing people together in community, but also through the concrete practice and action of how participatory art is undertaken. For instance, this will connect this review more clearly with the discussion of the work of Natalia Carminate on mindful open calls Section 3.

This section could also include a longer discussion of what happens to the connection between care and art when art is institutionalised, continuing the discussion on institutionalisation from Section 1 to Section 2 of the article.

Section 2 refers to two art initiatives that needed further explanation in order for the reader who is not familiar with these examples to grasp how they connect with the argument.

In Section 3 the authors could provide a clearer explanation of why they selected these specific projects to feature. Is it because they highlight different aspects of the relationship between art and care? If so, in which ways? A more clearly structured discussion in Section 2 will serve as a basis for the discussion of examples in Section 3 which, at the moment, remains rather on the descriptive level (although it is very interesting indeed). In this respect, the authors could take the concluding paragraph of this section – that nicely pulls out key themes – as a guide for structuring this section.

Finally, an editing comment: I think that Judith Butler is using they/them pronouns.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?
Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?
Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Partly

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?
Partly

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: social movements, democracy, care, digital media

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 22 Mar 2026

Ramon Parramon

We sincerely thank you for your thoughtful and constructive comments. Taking into account the suggestions of both reviewers, we have revised the manuscript extensively, rewriting key sections and uploading a new version. We highlight that the theoretical references are now more clearly integrated with the central themes concerning care and situated artistic practices. The methodology, as well as the connection between the case studies and the theoretical framework, has also been further specified to enhance coherence between theory and practice.
Below we respond point by point, indicating precisely where the manuscript has been revised. **- The manuscript has undergone substantial revision**
The manuscript has been significantly revised in both its writing and conceptual articulation. Several sections have been rewritten or expanded in response to the reviewer's suggestions. The theoretical framework is now more clearly connected to the themes that link care and socially situated artistic practices, ensuring greater coherence between conceptual references and the empirical material. **- Reorganisation of Section 1**
We reorganised Section 1 to strengthen the definition of care as an ethical framing for situated art practice, highlighting commonalities and tensions across authors, and foregrounding key concepts within care ethics such as interdependence, vulnerability, equity, politics of support, care-work, and institutionalisation.
This structure clarifies earlier material in Section 1 regarding the authors referenced, the various definitions of care, and the role of care-work. The reorganised section also includes a new dedicated subsection, "Power, equity and the risks of paternalism," which consolidates and highlights these limitations. **- Improvements in Section 2**
Section 2 now reads more smoothly, with a micro-summary reinforcing how assembly, mutual support, and relational infrastructures translate into operational devices and organisational transformations in art contexts.
• The thread on institutionalisation (introduced in Section 1) is explicitly carried into Section 2 and subsequently examined through the three case studies in Section 3 (tools, protocols, critical grammars). **- Strengthened articulation in Section 3**
We added two opening sentences in Section 3 stating the theoretical sampling rationale and clarifying what each case operationalises (infrastructure/organisation; critical grammar/equity; protocols/accessibility).
We have reinforced the analytic articulation in Section 3 by:
• explicitly indicating why each case was selected (distinct operational articulations: infrastructure/organisation; critical grammar/equity; protocols/accessibility)
• making explicit cross links to core constructs (interdependence, institutional critique, redistribution, accessibility, non violence) in the closing synthesis of Section 3 **Summary**
Collectively, these changes make the methodology clearer and more transparent; restructure the theoretical review by themes with a robust definition of care at the outset;

clarify transitions and justify the case study selection; and strengthen the analytical integration between the ethics of care and the artistic empirical cases.
We are grateful for your insights, which have contributed to improving the clarity and relevance of the manuscript.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 10 January 2026

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Triyono Triyono
Universitas PGRI Sumatera Barat, Sumatera Barat, Kota Padang, Indonesia

Regarding Methodology and Engagement with Relevant Literature (Question 2)
The article demonstrates strong engagement with relevant and up-to-date secondary literature, particularly key contributions in the field of ethics of care and socially engaged art. However, the methodological approach underlying the *(Un)Open Archive* case study remains implicit rather than explicitly articulated. To enhance academic rigor, the authors are encouraged to clearly define the methodological positioning of the study (e.g., reflective case study, practice-based research, or critical qualitative inquiry). Including a brief methodology section outlining case selection, analytical strategy, and researcher positionality would substantially strengthen the transparency and validity of the research.
Regarding Clarity and Persuasiveness of Presentation (Question 3)
Overall, the article is well structured and conceptually coherent, with a logical progression from theoretical foundations to empirical reflection. Nevertheless, the dense theoretical discussion and reflective narrative style may pose accessibility challenges for readers outside specialised fields. The inclusion of concise conceptual summaries at the end of major sections, along with clearer transitions between theoretical discussion and empirical reflection, would help make the analytical connections more explicit and improve readability.
Regarding the Strength of Arguments and Supporting Evidence (Question 4)
The normative and theoretical arguments presented are persuasive and well supported by the existing scholarly literature. However, the empirical dimension of the case study relies primarily on descriptive and reflective accounts rather than systematic qualitative analysis. The case study section would benefit from clearer analytical insights, such as the identification of thematic patterns, comparative reflections, or illustrative excerpts from participant contributions. More explicit linkage between the case study observations and the ethics of care framework would further strengthen the coherence and persuasiveness of the overall argument.

References

1. Millner J: Care ethics and contemporary art: Imagining and practising care. *Thesis Eleven*. 2024; **183** (1): 103-118 Publisher Full Text

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?
Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?
Partly

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Partly

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?
Partly

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
No source data required

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Interdisciplinary Humanities; Cultural Studies; Ethics of Care and Social Theory

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 22 Mar 2026

Ramon Parramon

We sincerely thank you for your thoughtful and constructive comments. Taking into account the suggestions of both reviewers, we have revised the manuscript extensively, rewriting key sections. We highlight that the theoretical references are now more clearly integrated with the central themes concerning care and situated artistic practices. The methodology, as well as the connection between the case studies and the theoretical framework, has also been further specified to enhance coherence between theory and practice.
Below we respond point by point, indicating precisely where the manuscript has been revised.
- Methodology needs to be made explicit
The methodology has been specified in more detail, clarifying the connection between the selected case studies and the theoretical foundations of the article. This revised version seeks to strengthen the synergy between theory and practice throughout the text.

Additionally, some new references have been incorporated to reinforce key arguments and to support the newly added sections.

- Improving readability

We inserted micro summaries which synthesise key takeaways and signal the transition to the next section:

- End of Section 1: synthesises the care framework as relational infrastructure and prepares the movement from theory to operativity.
- End of Section 2 (or 2.1): synthesises interconnections among art, assemblage, and organisational transformations, setting up Section 3.

- Strengthen the empirical dimension: themes, comparative insights, and links to care ethics.

We have reinforced the analytic articulation in Section 3 by:

- explicitly indicating why each case was selected (distinct operational articulations: infrastructure/organisation; critical grammar/equity; protocols/accessibility)
- making explicit cross links to core constructs (interdependence, institutional critique, redistribution, accessibility, non violence) in the closing synthesis of Section 3.

Summary

Collectively, these changes make the methodology explicit and transparent; restructure the theoretical review by themes with a robust definition of care up front; clarify transitions and justify the case study selection; and strengthen the analytical integration between the ethics of care and the empirical cases.

We are grateful for your insights, which have contribute to improving the clarity and relevance of the manuscript.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.