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Care and Critical Action

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EDITORIAL

This issue proposes care as critical action, which we introduced as one of the analytic instruments to critique capitalist modes of spatial production, such as has been put forward by Ellen Meiksins Wood in *Democracy Against Capitalism* (2016). By putting forward perspectives on urban care, institutions of care, and care as agency, we argue that care as critical action refers to individual and collective mobilization for the radical changes society needs today. Regrettably, it has been overshadowed by regressive forms of individualism, undermining the social imagination and eroding civic institutions. Care for “the other,” for individual and collective life, for the planet, and for the city must be brought to the forefront in our relations of thought.

This issue begins with two theoretical papers. In “My neighbour, the subject of civilisation,” Lorens Holm presents a textured reflection that focuses on the neighbour both as figure and figure of thought, which enables Holm to cross between the ethical discourse of care and the spatial discourse of architecture and the urban. Holm focuses on the party wall as a spatial element that articulates the care of the other, the neighbour. For Holm, we are all neighbours and yet there is always an ambivalence in this relation, which is laced with violence—violence of enclosure, the governance of a party wall, fields, land, city, the split subject; and of civilisational discontent. Holm argues that care is a relation. Holm writes: “Ethics is about living well together. Living well appears not to be something that resides in the individual, but between them.” In “Deconstructing Hospitality: Postcolonial Care in the Built Environment,” Nathanael Nelson revisits selected seminal texts by Jacques Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, and places them in an inventive dialogue with bell hooks on the themes of otherness, hospitality, decolonization, and radical action. Nelson quotes hooks as follows: “These margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resist-

ance [...] we are more silent when it comes to speaking of the margin as a site of resistance.” In Nelson’s essay, care takes on a transgressive role.

Papers by Andrew Copolov followed by Ceara O’Leary, Jiayi Jin and Yuxin Wu, then Lee Ivett and Ecaterina Stefanescu bring the notion of care more directly into the practices and inhabitation of the city. In “The urban staff room: Between institutional and mutualistic care in Melbourne’s gig economy,” Copolov articulates the urban staff room as a micro-institution of care in the civic realm and argues for care as a mutual activity. Copolov brings the “voice” of gig workers into the text. In “Community Hubs as Networks of Care,” O’Leary describes the network of small-scale community spaces in Detroit as an inherently informal and semi-institutional way to establish caring practices. Such spaces are seen by the author as enablers of connections among marginalised citizens, whose voices are often unheard by institutional top-down process of place making. In “Careful Careless — A Systems Thinking to Restore Ecological Systems in Cities,” Jin and Wu emphasise care of urban land and address question of soil as ground and the need for interspecies care—the foxes, the hedgehogs, the pigeons—as urban actors. In “To Make is to Care,” Ivett and Stefanescu reflect on three moments of care as agency. They propose the categories of representation, intervention, and transition as the terms around which care as method and critical principle frame a thoughtful approach to architecture and urbanism with an ethical imperative. In “For a relational understanding of care in critical urban action,” Jonathan Orlek, Claire McAndrew, Cristina Cerulli, Mara Ferreri, Marianna Cavada, and Eleanor Ratcliffe draw together reflections on their collaborative research project “Caring—with Cities” (2021–23). It investigated multiple forms of caring across neighbourhoods, towns, and cities in England, involving urban residents, community groups, public sector officers, and



urban professionals, reflecting on the role of the engaged spatial practitioner in such a framework of action. They ask: what forms of “caring—with” practices successfully recognise, value, support and amplify care within cities? They aim to shift the terms of discourse to “caring—with,” rather than “caring—about” or “caring—for.” They argue that this shifts care as interrelational, drawing on Joan Tronto’s proposition of caring—with as a different way of envisaging care as “an ongoing system of caring acts in which we’re sometimes on an extreme end of the giving–receiving scale, and sometimes in the middle.”

In “The caregivers’ strike: a tale of violence and care in the entrails of San Salvador,” Sofia Rivera-García brings terrifying attention to a hidden and violent phenomenon. The essay introduces the concepts of *cuero-territorio* [body/territory relation] and *acuerpamiento* [bodily infrastructures of care], to understand the practices and feelings of individual bodies as collective bodies. Rivera-García conceptualises the body as a territory and care as a collaborative practice, providing a definition of infrastructures of care that resonates and updates Arendt, to engage with “complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices (. . .) reproducing life in the city.”

