

***Critique and care,
critique of care***

*Artistic practice as a space
for fragility and contact:
a transformative tool
in the society of productivity*

Paola d'Andrea

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TO MILO

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Abstract

This thesis explores artistic practice as an open and evolving process guided by three key principles: fragility, encounter, and care. Drawing on an intimate research experience in the Fontainhas area of Porto, it presents a methodology that intertwines artistic exploration with the human and social landscape. The first chapter analyses fragility not as weakness, but as a generative condition of critical and creative thought. The second chapter explores encounters and contacts as expansive practices, mediated by art and the artistic object, that reflect on regeneration as an evolutionary response to the capitalist model. The third chapter analyses the concept of care, restoring depth and complexity to the term and overcoming reductive interpretations and simplistic interpretations. When understood as responsibility and relationship, care becomes a tool for imagining an artistic practice that can respond to fragility and activate transformation processes. Through these three steps, the thesis proposes a methodology based on sensitive and poetic action that is constantly intertwined with the socio-environmental context.

Keywords

Fragility, Contact, Care Practices, Ephemeral.

Resumo

Esta tese explora a prática artística como um processo aberto e evolutivo guiado por três princípios-chave: a fragilidade, o encontro e o cuidado. Partindo de uma experiência de investigação íntima na zona das Fontainhas, no Porto, apresenta uma metodologia que entrelaça a exploração artística com a paisagem humana e social. O primeiro capítulo analisa a fragilidade não como fraqueza, mas como uma condição geradora de pensamento crítico e criativo. O segundo capítulo explora os encontros e contactos como práticas expansivas, mediadas pela arte e pelo objeto artístico, que reflectem sobre a regeneração como resposta evolutiva ao modelo capitalista. O terceiro capítulo analisa o conceito de cuidado, devolvendo profundidade e complexidade ao termo e ultrapassando interpretações redutoras e simplistas. Quando entendido como responsabilidade e relação, o cuidado torna-se uma ferramenta para imaginar uma prática artística que possa responder à fragilidade e ativar processos de transformação. Por meio desses três passos, a tese propõe uma metodologia baseada na ação sensível e poética, constantemente entrelaçada com o contexto socioambiental.

Palavras-chave

Fragilidade, Contacto, Práticas de cuidado, Efémero.

About the translation

I have chosen to read and quote mainly Italian texts, as it is my mother tongue and enables me to understand and express the nuances of my research precisely. Italian is an integral part of who I am; it has shaped my thoughts and the way I express myself, and it continues to support and guide me today. For this reason, many of the cited sources are from works that I read in Italian. I personally translated the quotations into English, except for those from Donna Haraway's books.

Similarly, some of the artists I refer to are Italian: my artistic training and personal experience have been shaped by the sensitivity and expressiveness of my country's culture. However, my status as a perpetual traveller, both physically and metaphorically, has led me to experience and explore diverse global contexts, broadening my perspectives and cultural references, and fostering an open and eclectic artistic approach. In this perspective, the artist becomes intertwined with the context they inhabit, moving as a global citizen and an explorer of various realities.

Note on images and chapter introductions

To accompany the reader on the visual journey of the thesis, I have made a conscious stylistic choice to differentiate between black and white images, when created by third parties and found in digital archives, and colour images, which are photographs taken by me during my artistic practice, research and travel experiences. This distinction creates an immediate and intuitive visual vocabulary, highlighting my active and direct gaze on places and works. This choice aims for clarity and an essential aesthetic, facilitating the sensory reading of the text and integrating written research with visual research.

Each chapter opens with a cinematic reference, a device that echoes Jack Halberstam's methodology in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), where the use of pop-culture images introduces more complex concepts. The scenes taken from cinema serve as an immediate preface: evocative and familiar, they appeal to the senses of sight and action, offering the reader a first concrete link to the themes I will develop.

Arriving with the van

For some people, the relationship with art is a lifelong journey: a necessary, wonderful and simultaneously arduous one. The journey that has led me to present this thesis has deep roots that sink into a lifetime of experiences, but for the sake of consistency with the context, I will consider it to have begun in September 2023. It began with my arrival in the Fontainhas area of Porto. From the moment I parked the van and threw open its tailgate in the narrow, dead-end street, this area has served as a backdrop and a resource for my artistic and personal journey over the past two years.

The Fontainhas area was extremely important to me, firstly because it made it easy for me to settle into my new life in an unknown city. There are few places where we “travellers on wheels”¹ can integrate into city life, in much the same way that artists often struggle to integrate into the socio-economic fabric. Like the *traveller*, the artist arrives where he/she is not expected; he/she slips into the cracks of a place – physical or imaginary – to observe, inhabit and adapt to it, using the surrounding space for expression and survival. For me, Fontainhas was *the Place* of survival and existence. I lived there for several days, finding water to quench my thirst, silence to sleep and contact with the social fabric of the city.



My camper van where I lived for a week in Fontainhas, research Image, 2023.

For this reason, it became a fundamental point of research and artistic practice, present in many of my works and this thesis, both directly and indirectly.

¹ Expression that indicates people who choose to travel using autonomous mobile means – such as campers, vans or caravans – combining travel and accommodation in a single solution, often with an itinerant and independent lifestyle.

From the very beginning, Fontainhas has enabled me to engage in an activity that is as essential for my survival and that of all living beings as breathing or eating: encountering others². *Meeting* people or things, and exchanging ideas, is an essential part of living well. In my experience, the encounter is an expansive act in both time and space. It allows us to connect with our surroundings, find solutions and feel stimulated by the socio-environmental ecosystem of which we are a part. It represents the ability to be present in a place, to listen to it, observe it and interact with it in a respectful and consensual way.



Images from the Park4night platform where I found parking tips, research image, 2023.

Today, the Fontainhas neighborhood stands as a living testament to the transitions brought about by gentrification: a neighborhood reshaped by historical territorial processes and public decisions that displaced residents at various times, for instance, during the construction of the Infante Dom Henrique Bridge, and more recently,

² Encounter: From the Latin *in contra* ('to go towards the other'), it is the act or moment in which two or more subjects find themselves in the same place, either intentionally or casually. It can refer to a specific event, such as a physical meeting between people, or a more abstract concept, such as the comparison of ideas, cultures or sensibilities.

due to conflicting policies between local housing and the tourism industry. What remains are the material and social traces of a process that never included a genuine regeneration plan, only the liberal decision to entrust private, mostly foreign, investors with the task of turning the area into a tourist destination.

The consequences of this socio-political transition are reflected in the space itself, where homeless people now seek refuge, living in tents and cars. So Fontainhas exists in a socially complex state, a kind of temporary suspension, while the surrounding Bonfim neighborhood undergoes rapid transformation. This interstitial identity, undefined by rigid structures, makes it an osmotic place and grants it a small margin of freedom: an urban space where people can still socialize, embrace idleness, and exist outside the logic of the market. Here, some people have created an urban garden as a concrete response to institutional inadequacy, and as a way to meet their social need for both shelter and access to food.

It remains a living place, yet one permeated by uncertainty about the future: no one knows how much longer this space will remain public, how much longer its beautiful river view will be accessible to all—and not only to those who can afford it.

This peculiarities allowed me to better understand the socio-cultural context into which I was integrating and, at the same time, have helped me to avoid feeling like a total stranger in an unfamiliar place. Both the Faculty of Fine Arts and my house are located close to Fontainhas, which has become one of my favourite places in the city. I spend time there practising and analysing life in public spaces. *Morar nas Fontainhas* (2023) was the first artistic work that I presented at the Fine Arts Academy, and it reflects my experience of inhabiting public spaces, emphasising that meeting is an intimate and artistic practice that can be translated into a methodology. In fact, my works develop around what is most accessible to me in terms of proxemics, economics and emotion, as well as the casual manner in which life presents me with certain ideas, facts or people. What I encounter on my travels provides material for my work, and what I need to practise will be encountered during my travels.



[Morar as Fontainhas](#), video, 2023.

Practice

Practice is a word that fully describes the identity of those who create. Practice: *being practical*¹, repeating an action over time, overcoming the limits of the *ideal*², materialising in reality.

¹ By “being practical”, we mean having the ability to deal with situations and problems in a concrete, functional and effective way. This involves prioritising direct experience, action and operational resolution over theoretical abstraction.

² Something that is perfect only in theory, but without any actual confirmation in reality.

This concept has fundamental weight in my research, defining a path in progress, never closed or concluded, ready to integrate new discoveries and open to encounter.

Practice is the space in which I shape the world according to my perspectives; it is the place where I gain experience, express and transform myself. Practice helps develop skills to respond to fragility: *care practices*. These, arising from the instinct of survival and evolution, support the creative possibilities of the human imagination and even artistic creation.

Methodology

The chapters of my thesis are structured to reflect my artistic methodology. My creative process begins when I start observing my surroundings, taking into account my own needs and those of the community around me. I use the present as a starting point for my creative thinking, embracing all its imperfections and contradictions.

My projects take shape from enquiry and necessity: I do speak about it in the first chapter dedicated to fragility, understood as a starting point for imagination, reaction, strength rather than weakness, to develop critical and creative thinking.

To develop these concepts, I get accompanied by the philosopher and queer feminist theorist Judith Butler, who has reflected a lot on the theme of fragility, especially in relation to the body. Vulnerability is a political dimension of existence, *precariousness* is a universal human condition, politically distributed in an unequal way. Despite its vulnerability, the body acts, protests and occupies spaces. It uses its fragility to create tension with power. Reflecting on this, the first investigative question that arose was:

How can artistic practice be guided by fragility?

The second chapter focuses on the concept of *encounter*, when fragility comes into *contact* with other elements of the landscape. It explains my interest in art in public spaces: the relationship, sharing and resonance of artistic practice in the external world. Contact enables human beings to survive by sharing, forming collectives and developing possible solutions. Donna Haraway's Cyborg feminist theory has stimulated important reflections on my identity. Haraway has the ability to envisage the future: she describes it clearly and, like the greatest artists, enables others to see it too. Her ideas overcome the past and present to realise the future, relieving us of the inconsistent weight of utopia. Dualisms such as man-woman and natural-artificial are overcome, and hybridisation, guided by consciousness, will and freedom, begins. This chapter asks:

How can artistic practice be a tool for contact and encounter?

In the last chapter, I address the topic of *care*, which is the subject of much debate in academic and political circles today and has become inflated in both the capitalist mainstream and the militant

underground.

The term *care* has become so widespread that it risks losing depth and meaning. It is often used generically or rhetorically without delving into its complexity. *Care* implies effort, responsibility, relationships and time. For privileged individuals, this means questioning themselves, to avoid emptying it of its transformative potential and reducing it to an ambiguous term that can be exploited and disconnected from concrete practices.

Fortunately, I met the philosopher Boris Groys, who clarified the real contradictions that accompany this word for me. Consequently, I was able to identify the concept of care as the third pillar of my methodology. When I dedicate myself to the contradictions of the present without imposing self-referential or preconceived ideas, I enable reality to emerge. When I act as an artist, I disappear into my practice, enabling it to relate to the world. The resulting outputs have a life of their own and provoke reactions from the audience that are all valid. I observe and listen; I camouflage myself within the socio-environmental landscape, because ultimately, I am part of it.

The third investigative question is:

How can care be used to inform an artistic practice?

Fragility, contact/encounter and care are essential steps that enable me to progress through the various stages of creation and achieve an expression that aligns with my perception of reality. I hope that the analysis of authors and artists that you will find in my text can clarify and facilitate the mechanisms of my work and thoughts, which are inspired by stimuli and inspirations that are fundamental and essential for me to engage in academic, but also political and personal reflections and speculations on the reality of today's world.