We conclude with a set of papers that reflect on the politics and poetics of care as critical action. Mathilde Redouté reflects on a politics for common care in “Curated commoning,” on the movement from commons to enclosure, with a critique of originary accumulation and references to Elinor Ostrom and Silvia Federici. In “Paths of banana trees: passages of care between unequal worlds,” Carolina Correia dos Santos and Iazana Guizzo describe the care for the territory as a process of “becoming forest” to allow the landscapes to reactivate our bodies and consequently to further complicate the nature/social pairing of the Anthropocene—our geologic era when

social and natural relations are entangled with all sorts of discursive and technological forces. Huda Tayob’s conclusive essay “Archival Care” discusses her and Bongani Kona’s project “The Archive of Forgetfulness,” a pan-African digital exhibition and podcast series which ran in 2020 and 2021. Drawing inspiration from Mahmoud Darwish’s poem “Memory for Forgetfulness,” the Tayob and Kona’s archive questions how we might engage with what exists in the failure of memory. In the project, practices of care extend from the labour of maintaining neighbourliness, to multiple, small acts of refusal. Tayob argues that the attention to forgetfulness, to un-listened and un-spoken stories, is grounded in practices of peripheral care and constitute an agency of “small refusal.” This essay opens reflections on the theoretical underpinning of care as a tool for critical action, a framework to analyse and dismantle power relations, and to re-establish spatial counternarratives.

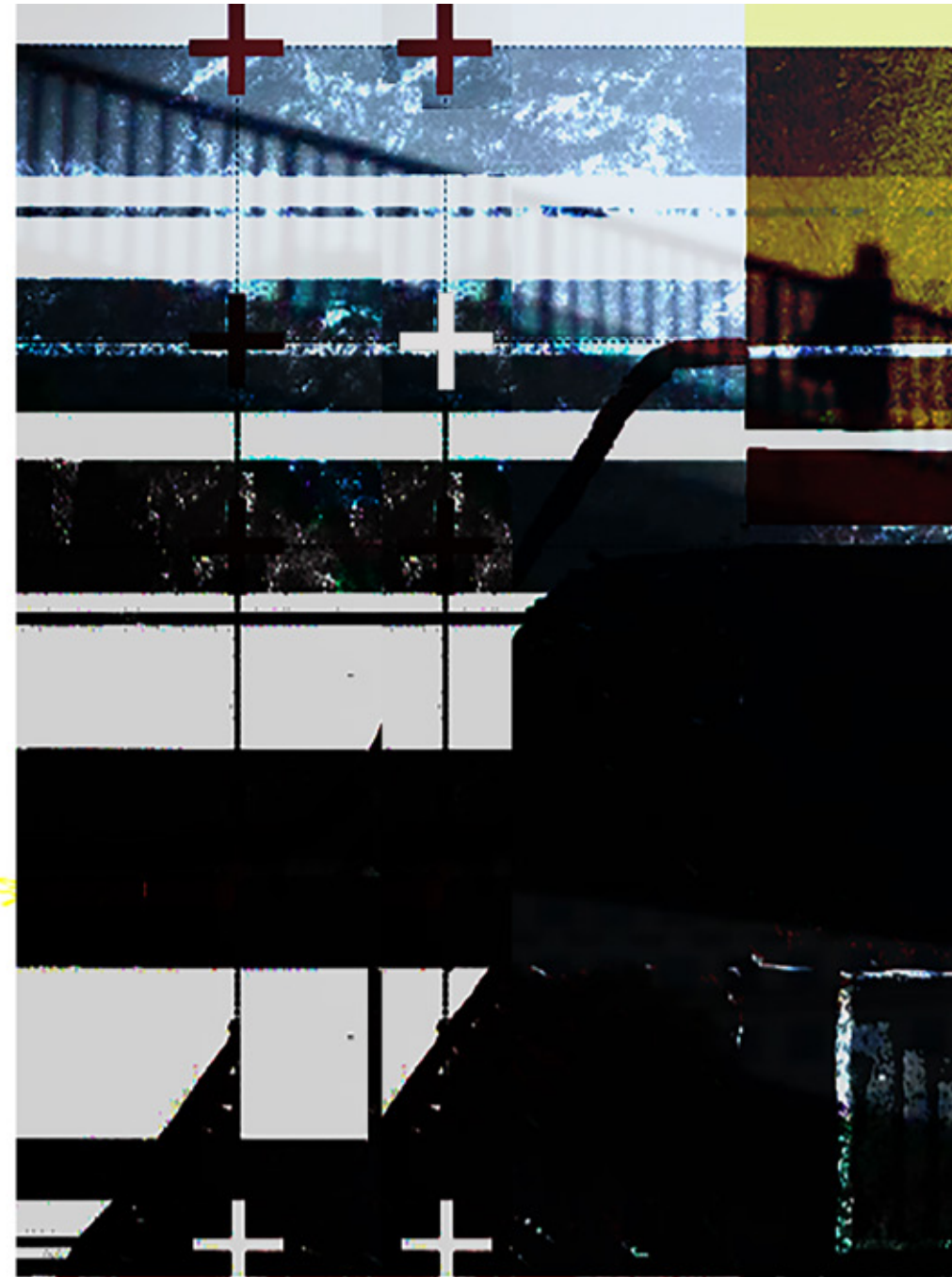
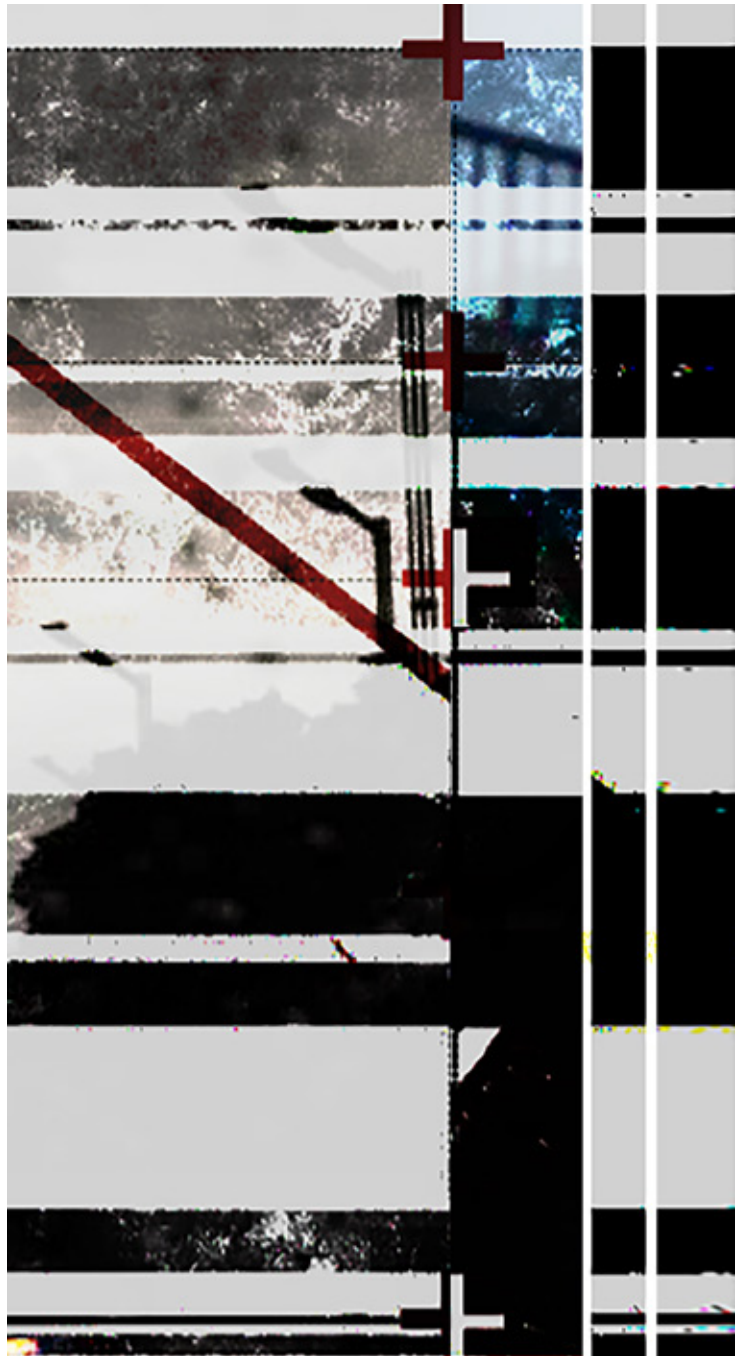
Throughout the issue, the visual essay by Patrizio Martinelli, “Urban transparencies: The city as a palimpsest for action and care,” offers a provocative reading of the city as a palimpsest. Rowe and Slutzky’s notion of “transparency” is critically used by Martinelli to represent the interpenetration and overlapping of figures that compose the city, without optically destroying each other. This is achieved through the representation of depths, the simultaneity of the social experiences, along with the varying degrees of opacities that blur elements and merge figures into one another. Between the layers, elements, and experiences that these portraits of urban fragments express, Martinelli offers an imagery of the city that alludes to forms of action and spatial care, in overlapping time, space, and collective life.