Terms

During my research, I discovered that the term care is also linked to art at an etymological level. The terms *curatorship* and *curiosity* share a Latin root: *cura*³.

³ *Cura*: attention, concern and care, as well as responsibility towards something or someone.

The term *curatorship* comes from *curator*, meaning someone who takes care of and maintains a deep sense of responsibility towards works, cultural contexts and the public. It is not just about organisation, but it is also a relational, narrative and often ethical act. *Curiosity*, from the Latin *curiosus*, originally referred to someone who observed with attention and a desire to know. This was a lively, active and often profound form of attention, far removed from the superficial connotations the term has today. Curiosity can be considered the initial spark of care; it is what that moves us towards others and activate interest and openness. It is through care that this impulse takes root and transforms into action, listening and construction of meaning.

Places

If my journey began with my arrival in Fontainhas, then it could certainly not end anywhere else. I have done a lot of experimenting in this place. During the first year of my master's degree, my work was centred around the Bonfim area, remaining within a radius of about one kilometre from Fontainhas: my house and the Faculty of Fine Arts are about 200 metres away, the Prado do Repouso cemetery is about 600 metres away and the Parque das Aguas is 1.1 kilometres away. Almost everything I encountered in terms of spaces and materials was found in this area. The exception is my work in

collaboration with the *Art and Health* project⁴, which is located about 5 km from Fontainhas.

I did my research for the entire second year in Fontainhas, in the urban garden created by locals, slow travellers and homeless people. The *Garden of Care* project is the result of frequenting the place and experimenting with that fragile ecosystem, as well as the contact between different species of living beings. Fontainhas is a place on the edge between yesterday and tomorrow, evolving between “invasive” plants and other cultivated ones, on the rubble of the past and artisanally reconfigured spaces, between natural and urban boundaries, between planned walks and chance encounters. Here, the practice of the present matters more than anything else.



Artwork map, textile, 2025 - Red marks my artworks and green marks my house.

⁴ The *Art and Health* project, launched in 2022 by the Soares dos Reis National Museum and the University Hospital Centre of Porto, explores how museum collections can support the well-being of patients, doctors, and caregivers. After a research phase, I contributed by donating three of my artworks to the Centre for Mothers and Children (CMIN) in Porto.

Garden diary #1

September 8, 2024

Today, I felt fragile once again. I felt alone, helpless and exiled, as if time was slipping through my fingers.

Overwhelmed by these feelings, I went out and arrived in Fontainhas, the first place in this city to welcome me and my van, where I built my temporary shelter. That place is just a few steps away from where I am now.

After a short break in the sun, I walked and explored the few narrow streets that I still didn't know. I felt immersed in stagnation and useless.... I was walking and walking I arrived at the point where nature met the people who resist: the fragile ones of life; those who, at some point in their existence, had felt something similar to what I was feeling at that moment.

I decided to start a garden, joining them, to take care of a small plot of land overlooking the river. This will help me to take care of myself, too. For now, only wild herbs and some pumpkins grow there. I will try to keep myself busy to heal my soul, alone and at my own risk, with no prior knowledge. I hope that José will help me. Inspired by Hans Ulrich Obrist's thoughts on the “Cosmos of Utopia” and the “Archipelago Thought”¹, I have decided that this will be a utopian garden, where I will attempt to turn fleeting thoughts and ideas about care into reality: a place of experimentation where I can learn through experience what it means to heal and cure.

¹ They are collected in the book *A che cosa serve l'arte*, edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Gianluigi Recuperati (2023), where utopia is interpreted as a living, navigable and semi-mobile landscape that, according to the “Principle of Hope”, it is not yet realised but is nourished by lofty ideals and remains vibrant on the horizon of the possible. “Archipelago Thought” enables us to conclude that neither individual nor collective identities are fixed and determined once and for all. The archipelago pattern is therefore the pattern of utopian thought for the future: the present naturally becoming the future.



Community gardens of Fontainhas, research image, 2025, Porto



The garden at Prospect Cottage, photography project © Howard Sooley, 1990

In 1990, Howard Sooley photographed Derek Jarman at the stark, cobblestoned Prospect Cottage, framed against Kent's Dungeness nuclear power station. These photographs are collected in the book *Derek Jarman's Garden, Derek Jarman, Photographs by Howard Sooley*, (Thames and Hudson, London, 1995) which was the author's final work before he died of an HIV-related illness. It is a diary that constitutes a memorial to the fact that, despite everything, the artist created a work of incredible beauty in the most inhospitable of places.

1. Starting from fragility

Containment and expression

The future is defined by the fragility of life – individual, collective and planetary – and the omnipresence of death. (Bratton, 2023, as cited in Groys, 2023, back cover)

On the relationship between image and absence

- *See? They use cheap, poor-quality materials.*
- *How ugly that is.*
- *Well, art isn't about beautiful or ugly things, but things that move you or make you think.*

In the series *Bellas Artes* (2024), the director of the Ibero-American Museum of Modern Art, Antonio Dumas, starts a conversation with his grandson on this topic: “how do you know that this is an artwork and not just a pile of rubbish? You always find broken things and old furniture in the dumpsters...” the child asks, expressing a doubt shared by many spectators of contemporary art.

- *For something to be considered art, someone must present it and propose it as such. There must also be someone who receives and accepts it as such. Look at these branches and these broken mirrors. In any other place, they would be considered rubbish. But placed here, in the museum, they are seen as art.*
- *I don't understand it.* (*Bellas Artes*, 2024; Season 1, Episode 4)

Undeniably, many people have come to the same conclusion as Dumas's nephew when relating to contemporary works of art that they do not consider communicative, according to a personal perception. In the contemporary, in which artistic value is not defined by technical rules or a codified aesthetic, but by the attribution of meaning through a process, artworks express themselves through different languages in the same way as the public⁵.

⁵ The art of *mediality* recognises that works of art are not merely aesthetic objects, but processes of mediation between absence and presence, matter and spirit, and artist and spectator. In *Arte e Mediação* (2016), Maria Teresa Cruz emphasises the importance of the work 'not as a thing, but as a means'. This concept is related to studies of intermediality and multimedia arts, which examine the interactions and influences between different media and

Over time, art has transformed into a field with blurred boundaries, where ambiguity often creates distance between the public and artists, and between users and cultural research.

One aspect of art that has remained constant over the centuries is the use of images to make visible what is absent and give a body to what does not have one, in an attempt to fill a void⁶. In Western thought, images have often been used to affirm and remember power⁷. In other civilisations and cultures, however, images gave body to spirits, deities or ancestors. Even today, many works create tensions to highlight absence, directing the viewer's gaze towards what is not present in the exhibition room⁸. Many artists have attempted to capture the ephemeral, to give form to the invisible and to make the transient eternal.

The idea that images can compensate for an absence has been perpetuated over the centuries and cultures and reveals a profound link between art and fragility: the fragility of what cannot be seen, of time that erases and memory that fades away. Thus, we can understand how the artwork is a place where absence becomes presence, where fragility is not denied but amplified, remembered and recounted. In a museum, we might ask ourselves: What presence is this work revealing? What aspects of existence is it trying to manifest? What is there that we cannot see?

artistic forms.

⁶ As addressed by Philippe Descola in the essay *L'arte prima dell'arte* (2024)

⁷ Art has often served as a reflection and representation of different forms of power, including political, religious, economic and symbolic. It has been used both to legitimise and to criticise.

⁸ Several contemporary works of art use absence as an expressive tool. Many of Louise Bourgeois's pieces symbolise and represent absences and personal traumas. In her *Siluetas* series (1973–1980), Ana Mendieta leaves empty traces of her body to represent the experience of exile and being uprooted from Cuba. In *Untitled* (Portrait of Ross in L.A.) (1991), Félix González-Torres represents the loss caused by AIDS through a pile of sweets that progressively decreases. In *The Artist is Present* (2010), Marina Abramović stages the absence of words, leaving only the tension of the gaze.



Ana Mendieta, *Untitled: Silueta Series*, gelatine silver print, 1978.

In several of my works, the artistic object serves as a device that makes absences or subtle nuances visible and manifest. When worn, the work *Camouflage* allows you to see energy channels and *meridians*⁹, it is where pain accumulates, but also where the possibility of healing exists. Each body is a physical archive of experiences, sending signals that need to be deciphered. This creates a system of maps – invisible to the naked eye – that is constantly searching for balance and transformation. Everyone should learn to encode the signals of their own body system.

⁹ In traditional Chinese medicine, meridians are invisible energy channels that run across the body, through which Qi (vital energy) flows. These channels connect organs and tissues, forming the theoretical basis for various therapeutic practices.



Camouflage, tissues, 2024

In *Platonic Devices to Reflect Reality*, I aimed to create a dreamlike representation of plants within an urban environment. The indirect representations of the shadows stimulate a relationship with nature that is sensitive and instinctive, rather than rational. As in the Platonic myth of the cave, images of reality are often distorted and mediated by filters that prevent access to the truth. The work's delicate, evocative, whispered language fades between the pain of loss¹⁰ and the recollection of what has been lost.



Platonic Devices to Reflect Reality, plants, cardboard, net, 2024.

¹⁰ The loss of healthy, balanced and non-dominating relationships with other species and nature.

The arts are indeed everywhere assigned the function of embodying an absent presence, but this function is tinged by the nature of what can be seen, the identity of those who have

the power to make visible, the means employed to give body to what is represented, and the circumstances in which the depicted entities become active in the contexts that host them or which they become the main organisers. (Descola, 2024: 24)

The context and pretext of a work are factors determining its resonance, as does the mediation process implemented by the artist to communicate with the public broadly and horizontally.

Presentification¹¹, i.e., the process of manifesting something absent, allows us to influence perception and experience things that are normally outside the reach of the senses or time. Art acts as a gateway to emotional experiences and contemplation, bringing us closer to fragile and vulnerable things and opening a dialogue with others that fosters recognition and understanding.

¹¹ Term formed linguistically from the noun present (of "what is here and now") with the suffix -ify, or the action of making something in a certain state.

Fragility

Recognising fragility is the first step in the healing process. Recognising vulnerability activates the transformative process that restores balance and re-establishes dialogue.

The healing process should always start from the foundations, addressing the cause that shook them and traumatically supports them. Similarly, an artistic practice that aims to be transformative towards the subjects involved, the issues addressed, and the aesthetics adopted should emerge through an engagement with fragilities, imperfections, errors, necessities and the forgetfulness; with the intolerable.

As Jack Halberstam explains in his book *L'arte queer del fallimento* (2011) (The Queer Art of Failure), it's all about how stories are told. In a culture of optimism at all costs, "the secret history of pessimism" becomes the history of queer anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggle. "It is the history of art without a market, of acting without a script, of storytelling without progress"; it is "a rejection of legibility". Inactivity, inaction and passivity can be practices of sabotage within the framework of the dominant system. Failure becomes a practice for identifying the inconsistencies of power, for devoting oneself to improvisation and acting outside ideological rigidity. Failure is associated with non-conformity, in which we find all the nuances of fragility.

Unlike design, which identifies and solves problems, artistic work does not aim to provide the *right solutions*. Artistic work is a form of mediation¹² and a journey that starts from the needs of the work and what inhabits it. The artist and the public walk along the path that leads to an encounter with themselves or others, in an osmotic exchange between the internal and the external.

Art amplifies the senses and sensibilities, and the ability to see and perceive, because it confronts us with ever-new aesthetic, social and political issues. When art is truly powerful, it is a step that turns an entire society upside down.