The papers discussed in this issue developed and challenged the idea of care as critical action, which becomes an interdisciplinary tool to read, analyse, interact with, and act upon the the

urban environment, across different cultures and geographies. It is to re-establish the ideas, values, and a promise of new civic institutions that connect to the ongoing struggle over social, political, and democratic life. The challenge is to find methods and practices for kinship, mutual endeavour, and an ethics of care, as tasks for

an effective response to the breakdown of our cities and planet. The task is to reimagine care as critical action across scales, from the individual to social relations, and planetary entanglements.

N.B., C.M.E. & C.M.



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edited by // Cameron McEwan, Nadia Bertolino & Cristina Mattiucci

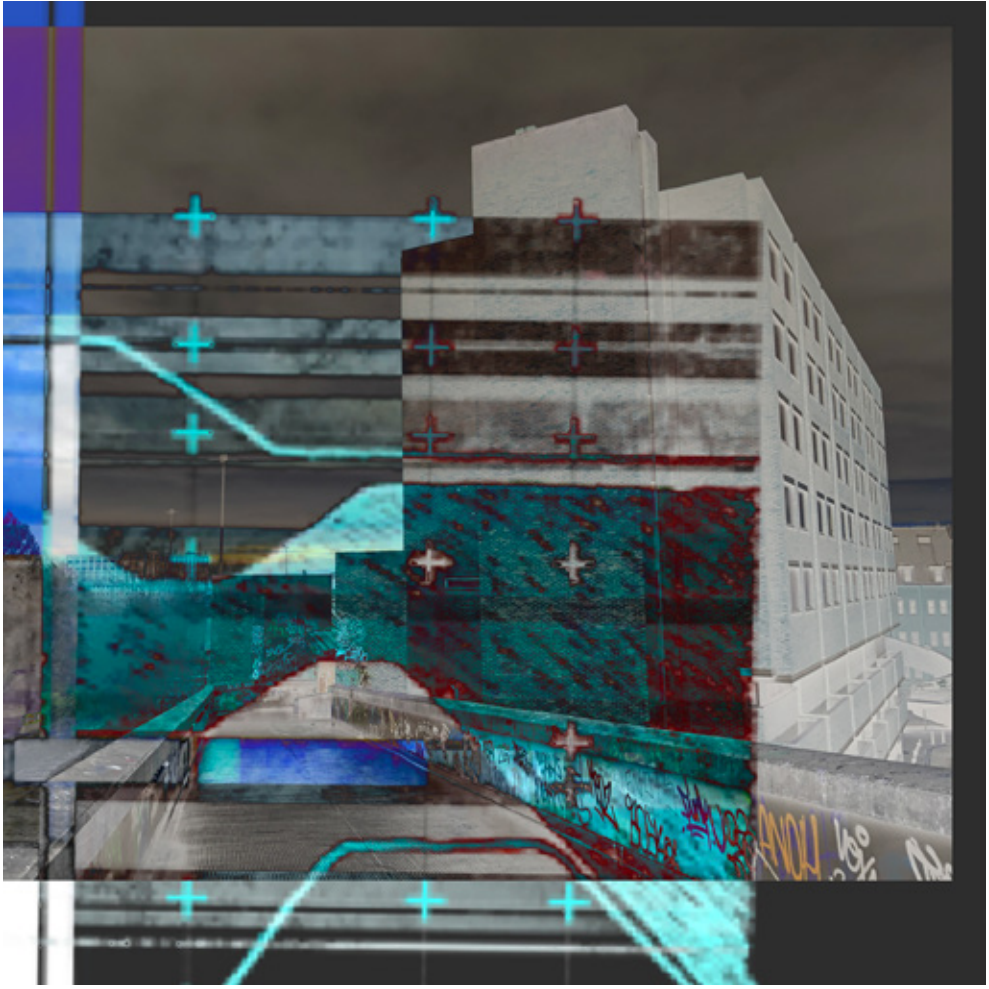
Guest Artist // Patrizio Martinelli

Io Squaderno is a project by Andrea Mubi Brighenti, Cristina Mattiucci & Andrea Pavoni.

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In the next issue:
Glossy Urban Dystopias

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