¹² It expresses its own language through materiality.

Artistic research that starts from fragility amplifies the voice of needs that are not given a platform in the performative perfection imposed by capitalist work. Fragility is a condition that is often subdued by shame, lack of attention and lack of privilege.

As Vincent van Gogh says in letter 237 (1882-1883) addressed to his brother Théo:

What is drawing? How do you get there? It is the process of breaking through an invisible barrier between what you feel and what you can achieve. It is useless to hit this wall hard; according to me, you have to undermine it slowly and patiently with a file. (Van Gogh, 1977, as quoted in Artaud, 2010: 40).

Art – the gap between *what you feel and what you can do* – is a slow, decisive action that opens channels of expression. In my research, it is a space in which communication occurs on multiple levels and the variety of media opens up more possibilities for expressing the multitude of languages that exist in the world. It is a megaphone for distant and repressed voices. My artistic practice considers the voices coming from people and communities, not just from institutions because I consider that art must arise from needs, not strategic interests.

Art as a containment space

In her essay, *Perdita e rigenerazione* (Between loss and regeneration), Judith Butler presents the artistic object in the sense of Winnicott: as a reliable and receptive entity that can bear and reflect passions that would otherwise be intolerable.

As Butler writes in the text:

[...] In museums, I began to feel as though I was handing my emotional life over to objects so they could take care of it. At the time, everything that seemed intolerable was temporarily handed over to objects, or perhaps to the object field. It was as if the objects were offering to take over my mind for a while. They did not transform all my suffering into joy; it was

not a redemptive transformation. Rather, they worked to transform the intolerable nature of my mind into something more bearable. For me, it was as if the world was renewing itself, becoming more enduring and conducive to life. It also meant accessing a kind of exchange and relationship that turned out to be an alternative to who I am. (Butler, 2023: 45)

Artistic objects allow us to reorganise the psychic material, to contain destructive emotions and feelings. It enables us to observe these emotions *from outside*, reflect on them so as to outlive them and begin to work on them.

Buttler describes the museum as a possible place of “support and containment”, in the sense in which Winnicott¹³ had defined the maternal embrace during the infant's development, or the role played by the setting in psychoanalytic practice, as a container for intolerable passions and anxieties.

Tolerating the intolerable does not solve it; it means entering a relationship with it. This involves living with it and examining its contours and consistencies. It also requires reflection on the mechanisms and methods that enable it to perpetuate. (Butler, 2023: 30)

Artistic creation, the object as well as the process, is capable of filtering the exchange of flows with pain, providing prostheses to cushion it¹⁴ and offering new codes to interpret it. The infinite variations of art provide imaginative solutions that can be applied to reality to alleviate or transform it.

In *Lutto e melanconia* (Mourning and Melancholia; 1915), Freud explains that the process of mourning requires the gradual acceptance of the “verdict of reality”. By renouncing this process, the melancholic mechanism is activated, i.e., an escape from reality.

13 Winnicott, Donald W., *Gioco e realtà* (Playing and Reality), Armando Editore, 1974.

14 It is precisely in this sense that Mari Katayama's work is interesting. We will analyse it in the next chapter.

Nowadays, many people and political and ideological movements perpetuate the denial of reality, and the maniacal repression of the death drive that capitalism brings with it¹⁵.

The promise of unlimited economic growth, hidden behind the veneer of form and progress, merely serves to obscure the fragility of the world. According to Butler, art plays a fundamental role in unmasking these processes. She writes:

Art can only provide a jolt if it demonstrates and documents the normalisation of destruction. The normalisation of oil consumption and production is a destructive process that should be presented as such. We need art forms that celebrate life amidst destruction and simultaneously expose the strategies through which ruin is presented as progress or, worse still, as normality. (Buttler, 2023: 62)

Who's gonna eat this plastic is the project that I reworked through the texts of the essay *Plastic: Accumulation Without Metabolism* (2015) by Heather Davis. The concept of accumulation, linked to pollution and the overproduction of objects and information, is a biological and social consequence of the absence of decomposition and metabolism. Without a limited and finite relationship between birth and death (production and disposal), the biological cycle is disrupted. The *plastiglomerates*¹⁶ are archaeological evidence of accumulated material that cannot be disposed of, and which is being integrated into existing natural processes.

15 These include climate denial, which rejects scientific evidence of climate change; historical denial, which rejects documented events such as past or ongoing genocides; and movements that reject social inequalities and human rights, denying systemic discrimination and opposing inclusionary and socially just policies.

16 The term *plastiglomerate* was coined in 2014 by Patricia Corcoran, Charles J. Moore, and Kelly Jazvac to describe a new type of rock consisting of plastic fragments fused with natural materials such as sand, shells, and stones.



Who's gonna eat this plastic - experimenting with plastiglomerates, natural materials combined with plastic, 2024.

My decision to conduct artistic research in the Prado do Repouso Cemetery in Porto stemmed from my desire to explore the ultimate place of the intolerable: the place that separates the living city from the pain and memory of our own mortality and decay. I conceived of *Communio Creatio Mors* (2024) as a series of disruptive and revelatory installations and actions within this suspended space. By losing contact with mortality, humanity also loses contact with its limits, translating this refusal into an unsustainable socio-economic system perpetuated by the ideas of immortality, accumulation, and infinite growth.



Communio Creatio Mors- Decomposition is transformation, installation in the Prado do Repouso Cemetery, 2024.

Fractures. Bodies and places

Fragility is a natural aspect of existence. Linked to finiteness and imperfection, it implies the risk of pain and failure, but also the possibility of opening up to the world. Like the cracks in Lucio Fontana's canvases, it provides access to a dimension beyond perceptible reality; it opens up to the unknown.

These cuts encourage reflection on the meaning of what we cannot see, and the canvas becomes a three-dimensional space that engages with its surroundings. In its simplicity, the cut connects interior and exterior worlds, engaging with the public and inviting them to look inside. In her performance *Cut Piece* (1964), Yoko Ono invites spectators to cut pieces of her clothing, demonstrating her complete willingness to “offer herself” and expose herself to violence and the gaze of others. This evokes a radical choice of physical and psychological fragility.



Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, 1966. Performance during the DIAS, Africa Centre, London. Five ferrotyped original gelatine silver prints 25.7 x 20 cm. each.

Cutting is a gesture associated with self-harm, but also with certain erotic practices. In the case of self-harm, it is an attempt to make invisible pain tangible. It is a way to regain a sense of control over one's own body and emotional experience¹⁷.

This is evident in Gina Pane's *Azione Sentimentale* (1973), in which the body becomes a ritualistic instrument offering both its fragility and its vital energy. This is a feminist gesture that challenges the stereotypes forged by society.



Gina Pane, *Azione Sentimentale*, 1973. Performance, photographic documentation curated by Françoise Masson, Galleria Diagramma, Milan.

Alberto Burri's Cretti pieces activate a dialogue between destruction and creation. Perceptible as signs of ruin, they become part of a new aesthetic — a beauty born from deterioration.

¹⁷ This statement does not intend to equate the artistic act of cutting with self-harm; rather, it aims to emphasise how cutting can assume symbolic meanings related to self-expression and the connection between the internal and external worlds in different contexts.

This concept is reminiscent of the Japanese philosophy of kintsugi¹⁸, which is a technique that celebrates scars by filling them with molten gold, turning them into a testimony of survival and history.

The openings these artists created, aesthetically and materially, tell of fragility as a source of new strength. In the *Grande Cretto di Gibellina*, created between 1984 and 1989, the cracks map out the layout of a town destroyed by an earthquake, transforming pain and loss into a permanent work of art.

As a monument of collective memory, the cretto preserves the memory of the tragedy through furrows that can be retraced. This archaeological site of pain unites history, anthropology, intimate life and art.



Me visiting Burri's Cretto of Gibellina, research image, 2020.

¹⁸ *Kintsugi* meaning "golden repair", is a Japanese technique that was developed during the Muromachi period (15th–16th century).

Cracks and fractures are not just physical and material. Banksy's artistic experimentation and *street art* in general experiment with the cracks in society, the unsuspected corners of the streets, and the dark corners of the art system. By highlighting the contradictions within the artistic system, where the logic of the market is reproduced, it becomes clear that the only way to practise art as criticism is through illegality. Banksy works mostly at night and in a short period of time on illegal walls, a methodology forced upon him by a control apparatus with a rigid idea of the use of public space. For him, acting illegally is the only way he can feel free, both as an artist and as a human being, breaking free from the confines of the "White Cube" and the capitalist control system.

Illegality is the most fragile condition to which the system condemns human beings¹⁹ and often, fragility and illegality reinforce each other, creating a vicious circle where one favours the other. Banksy embodies illegality, and each of his street artworks is an example of it. It is no coincidence that the symbol par excellence of his art is the rat²⁰.

His work traverses the intolerable aspects of contemporary society and the fragility of a two-faced society, one accustomed and the other discriminated against. Adopting a playful style with simple, accessible features, he rejects institutional mediation and speaks directly to people, bearing the consequences that this entails²¹.

His images expose the inconsistencies of a capitalist-controlled mass society living in an upside-down world besieged by accumulating objects, states of control, and climate disasters. This disturbing mechanism is the best bait for producing a reaction: a shaking of the soul, an encounter with one's own power of reaction and decision.

¹⁹ Illegal immigration, the repression of freedom of expression, laws that control people's bodies, systemic poverty, colonisation and the exploitation of resources.

²⁰ *Rats exist without permission. They are hated, hunted and persecuted. They live in quiet desperation amongst the filth. And yet they are capable of bringing entire civilisations to their knees. If you are dirty, insignificant and unloved then rats are the ultimate role model.* (Banksy, Wall and Piece, 2005).

²¹ Displaying artworks without "protective devices" in public spaces can lead to their modification or theft. Various documentaries delve deeper into the theme of the illegal commodification of Banksy's public works, including *Saving Banksy* (2014) by Colin Day, *L'uomo che rubò Banksy* (The man who stole Banksy; 2018) by Marco Proserpio, and *The Banksy Job* (2016) by Ian Roderick Gray and Dylan Harvey.

Francis Alÿs also uses public spaces as places for artistic intervention, blurring the boundaries between art and everyday life. He explores political and social themes with a subtle, poetic approach and language. His actions, in which bodies are the engine of existence, explore issues such as migration, borders, war and precariousness. While Banksy is direct, evoking feelings of anger and shame, Alÿs is contemplative. Accompanying his artistic processes with presence and constancy, he transports us to the margins of society with the imaginative pace of possibilities.



Francis Alÿs, *Paradox of Praxis I (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)*, Mexico City, 1997. Performance.

Fragility, the main subject of his camera, is sublimated: a worthy human condition and a fertile space for experimentation. It does not adopt the caricatured or paternalistic aesthetic of desperation, but rather the poetic and surreal aesthetic of an ice cube melting in the streets of the metropolis.

Like his protagonists, Alÿs' actions may seem useless, simple or secondary, but they contain all the power of revolution. He creates

works that are powerful despite their ephemerality, symbolising the paradox of life: that of the strength that can emerge from situations of profound fragility and insecurity; the strength to be alive despite war, unjust policies, poverty, and the inevitability of death.

Fragility as a driving force for artistic practice

Having analysed examples of art in dialogue with different forms of fragility, I welcome Butler's reflections and engage with the question raised by the author in *Perdita e Rigenerazione* (Between Loss and Regeneration): "How can art help us create a world that can counteract the enormous forces of destruction?" (Butler, 2023: 54). The answer she proposes highlights the need that drives certain artistic research: "I believe that the solution to this problem lies in calling on the arts – both inside and outside museums, and both in person and online – to confront rampant denialism and begin to imagine ways to save the planet" (Butler, 2023: 54).

Deep connections are created between art and life, and perhaps it is art itself that enables us to approach socio-environmental catastrophes more freely and profoundly in this historical moment.

Quoting the words of the philosopher Anna Longo, (quoted in Butler, 2023: 54):

*In the times in which we live [...] art seems not only impossible, but also frivolous and impotent. It is precisely at such times that we need art the most, or rather, we need to become artists. Not creators of new masks for values that will make the masses desire their own enslavement but living agents capable of affirming life against what mutilates it under the pretext of making it possible.*²²

If scientific subjects can only provide partial answers, we should look to the arts for processes of re-elaboration and renewal.

²² Anna Longo, *Quand le Carrè rencontre Sebald – sur L'espion qui aimait les livres* de John le Carrè, in "Aoc", 12 gennaio 2023.

*Scientism and Technocracy*²³, are leading not only to the atrophy of poetic thought and action, but also to the loss of relationships and contact between living beings and socio-spiritual entities.

The responsibility of those who create, of the link between politics and creation, is explained by Butler as follows:

There is no human life without the life of the Earth. Bringing a living object into the world or making art creates something that acts upon us. If we share it, a space emerges; or better still, we bring a living space into the world. So why not connect living artistic spaces with the emerging space of democratic freedom, which is essential to regenerating our lives?

The only way to escape the cycle of loss is to come together to grieve and allow this unity to create something new. Public happiness can only be regenerated where we can come together, and it is this regeneration that must overcome the forces of destruction. This is why we must embrace the unpredictable; only artistic creation's unpredictability can document our loss and embody the regenerative power we so desperately need. (Butler, 2023: 75)

Unpredictability is the approach that enables us to respond to the intolerable. If we assume that pain only generates more pain, imperfection cannot provide interesting solutions and lack can never be filled, we preclude the unexpected from entering, disrupting and reordering what is difficult to understand. When creating, we should have starting questions, but not predetermined results: the difference between the artistic process and an urban planning project lies in the feelings generated along the way, the sensations of the present, and the responses to our impulses.

²³ *Scientism* attributes absolute authority to science in determining all forms of knowledge and truth, thereby reducing the value of other forms of knowledge. Technocracy is a system of government or social management in which power is entrusted to technicians based on the idea that scientific or technological expertise is superior to political or democratic expertise.

[...] a free action demonstrates freedom when it is carried out. It does not adhere to any preconceived notions of what freedom should be. In other words, we cannot grasp the principle of freedom before it is enacted. It is through the action that we come to understand freedom. (Buttler, 2023: 69)

Morar as Fontainhas (2023) is the reenactment of my life in the van in Fontainhas. It represents how action can help us to understand and strengthen freedom. The work does not romanticise precariousness or life on the street, but highlights existing social conditions, such as the emergence of new urban practices. It represents the possibility of existing amid imperfection, oscillating between comfort and discomfort, in a place with blurred boundaries and an unpredictable flow of time. It tells the story of the creative power that emerges from the tension between order and chaos, control and flow.

Following this same line of thought, I continued my artistic research in that territory. I abandoned the van, an intimate and personal space, and explored the external area, which is open and contaminated by the people who live in Fontainhas every day. On the slopes of the Douro River, amidst the rubble of a neighbourhood destroyed by inadequate social policies, some people created self-managed urban gardens, while others constructed makeshift shelters. I adopted a section of one of these gardens and lived in it for a while, cleaning and cultivating it and meeting people. A diary also emerged, with material collected during my research in the garden, in which I wrote reflections on care, community and public space; some of these texts open each chapter of the thesis. The notes then evolved into the *Garden of Care* project, an installation in the gardens of Fontainhas, as the perfect conclusion to an intimate and artistic two-year journey in the city of Porto, within the public, political and social space.



Community gardens in Fontainhas, research images, 2023

Garden diary #2

September 13, 2024

Breakfast with Melissa

Melissa and I went to have breakfast in the garden. The chair that I had left there the day before was still there.

The sky was clear, and it was hot.

I had made coffee and done some shopping, trying to be careful but also spontaneous. I took out the fruit, cheese, hummus and yoghurt; Meli had also brought some things. We spent two hours chatting non-stop. The day before, I had been reflecting on relationships: what generates and maintains them; what it means to be in one. I arrived eager to address this topic, so I questioned Meli about what it meant to relate and how personal experiences could affect relationships. I was looking for a different perspective, a new opinion to compare with my own, which I already knew inside out. I was bored of my own brain and felt I had to look outside of myself for other ideas and possibilities. Meli says that our experiences shape us and that life's hardships can harden people. I would like to disagree because I nurture the hope that, after every setback or loss, there can be renewal. However, deep down, I know that she is right, and that people become embittered by situations that overwhelm them. Our breakfast attracted the attention of others. First, Maria passed by with Daniel, then Diogo, who told us a little about the plants in his garden. My neighbours, who live in tents under the roofs, said hello. Being present in a place is invasive¹; energies expand, and people attract each other. Is this how a community is formed? Can a community be predetermined, or is it simply the result of individuals who find themselves in the same place for various reasons? I believe that a community is the result of many interconnected relationships, rather than a single compact group decided upon in advance.

¹ Using this term to refer to both the botanical and social aspects of life in an urban garden highlights the intersection of the human and vegetal worlds in a series of hierarchical-free interspecies relationships, where the ways of plants can influence those of people.



Community gardens of Fontainhas, research image, 2023, Porto



The garden at Prospect Cottage, photography project © Howard Sooley, 1990

Derek Jarman soon became a regular visitor to Prospect Cottage in Dungeness and recalls: "The back garden was much more random and fluid from its inception with no tangible framework or structure [...] back garden was a pure joy to work in – garden Abstract Expressionism – with none of the usual constraints of beds, soil and grass".
(As reported for the exhibition of Derek Jarman at the Garden Museum of London; gardenmuseum.org.uk/).

2. Contact and Multiplication

Encounters and relationships

<<Dear Hans Ulrich: Almost zero speed>>.
I interpreted it as a literal exhortation to
increase speed, or rather, to never stop
searching, because 'almost zero speed' is
a state in which nothing is produced, or at
least not yet — a speed capable of
generating discoveries. (Obrist, 2023: 14)

Control systems

The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work... when you go to church... when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.
(*The Matrix*, 1999, 0:48:00).

In the cult film *The Matrix* (1999), the protagonist, Neo, finds himself living in an unaware state, 'trapped' in the role assigned to him by society (the Matrix). When he is introduced to the human resistance, however, he discovers the reality behind the system, which causes his identity to change radically. Constantly faced with the choice of either following a predetermined path or acting of his own volition, Neo transforms himself until he becomes the chosen one.

The Matrix, an emblematic film of the 2000s, introduced themes to cinema that were little explored at the time, such as systemic control and its influence on identity, and the concept of digital and cyberspace as hyper-controlled social places. This was a vision that was once science fiction, but which today lucidly reflects the real dynamics of digital networks.

For Morpheus, the truth is that we are all slaves in a prison with no bars, with our minds trapped by the system's networks.

The beliefs and fears fuelled by the control system²⁴ limit our ability to explore more fluid and nuanced identities and connections.

Identity in the *expanded field*

The *expanded field* model proposed by Rosalind Krauss (1979)²⁵ describes the moment when sculpture breaks free from the rigid boundaries of tradition, opening up to a multitude of spatial practices and relations. This overcomes the idea of an isolated, self-sufficient object, favouring an open configuration in relation to architecture, landscape, and public space. In the semiotic square, derived from Lévi-Strauss, concepts (or categories) are related to each other in more than just a binary way, exploring possible oppositions and combinations.

In *Spectrum of Evaluation* (2008–10), Thomas Hirschhorn considers the criteria used to evaluate and interpret art in relation to various social, political, and cultural levels. The spectrum suggests that art cannot be judged according to static or univocal criteria, but rather through a variety of experiences and responses ranging from the aesthetic to the social and political functions of the work.

Both schemes describe art that expands in terms of meaning, form and dynamic processes, in which the audience, context and society play central and active roles. Similarly, I have outlined my methodology for the encounter²⁶.

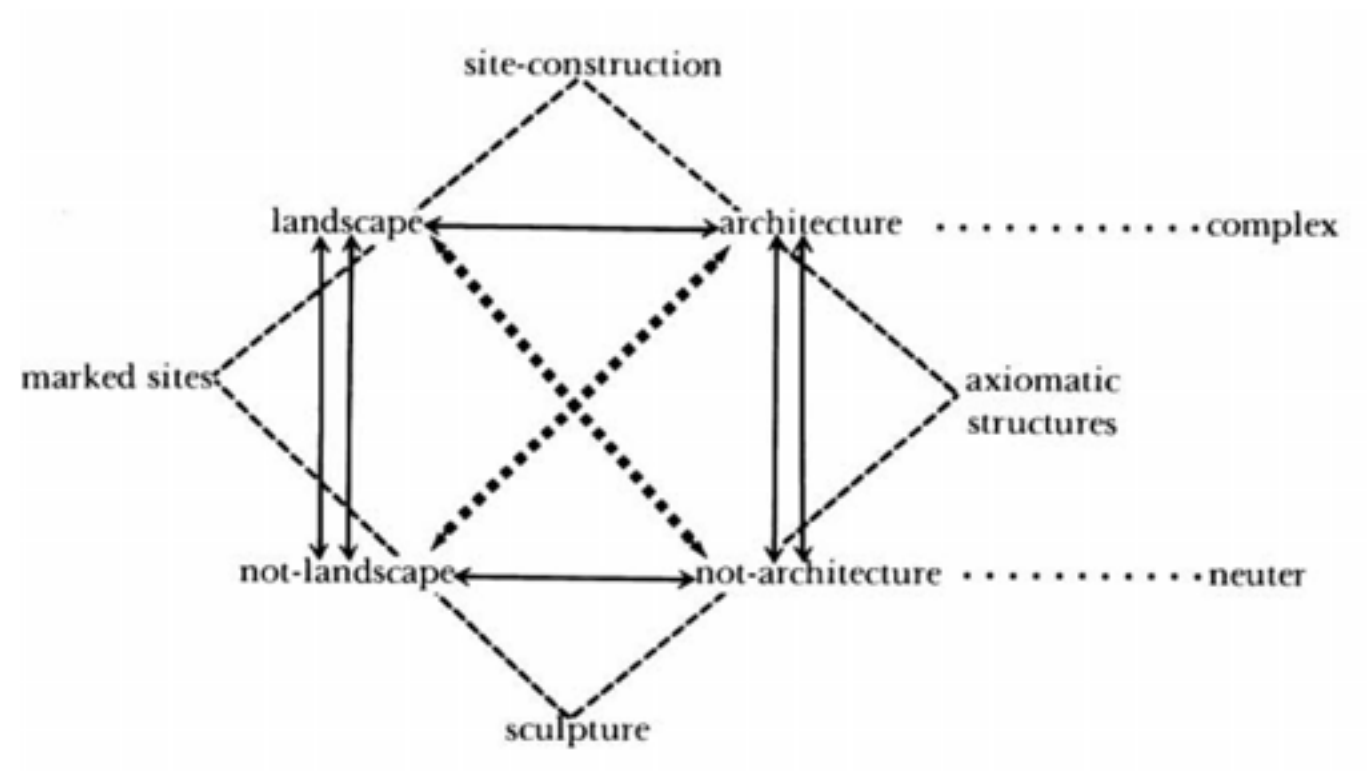
What elements come together during the creative process?

The artist, the artwork, the audience and the context... These factors are all intertwined in an ever-changing way, creating a vast field of possibilities in this continuous and unpredictable process.

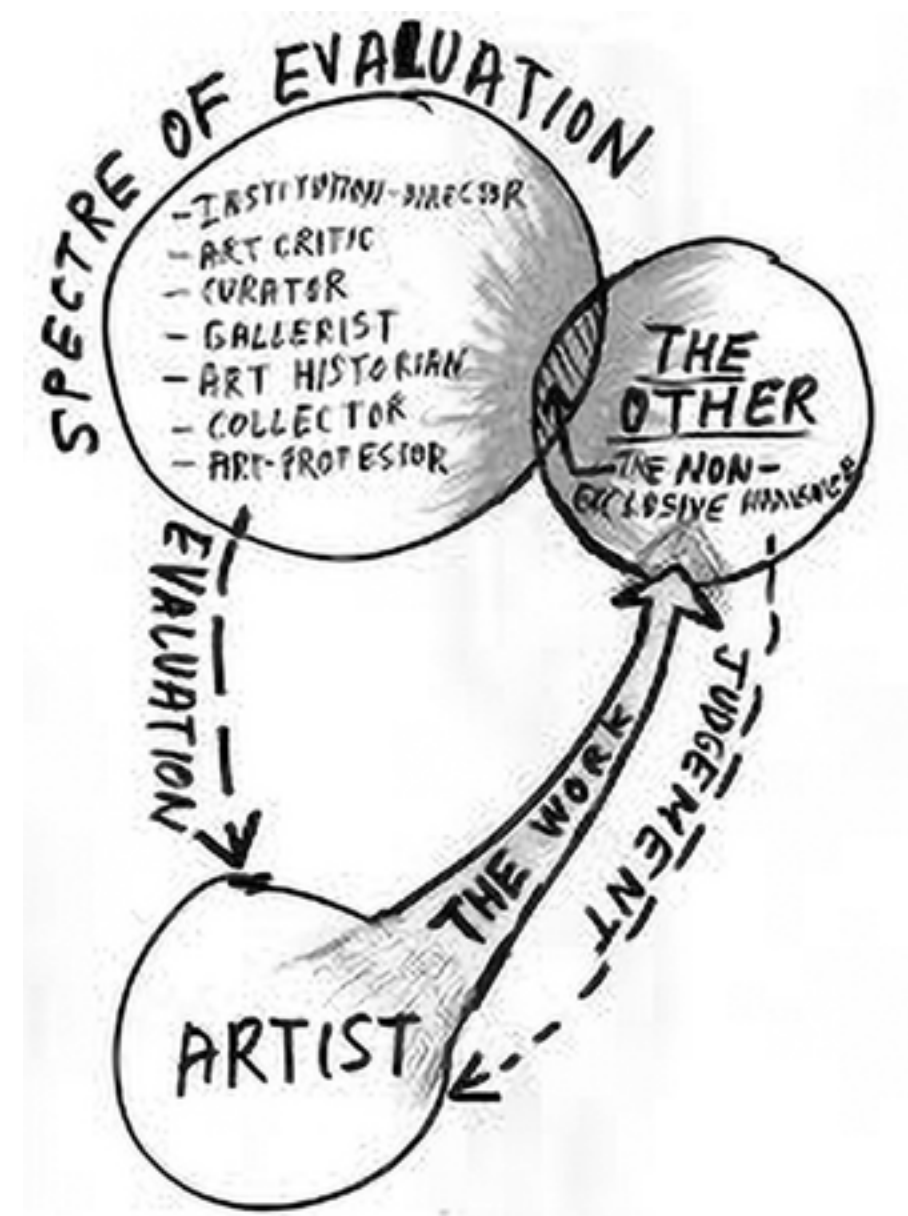
²⁴ The set of structures, rules, social conventions and mechanisms (often invisible or internalised) that regulate and limit the behaviour of individuals within a society, including institutions, the media, and dominant Western and colonialist cultures and social norms.

²⁵ Krauss, Rosalind, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, in «October», vol. 8, Spring 1979, pp. 30–44.

²⁶ As described in the introductory chapter.



The Expanded Field, diagram by Rosalind Krauss. Reprinted from Krauss, R. (1979). *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*. October 8, p. 37.



Spectrum of Evaluation, Thomas Hirschhorn, 2008-2010.

Therefore, the encounter between the elements of art, and through art, is generative, plural and multiplying, but not predictable according to a specific, controlled plan. Compared to other disciplinary fields, the results of art can only be predicted in a partial and limited way; they can be imagined.

The kaleidoscope-mirror from my work, *Many Ways of Mirroring* (2024), is the ideal form for representing the multiplication of identities and reflections that mirror each other, mixing and projecting to generate ever-new, subjective and spontaneous combinations. Drawing inspiration from the reflective capacity of water and the dynamic way its waves multiply, this object serves as a tool for exploring the various dimensions of the self and the elements of the surrounding ecosystem. It is a tangle of reflections that make up a multifaceted, fluid, kaleidoscopic and never univocal reality.

The world of art is a kaleidoscope of relationships, and it is from this multiplicity that my works draw the strength to generate new creative processes.



Many ways of mirroring, mirrors and wood, 2024.

The relationship

By defining the existence of the other, I can finally define myself, or as Judith Butler writes in the essay *Perdita e rigenerazione* (Between Loss and Regeneration; 2023): By affirming relationality, one renounces projection (Butler, p. 43, 2023). Engaging with the outside world involves relinquishing part of the ego but also opens up the possibility of seeing beyond oneself, through the eyes of others: relationality is the essence of existence and the very foundation of life and love.

This dynamic occurs constantly through art because it allows us to observe the artistic object and ourselves through it. Works of art are mirrors of the people who created them and of the people who observe them. Spectators can discover themselves in these mirrors. Wherever a work is placed, gazes multiply, intersect and can contaminate and amplify one another.

In his book *Estetica relazionale* (Relational Aesthetics, 1998), Nicolas Bourriaud emphasises the importance of observers being present together and asks some useful questions about our relationship with works of art:

Does it allow me to exist in front of it, or does it, on the contrary, deny me as a subject by refusing to consider the Other in its structure? Does the space-time suggested or described by this work, along with its governing laws, align with my real-life aspirations? Does it criticise what I consider to be criticisable? Could I live in a space-time that corresponds to it? (Bourriaud, 1998: 58)

These questions encourage us to engage through the singularity of our relationship with the world.

The artwork therefore functions as a *social interstice*²⁷, as a space of interaction that relates to the system while proposing alternative

²⁷ A space of possibility that emerges within (or between) existing social structures, often in the margins or folds of established systems. A space for breathing or opening up; small yet significant. A term used by Karl Marx to describe exchange communities that operate outside the framework of the capitalist economy because they are not subject to the law of profit.

modes of exchange and imagination with respect to it. It is a door that allows one to reach a place outside the Matrix. I envisage artworks as microcosms that are immersed in, yet autonomous from, society. They offer an encounter between the fantastic and the real, the visible and the invisible, the past, the present and the future, and utopia and its realisation. Places of contact.



Camouflage, tissues, 2024.

In *Camouflage* (2024), contact manifests itself as practice: contact with oneself, one's body and one's pain, is experienced as a search and an exploration, almost like a game, and is a fundamental moment of silence and listening. Understanding where the pain lies by touching oneself helps to describe the unique map of one's body: a fundamental exercise in self-care and self-determination. By walking over the surfaces of the body and moving our fingers intuitively over the areas that hurt or need attention, we are decoding our history to understand where it comes from and where it will go.

The cyborg as a model



Kiki Kogelnik, Female Robot 1964. Paint, at Kiki Kogelnik Foundation

Just as we are not isolated beings in space, but rather the result of a network of interrelations with our surroundings, so we are not neutral or pure entities, but rather the product of a stratification of events accumulated over our lifetimes and centuries of history. Each person produces temporal overlap, every day that passes contributes to this stratification. We live in the accumulation of time, acquiring experiences, pleasures and knowledge, as well as errors, traumas and wounds.

We must accept that existence does not stem from innocence or founding myths about original integrity. It is with these assumptions that Donna Haraway introduces us to the concept of the Cyborg.

Bodies, then, are not born; they are made. Bodies have been a thoroughly denaturalised as sign, context, and time.
(Haraway, 1995: 142)

The Cyborg is a hybrid figure that symbolises each of us. Through it, Haraway rejects the existentialist ideas of “naturalness” and “innocence”. These terms are in fact linked to narratives influenced by reproductive politics, in which women are viewed as vulnerable beings with a less defined sense of self and are associated solely

with the role of “generator of life”. Dismantling these roles is crucial in transfeminist struggles, as we have seen in *The Matrix*. People's identities are crystallised in categories through the construction of someone who is perceived and narrated as “other” from the dominant and *normative* self.

The Cyborg breaks these categories:

There are several consequences to taking seriously the imagery of cyborgs as other than our enemies. Our bodies, ourselves; bodies are maps of power and identity. Cyborgs are no exception. A Cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends); it takes irony for granted. One is too few, and two is only one possibility. (Haraway, 1995: 125)

Questioning the reproductive matrix in favour of the possibility of regrowth, reconstruction and recovery, Haraway argues that *we have all been deeply wounded. We need regeneration, not rebirth*. In this context, “the lost limb” (the trauma, the mistake, the wound) can grow back in a monstrous, double, different, and more powerful way. We abandon linear normativity to embrace the irregular and infinite possibilities of the Cyborg.

There is no absolute point of view that can summarise all experiences or encompass all perspectives. However, there is a condition of partiality that cannot be overcome (*permanent partiality*). She criticises great universal narratives, explaining that every point of view and form of knowledge is partial and situated, and never neutral depending on who produces it. The subject is no longer stable or coherent, but fragmented, kaleidoscopic, in progress and hybrid, just like the Cyborg.

Consequently, there is no universal or univocal *healing process* that regenerates wounds. We are Cyborgs and we are unique; any experience of transformation and healing must recognise our individuality and support us in our self-determination.

Multitude of bodies

The fear of “diversity” is the most powerful weapon used by the matrix²⁸. The colonial Western model assumes a uniform representation of bodies, politics, economics, and social structures.



Mari Katayama, *Bystander #001*, 2016. Self-portrait with Hand-sewn objects.

²⁸ It is used by extremist and far-right governments.

The artist Mari Katayama challenges many categories, developing a visual language based on the aesthetics of Cyborgs and non-normativity. Her artistic identity strengthens her sense of identity as an Asian disabled woman; the mutilations of her body give life to a vast and magnificent narrative world.

She continuously transforms the body, multiplying and repeating the “disturbing” element (the prosthesis and deformed or amputated limbs) *ad infinitum* in relation to the normative gaze. She emphasises this element to provoke and evoke emotion. Combining amputated and deformed physical elements with prostheses and objects, she adheres fully to the cyborg alphabet, camouflaging, transforming and inverting the silhouette, as well as the interaction of the human presence with space. Her scenes immerse us in a future of unique bodies, rebuilt after the fall. *Her High Heel Project*, which began in 2011, aims to create prostheses that enable her to wear high heels, offering a choice that transcends physical, social, and economic constraints.

Louise Bourgeois also rewrites the narrative of the body, citing the cyborg universe through metaphors, fragments, and deformations. Unconsciously, she breaks the barriers of *speciesism*²⁹ by representing the mother in the physicality of the spider, recognizing flora and fauna's role in caring for humans. That strong and protective spider body is threatening and fragile at the same time: only those who are truly intimate with the wild can abandon themselves to protecting nature. The spider-mother expresses the complex relationship between mothers and daughters, especially in a patriarchal society.

For Bourgeois, it is the sexuality of the body that makes it frightening. "Femininity" does not coincide with an idea of purity but rather manifests itself as a complexity of elements and stories. Understanding this complexity is necessary in order to reveal the body's strength.

The emotional wounds of her childhood manifest as mutilations on her adult body torn to pieces and dissected like an archive of indelible pain which cannot be eliminated, but from which one can only begin again.

Designed by the vulnerability and instability of identity, the hybrid forms describe the body as a territory full of emotions and symbolism: a map of past lives, forgotten memories and fragmented images that she tries to piece together through art. Only fragments, shapes, voids and protrusions remain of traumatic experiences; a body that changes with time and a memory that mixes with fantasy³⁰.

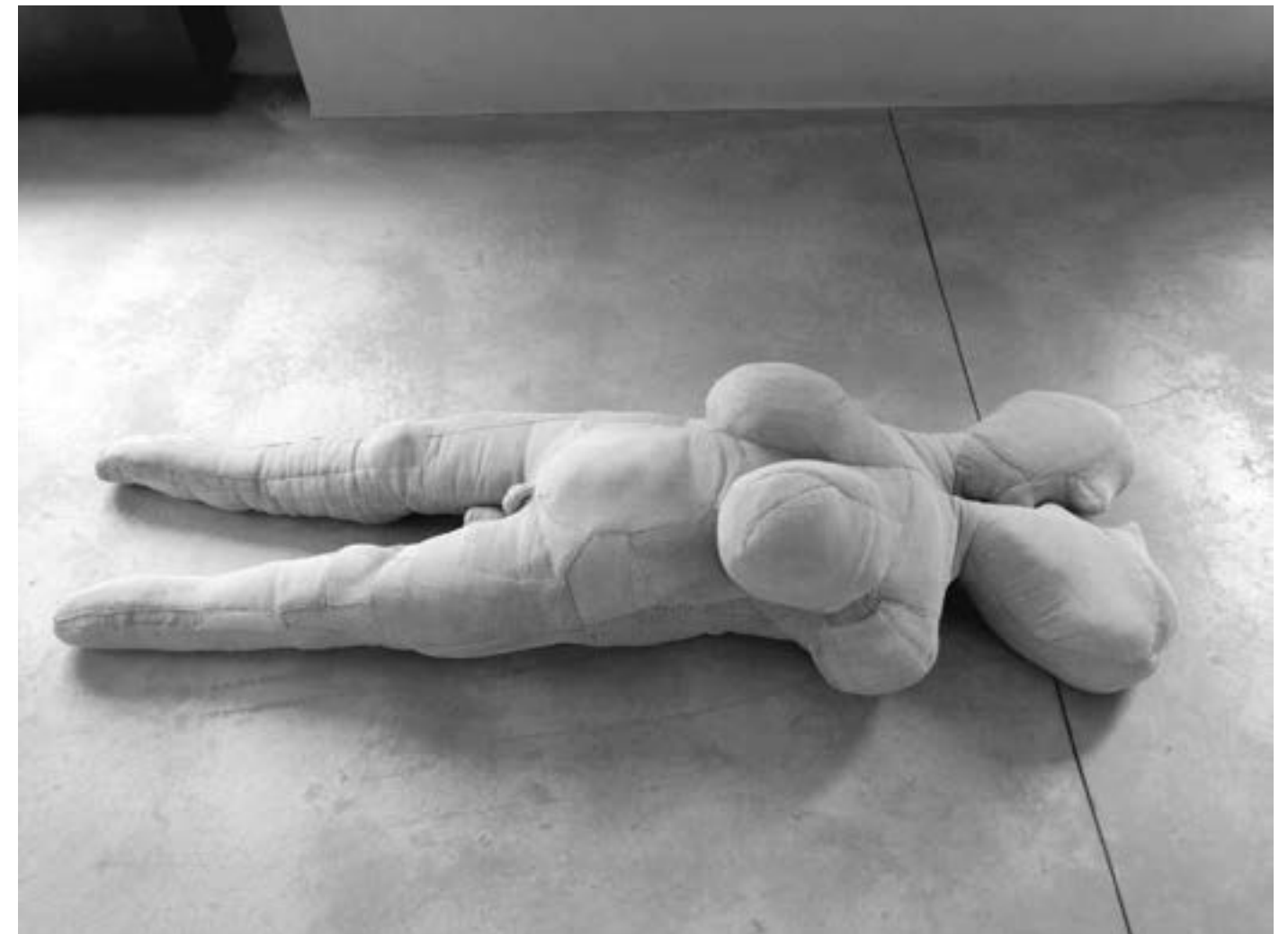
Both of these artists give life to an unconventional aesthetic in which the physicality of bodies becomes brutal, wonderfully powerful in its storytelling, unexpected and explosive, that takes up space and claims it.

²⁹ A form of discrimination based on species membership, whereby the lives and interests of human beings are considered superior to those of other animals and living beings, thus justifying their exploitation or differential treatment.

³⁰ To read more about Bourgeois's career, see the collection of her writings *Distruzione del padre / Ricostruzione del padre. Scritti e interviste 1923-2000* (Destruction of the Father/Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews, 1923–1997), Quodlibet, 2009 (1998).

It is a beauty born from pain, seeking to contain it, narrate it, and display it: it reclaims it and shows us how all of human history stems from it and is filled with it.

Pain must not be hidden or smothered by paternalism or pity. Sharing it is the first step in holding society accountable for the system it itself helps to perpetuate. Art, as a space where elements meet, must take on the task of repeating and multiplying – sometimes to the point of exhaustion – what systems of control attempt to conceal.



Louise Bourgeois *Single III* 1996. Fabric sculpture at Fondazione Prada

Commissioned by Banksy in Bethlehem in 2017, *The Walled Off Hotel* (2017)³¹ is a place where art confronts the oppression of the Palestinian people, allowing visitors to experience reality unfiltered. This hotel, which is also a museum and an artwork in itself, bears the burden of contemporary violence on a daily basis, both materially and politically, as a victim of it rather than an observer from the outside. By using the codes of the system, Banksy creates a microcosm in which to collectivise pain and responsibility, and to put the narrative back on track.



Me visiting *The Walled Off Hotel* and the Israeli division wall in Bethlehem, research image, 2023

³¹ *The Walled Off Hotel* is the hotel with "the worst view in the world", being located in front of the wall built by Israel to segregate and control the territories of the Palestinian West Bank.

My project *In Contact with Art* (2024) investigates the power of art as a metaphysical space, inhabited by people, objects in transformation, intertwining paths and ever-evolving dialogues. From the interviews collected, it emerged that art is not simply a set of techniques or materials, but an approach to reality that, for many, is deeply integrated into everyday life. This contrasts with the capitalist vision, which often reduces art to a privilege, a commodity, a status symbol or a simple ornament. Crossing public spaces where art is present generates contamination and stimulation, also overcoming pre-established socio-economic boundaries.



In contact with art, interviews with workers at the Academy of Fine Arts in Porto, 2024

We see every work of art as an opportunity to tell stories and generate narratives. It is a space of contact with reality (even the crudest) and with utopia. Through art, we can make utopia a little more concrete, bring what is different from us closer, and make it more understandable.

Garden diary #3

September 10, 2024

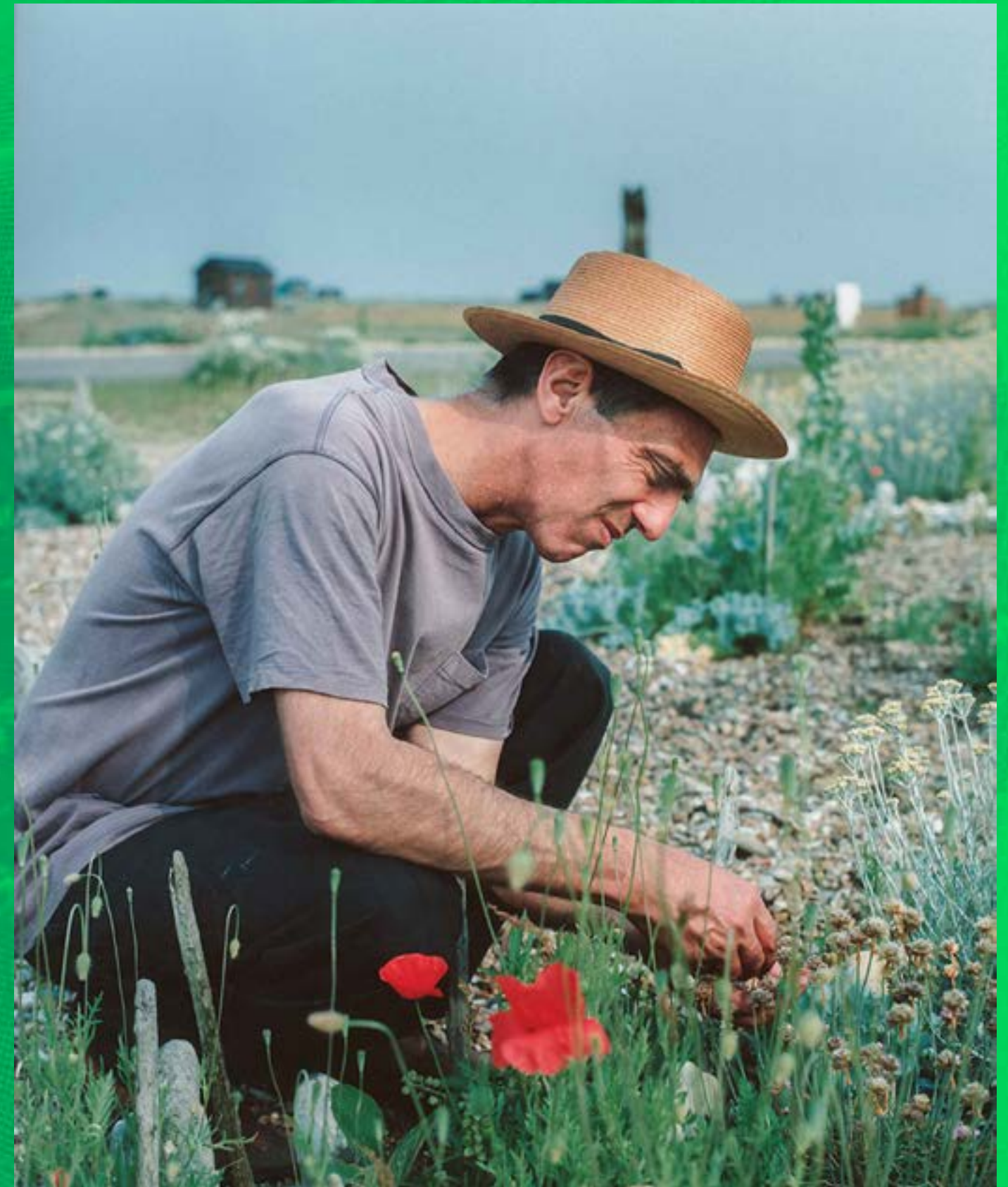
It's my second day in the garden, and it already feels like I've been here for a long time. Today, we marked out the boundaries of my plot by placing stones around the edges. I felt that the action of tracing boundaries was, at times, abusive and “colonising”, but, on the other hand, it was a way of taking responsibility for the void that I promised to fill and make grow. As I placed the stones next to each other and on top of each other, looking for the best joints, I reflected on how defining boundaries is an important part of the care process. They establish responsibility and a contract for the space that I occupy and need. Fragility often makes boundaries unstable, blurred and unclear, but when we start to take care of ourselves and take responsibility, those boundaries strengthen us and give us power. What makes care difficult is a lack of respect for other people's boundaries and a lack of responsibility. Responsibilities that are equally distributed are easier and fairer to bear than a disproportionate burden.

September 14, 2024

At around 5:00 pm, I went out to plant the first seedlings: I planted Romanesco cabbage, Galician cabbage and red beetroot. I started alone, and then José arrived, so I asked him to help me. I was a bit anxious; I didn't know if I was doing everything right: the right plants in the right place at the right distance. I started to ask myself: Does the practice of caring for plants include this feeling of anxiety and insecurity? The feeling of not knowing if what you're doing is right, or if your actions will help or harm the plant. Is there an exact formula for care? Or does each person practise care in their own way? How is a relationship of care built between the person offering it and the person receiving it? Can this relationship exist outside of power dynamics? Can caring be done wrong?



Community gardens of Fontainhas, research image, 2024, Porto



The garden at Prospect Cottage, photography project © Howard Sooley, 1990

Sooley continued to visit Derek until his death, joining him on trips scavenging for flotsam and to nurseries to buy plants. As Derek became more fragile and spent more time in the hospital, Sooley would help him travel back to Prospect Cottage, a place where for a time, as Sooley said in the book *Derek Jarman's Garden, Photographs by Howard Sooley*, "he cheated death hiding amongst the flowers and dancing with the bees."

3. Care as an artistic practice

Compromise, responsibility and regeneration

Critique and care, critique of care

I live in the American Gardens building on West 81st Street. My name is Patrick Bateman. I'm 27 years old. I believe in taking care of myself, and a balanced diet and a rigorous exercise routine. In the morning, if my face is a little puffy, I'll put on an ice pack while doing my stomach crunches. I can do a thousand now. After I remove the ice pack, I use a deep pore cleanser lotion. In the shower, I use a water-activated gel cleanser, then a honey almond body scrub, and on the face, an exfoliating gel scrub. Then I apply an herb-mint facial mask, which I leave on for 10 minutes while I prepare the rest of my routine. I always use an aftershave lotion with little or no alcohol, because alcohol dries your face out and makes you look older. Then moisturizer, then an anti-ageing eye balm, followed by a final moisturizing protective lotion. There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman; some kind of abstraction. But there is no real me: only an entity, something illusory. And though I can hide my cold gaze, and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable... I simply am not there. (American Psycho, 2000)

The opening monologue of *American Psycho* (2000) exemplifies an obsession with a care model that reduces the body and identity to mere objects to be preserved, stripping the individual of their interiority. Through his preoccupation with appearance and his battle against the passage of time, the protagonist, Patrick Bateman, portrays himself as an insubstantial and illusory entity, incapable of experiencing genuine emotions or forming meaningful connections. This condition progressively propels him towards violence and madness. The obsessive repetition of a rigid “care” routine becomes the means by which he fuels the cult of the self. Rather than being a true practice of care, it is a consumerist ritualisation of appearance that distances him from authenticity, autonomy, and real value. Ultimately, it is a condemnation.

As discussed in previous chapters, the process of self-identification should begin with an awareness of one's internal fragilities and needs. Mary Harro's film illustrates how the concept of care is frequently misconstrued and influenced by contradictory socio-political models. In his book *Filosofia della cura* (Philosophy of care, 2024), Boris Groys defines the “system of care”³² as the social and political system that cares about people as workers, as productive machines, considers them as energy to be consumed in order to maintain a productive state.

The “system of care” is based on bureaucratic provisions and laws that force citizens to be healthy, treating it as a duty and a form of social affirmation. This system does not acknowledge illness or fragility, considering those who are sick or disabled as weak links in the production chain.

Foucault describes modern states as biopolitical states³³ that, since the 18th century, have controlled birth, death and public health, thereby transforming the population into an object of government. Medicine has replaced religion, and hospitals have replaced churches: the cure of the soul has become the cure of the body.

Boris Groys explains:

Only if the body is kept healthy can its owner contribute to the well-being or change of society. Health is the fundamental prerequisite for participating in social life. This is why society tends not to accept decadence, passivity or indulgence towards illness, nor a reluctance to engage in normal self-care practices. (Groys, 2023: 16)

³² Boris Groys defines it as the set of contemporary, secular institutions responsible for maintaining the health of the human body.

³³ For further analysis: *Alberto Destasio, Agamben e Foucault: due modelli irriducibili di biopolitica* (Agamben and Foucault: Two Irreducible Models of Biopolitics), in *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics* XXV, no. 1 (2023): 406-434.

The author defines the concept of *symbolic body*³⁴ as an expansion of identity that enables bodies to be enrolled in the “system of care”, which is a surveillance apparatus that controls them without their awareness or consent. Bodies are treated as numbers, data and statistics, and abstract entities. Patrick Bateman’s character embodies the emptying of identity made by the State; a void that one tries to fill by identifying the self on the surface of appearance, today modelled more than ever with social avatars and digital identities.

Groys identifies the refusal of productive work as the only possibility for freeing the body from the mechanised dimension³⁵. It is only in this way that man can cease to be a machine and regain his animal nature. This makes him a sovereign creature, guided by his own instincts, including the fundamental instinct of survival.

Health, according to Nietzsche, is energy that expresses itself in action and from which freedom is born. It is not a condition imposed from the outside, but a *vital and self-affirming force*, at the basis of a process of freedom in continuous evolution: the *Great Health*³⁶.

It is precisely this vital force that underpins Groys’s concept of “care of the self”³⁷, which is a concept that is opposed to the “Care System”: a set of actions, practices, reflections and studies that do not arise from bureaucratic and control systems, but from physical, psychological and identity needs, both collective and individual. This approach aims to promote self-determination and interspecies well-being, independent of productive logics.

In the transition from the “State of Care” to the “Care of the Self”, the figure of the Socratic philosopher is seen as central.

34 The extension of the physical body that occurs through the creation of documents, videos, emails, photographs, and so on.

35 Through the analysis of Georges Bataille, who in *La parte maledetta* (The Accursed Share, 1949), defines productive work as an activity aimed at growth, conservation and utility - that is, the accumulation of resources and economic and social stability.

36 Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Gay Science* (Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, 1882) fragment 382, introduces the concept of *Great Health* where he associates health not with a static state of equilibrium, but with a vital dynamism, a creative and expansive force.

37 The subject of “care of the self” must defend the validity of their personal experiences, perceptions and beliefs, even when these are in opposition to the judgements of social institutions such as the scientific community and the church.

According to Socrates, the purpose of philosophy is not to progress along the path of erudition and knowledge, but to regress to a state of non-knowledge, where one neither learns nor teaches, nor acquires or spreads knowledge. Like a midwife helping with childbirth, the philosopher helps truth to be born from the soul³⁸.

The vision of the Socratic philosopher is consistent with the approach I take to my projects. Through the work of art, the artist favours a truth and an internal reflection in the spectator without forcing or constraining them. As recounted in the Myth of the Cave, social spaces encourage individuals to accept conventional truths (shadows), whereas the philosopher, though having discovered a superior reality (sunlight)³⁹, must not impose on others. The path out of the cave transforms the individual from an object of care into a subject capable of taking care of themselves. This transition is fundamental to my work: the work of art is a tool that stimulates this process, inviting the public to overcome their passive role and become active participants in the physical and imaginative spaces.

This is why philosophy coincides with preparing for death: because it involves abandoning the earthly, physical realm. Preparing for death is a solitary and silent activity. It is an act of contemplation. (Groys, 2023: 26)

The moment of contemplation generated by the work of art can lead to the momentary (interstitial) abandonment of the cave, in favour of movement towards external light, allowing us to temporarily experience other places, possibilities, and sensations.

I was interested in the *Arte e saude* project (Art and health), which was started in 2022 by the Soares dos Reis National Museum (MNSR) in collaboration with the University Hospital Centre of Porto. The project was developed based on the premise that museums and their collections can benefit the health and well-being of hospitalised patients, doctors, and caregivers. Accompanied by Liliana Teles Aguiar, supervisor of the Museum’s Educational Service,

38 For further analysis see Plato, *Theaetetus*.

39 Reference to Plato’s Cave Myth, *The Republic*, Book VII.



Delivery and use of *Platonic Devices to Reflect Reality Box- Art and Health Project*, at the CMIN in Porto, research image, March - June 2025.



I visited hospitals where reproductions of artworks from the museum had been installed to make the environments more pleasant and connect patients with art and its benefits. I was struck by the potential of the relationship between museum and hospital, two seemingly distant institutions that share similar social dynamics and needs. Daily contact with art can help patients cope with the challenges of hospitalization and illness. Following a few meetings,

I proposed donating three works of art from the *Platonic Devices to Reflect Reality* series to the Centre for Mothers and Children (CMIN) in Porto, to be placed in the play and workshop areas dedicated to hospitalized children. These works are designed to modify the space in a fantastic and imaginative way and to encourage interaction and creativity. In an impersonal setting such as a hospital, opening a wooden box that reveals colours and images to break up the monotony of the place and stimulate the senses offers an opportunity to explore new evolutions of the artistic object as a complementary well-being tool.

Care and Responsibility

To avoid romanticising the concept of care, it is important to recognise its Sisyphean nature. As in the myth of Sisyphus⁴⁰, condemned to eternally push a boulder up a mountain only to see it roll down each time, those who care for others (those who choose to base their work on the practice of caring) are faced with a continuous cycle of efforts that never has a definitive end.

Every act of care – whether preparing a meal, cleaning, administering medication, providing comfort or simply listening – is erased from the flow of life: the food is consumed, the house gets dirty again, the pain returns and the fragility persists. This constant repetition can be exhausting and alienating, as it translates into responsibilities that cannot be interrupted and are often made invisible.

The theme of “care work”⁴¹ is central to contemporary feminist struggles: the economic system relies on invisible, unpaid work carried out largely by women. According to existentialist concepts of the *feminine*, taking care of social structures such as the family and the emotional well-being of others has historically been considered a

40 The figure of Sisyphus appears in some passages of Homer's *Odyssey* (Book 11, line 593) and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book 4, line 463. However, it was Albert Camus who in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Le Mythe de Sisyphe, 1942) used the myth to explore the theme of the absurd and the human condition.

41 *Care work* refers to a range of activities — including material, emotional and relational tasks — that aim to meet the physical and emotional needs of others, such as caring for children, elderly people, those who are sick or disabled and in general those tasks that support everyday life.

natural duty of women rather than an activity of social value. Today, care work must be recognised as a collective responsibility and a central element of society and politics.

In my methodology, art takes on the task of addressing the care needs of the present time, based on this awareness. Rather than simply documenting reality, it interprets and acts upon it, questioning dominant norms and offering new perspectives on the world; it become a *space for care*⁴². Despite the *Sisyphean* burden fuelled by the awareness that artistic action does not possess the political power to change laws, it acts through contact, contemplation and narration to try to touch the awareness and conscience of the public and influence socio-economic relations.

It was with these ideas in mind that I developed the *Garden of Care* project during my second year of studies. Initially, I devoted myself to the Fontainhas garden through practical care, cleaning the space and tending to the plants as they grew. I also spoke to people.

However, I then decided to approach it in a more poetic and political way. The final installation is made up of words grafted into the space to recognise its value as a social refuge and an interstitial space within the urban context; a place where people and primary needs converge. I incorporated some of the 250 words that were removed by the Trump administration from official government websites⁴³ to make them resonate forcefully in the public sphere, recognising the political value of those who pass through and transform it daily in an informal and spontaneous way, where bureaucracy remains confined to paper. It is a gesture against censorship and in favour of grassroots claims: 50 small sculptures affirming public space as free, self-managed, welcoming and open to all.

42 In my artistic practice, the *space for care* is a physical and conceptual environment in which to safely explore and reflect on the dynamics of attention and acceptance towards the interspecies-related political, emotional and social needs.

43 The Donald Trump administration in 2025 has issued guidelines aimed at limiting or discouraging the use of terms associated with issues considered “woke” within federal agencies and offices. According to government documents that have been made public, hundreds of words and concepts have been identified as ones to avoid, in an effort to reduce the influence of progressive policies and language in federal institutions. Last consultation of the list of terms in the [article](#) on 13 September 2025.



Garden of Care, installation, 2025



Garden of Care, preparation of installation, 2025

The *Maintenance Art Manifesto* (1969) artistic project by Mierle Laderman Ukeles⁴⁴ has proposed reflections on care as a political and aesthetic act, challenging the separation between domestic work and artistic practice. In her manifesto, Ukeles distinguishes between “development”, which she defines as creation *ex novo*, and “maintenance”, which she defines as invisible, cyclical, necessary work. The manifesto elevates activities such as cleaning, feeding and maintaining to the level of artistic practice. In the performance *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance* (1973), Ukeles cleaned and polished the museum stairs, thereby reversing the hierarchy of roles within the art world and transforming an invisible, everyday activity into a political and performative act that is essential to the functioning of society.



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, 1969. Performance.

44 Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, first published in *Artforum* magazine in 1969, had a significant impact on conceptual and feminist art.

Even if the outcome is never final, every act of care has an inherent value as it fosters connections, provides relief and creates moments of humanity. The weight of the boulder does not disappear, but meaning can be created by carrying it. This is why it is worth continuing to care. Art is a field of freedom that must be passed through by care and must pass through it.

In Francis Alÿs's work *When Faith Moves Mountains* (2002), the apparently useless gesture on a macroscopic scale is a metaphor for transformation, however minimal. Moving a sand dune with 500 volunteers symbolises the power of teamwork and the ability to achieve collective goals through compromise.

As in the myth of Sisyphus, the effort seems destined to be lost over time: the sand can be blown away by the wind and the physical alteration is barely noticeable compared to the size of the mountain. However, the action becomes a shared experience and an act towards effecting change. It exists not only in the gesture itself, but also in the documentation and memory of those who participated.



Francis Alÿs, *When Faith Moves Mountains*, 2002. Participatory performance.

In Alÿs's works, every small gesture resonates on a larger scale; every local action is a metaphor for a global issue. The meaning lies not in the final result, but in the act itself.

His work explores care as an act of resistance, manifesting itself through the repetition of minimal actions destined to disappear yet charged with meaning. *Children's Games* (1999–present)⁴⁵ is a manifesto for the care and preservation of childhood, in which play becomes an act of resistance, creativity, connection and resilience.

Alÿs experiments with the boundaries between art, politics and society, questioning our responsibility for change and depicting the complexities of the global socio-political landscape. He does not directly denounce figures of power or make explicit accusations. The lens of his camera captures the people, lives and places that have been weakened by the system.

His videos are licensed under the “Creative Commons” license to overcome the exclusionary dynamics typical of elite culture. He develops his projects openly and collectively, enabling the protagonists to actively participate in the creative process and take ownership of their roles.

Learn to care

Paulo Freire identified a double violence in the binomial “oppressed-oppressor”: both subjects are trapped in a dehumanising system where one suffers injustice and repression while the other loses their own humanity through domination, becoming isolated from power and violence⁴⁶.

To explore experiences of care, we must consider the associated paradoxes and our responsibility for the impact of our actions on the world. Recognising that results are not always immediately visible, we strive to identify the most suitable care model for interspecies existence, expressing, crossing and regenerating fragilities and collective needs.

⁴⁵ The work was first exhibited at the Tate Modern in London in 1999.

⁴⁶ In *Pedagogia degli oppressi* (Pedagogy of the Oppressed; 1970), Paulo Freire analyses the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor as one of power, in which the former must become aware of their situation in order to begin the process of liberation and social transformation.

In his book *Imparare a curare* (Learn to care; 2024), Marco Guzzi explores care as a relational and creative process, emphasising the importance of an approach that combines science and storytelling, objectivity and emotional experience. *Narrative medicine*⁴⁷, the act of listening to the patient, enhances the use of language as a vehicle for healing, preventing the therapeutic relationship from being reduced to the mere administration of treatments (drugs, hospitalisations, therapies, etc.). Instead, it creates a space of reciprocity in which both the doctor and the patient actively participate in the healing process.

Our society exposes us to conditions that continually undermine our health, which is the great paradox of the 'Care System': it expects us to perform yet does not provide us with the means to feel good. Illness emerges because of exhausting work rhythms, social injustice, precariousness, urban pollution and alienating architecture. Therefore, the care project must overcome this paradox: it cannot be separated from the political and social context but must be addressed in a systemic perspective.

According to Guzzi, the discomfort we feel should prompt a desire for long convalescence and conscious surrender, which are denied by the frenetic rhythms and automatisms of capitalist society today. In this sense, art itself can be considered a space for convalescence, a territory where necessity and diversity can be embraced and experienced within a framework of respect, reflection, contemplation and pause. Questioning illness, fragility, marginality and necessity means asking what they can reveal. In doing so, any relationship, whether artistic, therapeutic or intimate, becomes a place of trust, creation and revision of the world, capable of subverting, or at least questioning, systems of oppression.

My work *Camouflage* (2023) is an object that allows everyone to listen to their own pain and perform a self-massage independently. The cure is something that everyone must identify through their own feeling and perception, acting as both a receiver and a stimulator of

⁴⁷ Recent practices in *narrative medicine* are part of a therapeutic approach that combines the objectivity of medical science with individuals' experiences and emotions, paying attention to the communication processes established in the doctor–patient relationship.

themselves:

- 1) *I identify my pain*
- 2) *I touch the points that need healing*
- 3) *I assess whether the way I touch makes me feel better. If not,*
- 4) *I modify my actions.*

This pattern of actions, which is activated by the work, stimulates feelings and actions simultaneously, creating an open, spontaneous and effective channel for communication.



A memory is like a candle that does not go out, participatory objects, 2025

According to Guzzi, listening, language and words are tools that can both heal and make people sick⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ It is urgent to make care more humane because we continue to respond to illness and old age with purely technical tools, forgetting that each person is the product of a mixture of stories, emotions and experiences that deserve to be heard.

Through language, those who suffer can find a way to express and transform their pain into meaning, whether that expression is verbal, visual or physical. In this context, art can be used as a care tool, touching the heart and body through words and images.

My artistic work in the Prado do Repouso cemetery explores the connection with collective rituals and investigates the theme of death through symbolism and materiality. The research project *A memory is like a candle that never goes out* (2025) provides a space for remembrance, enabling individual memories to become collective and facilitating the dialogue that helps transform pain. I have collected short mementoes about the deceased, transformed them into ritualistic objects, and placed them in public space to reveal silent stories and words. My aim is to infuse them with a new vital force and power.

Finding meaning in pain involves finding the most suitable narrative to shape it, transforming it into a creative act and consequently an act of self-determination using our fragility as a means of expression.

Life itself is a process of tearing and conquering meaning until our last breath. Finding a language to express suffering and educating ourselves in the art of silence and listening are the keys to a more humane and transformative cure. The meaning of the world cannot be found within it but must be sought beyond: in our ability to speak, relate to others and transform pain into knowledge and growth. Being silent means death, while language, in all its forms, is the key to healing and change.

Guzzi writes:

I am precarious. I can receive a meaning or a word precariously and transmit it through a creative act. This is a poetic act. The poetic act is also a precarious act. It is not created in the strength of the ego but in its weakness which is the power of the spirit. (Guzzi, 2024:71)

The healing process, therefore, is not a medical act, but an action in a broader human dimension, in the poetic act, in the artistic act.

Conclusions

The journey I have undertaken over these past two years has led me to develop a methodological approach in which fragility, contact, and care are not merely concepts, but emotional and political spaces I continuously traverse. Many others have explored these sensitive archipelagos before me, and today, in our current historical and social context, the theme of care has become central to cultural discourse. As we have seen in this thesis, art is deeply intertwined with the most intimate dimensions of human experience: it draws creative impulse and stylistic patterns from the personal histories of both artists and communities. The stories that move through the world can be transformed into paths that others may follow, allowing human experiences to become tools of knowledge, shaping the future and preserving the past in the healthiest and most just way possible.

Taking the side of fragility is a deliberate stance, one that remains necessary until equality prevails. Many artists find in fragility the very reason for their practice: being an artist can be complex, even painful, an arduous journey of self-discovery. Yet it is by moving through pain that one forges a personal alphabet, a language through which to express oneself. Those who are unable to make this passage are often left trapped in endless cycles of anger and violence.

On the other hand, being in a relationship, being part of a community, are practices whose saving power we too often overlook: contact, which in the artistic context evolves into contamination, is what makes experiences more interesting. The artist who manages to step aside and let the relationships they witness speak for themselves can ease the weight of art, walking through it with depth and lightness. Contamination, when enacted with respect, is expansive: it allows us to discover ourselves anew and with greater awareness.

Care, ultimately, is the natural outcome of a certain way of being in the world. It integrates multiple channels and brings them together in a state of serenity. We have seen how care cannot exist without responsibility and effort: willpower is the first step toward incorporating care into our daily lives, and listening is a fundamental piece, not to impose, but to collaborate. Numerous contemporary

initiatives have deeply inspired my research, showing how care can be enacted through art and collective practices. Projects such as *EoC (Ecologies of Care)* have informed my understanding of participatory approaches rooted in listening, relationality, and mutual support. Another interesting platform is *Queer Death Studies Network*, which has opened up a critical and transdisciplinary perspective on care, mourning and the politics of loss. These and many other examples represent networks in which art becomes a space for responsibility, contact and social transformation.

This thesis is rooted in the diverse experiences of my life: I have encountered art and artists across cultures and places, and I have lived, in my own skin, essential moments of fragility, contact, and care. It is through these crossings that I have found the core of my work and understood the deeper meaning of what I had been searching for so long in my artistic experience and in life.

This research has allowed me to cross the public, urban and social space, finding stimuli and answers beyond the academic environment. On the street, in informal dialogues with people, friends, teachers, workers, in the social dynamics observed and experienced daily, I felt I belonged to an expanded community, in which relationships have fuelled my growth, studies and the realization of my projects.

I hope that my works, although stylistically different, can be read as fragments of a puzzle reflecting the socio-environmental dynamics of our time. I hope that the heterogeneity of my work will continue to generate opportunities for research in dialogue with different communities and themes, and that it can contribute to the academic field by demonstrating how artistic approaches can intersect with various disciplines such as philosophy, botany, holistic medicine, anthropology, sociology and so on. Far from being concluded, this research remains open and evolving, as a possibility to generate further insights, with the hope that they are guided by play and responsibility towards the present.

Through this process, and in light of some recent personal events, I have realised that the care process is built day by day: walking slowly and remaining focused yet open to welcoming the doubts and fears, as well as the bursts of strength, that it brings with it.

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