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From Passion to Compassion: A Caring Inquiry into Creative Work as Socially Engaged Art

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Abstract

This article considers the analytical potential of a concept of care that foregrounds human interdependencies, relational ties and the needs of others as the basis for action in analysing work, such as creative work, which is neither directly nor obviously associated with care provision. Work in the creative industries has recently become a central concern in sociology. Much of this scholarship reproduces or extends the idea of creative work as a paradigm of individualized work in contemporary societies that is characterized by high levels of worker autonomy, passion, self-expression and self-enterprise. This article challenges such theorizations by calling attention to the role of caring in creative work, understood both as an ontological phenomenon and as a relational practice of sustaining and repairing the world. Drawing on a qualitative study of socially engaged art in South-East Europe, I argue that creative work manifests itself as a labour of care and compassion.

Keywords

care, caring, compassion, creative industries, creative labour, creative work, cultural work, individualization, individualized work, passion, socially engaged art, social practice art

Introduction

This article examines the undervalued and under-researched dynamics of care, caring and compassion in creative work. Sociological interest in creative industries – that is, those industries that produce and disseminate goods with predominantly symbolic and aesthetic value such as music, film and video games – has burgeoned over the last two decades (Banks, 2017; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010; McRobbie, 2016a, 2016b). Creative work has in turn become a central concern in sociology, as evinced by dedicated

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scholarship featuring prominently in this journal (Friedman et al., 2017; McRobbie, 2016b; O'Doherty and Willmott, 2009; Thompson et al., 2016).

The basic premise of these studies is that creative work is fundamentally individualized work. Owing to its requirements for 'passionate work' (Arvidsson et al., 2010; McRobbie, 2016a), including self-enterprising work-identities and self-governing subjectivities (Beech et al., 2016; Lee, 2018; Naudin, 2017), creative work has been widely defined as self-centred, self-expressive work, undertaken by autonomous 'subjects-in-formation' and self-reliant 'passionate labourers' (O'Doherty and Willmott, 2009; Scharff, 2016). This article looks beyond creative work as 'individualized work' by extending current philosophical and sociological discussions of care, caring and compassion to the study of creative work – a type of work that has been prevalently interpreted as having a 'care deficit' whereby creative workers are seen as displaying a disregard for moral considerations and relational commitments (Banks, 2006).

Care and caring are of fundamental social importance. Since caring has been long considered a quintessentially female activity, however, the societal significance and economic status of care work has consistently been denigrated and devalued as 'women's work' (England, 2005; Thomas, 1993). Scholarship on care has largely been spearheaded by gender scholars who have painstakingly demonstrated the economic and political value of care work, defined as labour practices and activities – usually gendered – that involve human contact and develop the capabilities and well-being of the other (England, 2005; Tronto, 1993). This scholarship typically examines the dynamics of care in the dual socio-economic domains of: (1) 'informal unpaid care work', as carried out in the 'invisible' domestic and private sphere by mothers, sisters and daughters (Folbre, 2012); and (2) 'formal paid care work', as undertaken in care occupations by care professionals such as nurses (Ray, 2013), home aids (Stacey, 2011) and teachers (Noddings, 2010). More recent scholarship has disentangled the concept of care from the gendered and binary public–private, formal–informal domains of labour in order to establish the relationality immanent in care as central to all human action and a fundamental element of all social and urban organization (Hall and Smith, 2015; Lynch, 2007). This is an invaluable body of scholarship which posits care as an essential and universal human attribute that acquires a particularistic force depending on cultural context (Held, 2006; Ray, 2013). Feminist scholarship has subsequently productively mobilized the concept of care to rethink the moral boundaries of political (Puig de La Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993) and economic life (Boris and Parrenas, 2010). In spite of these efforts at dissociating care from narrow occupational gendered 'care spheres', however, issues of care and caring are side-lined in sociological analysis of work, such as creative work, that is neither directly nor explicitly contingent on care provision.

This article builds on phenomenological conceptualizations of care as the principal practical and relational ethic of all economic, including occupational practices. The concept of care is mobilized as an analytical register with which to examine the lived experiences of creative work as revealed in in-depth interviews with performing artists engaging, among other things, also in social practice art. These experiences have been subjected to a caring inquiry that elucidates creative work as a labour of compassion as opposed to a labour of passion. A phenomenological 'caring inquiry' foregrounds the meanings, relationships and practices of care as an existential, ontological foundation of

human being (Dreyfus, 1991; Heidegger, 1996) and thus also a vital structure ('care-structure') of economic and labour activities (Ray, 2013). 'Being-in-the-world' (*Da-sein*) 'is essentially care' (Heidegger, 1996: 180) that presupposes an intrinsic propensity to 'act other-wise' instead of 'self-wise' (Lynch, 2007: 555). Caring underlies all life-sustaining activities that maintain and repair the world as a site of life lived well together with others (Tronto, 1993). Proceeding from this premise, this article seeks to elucidate the meaning and practices of care in creative work. A caring inquiry is more pertinent than ever given the rapid dwindling of public arts subsidies and the proliferation of non-profit funding schemes promoting socially instrumental artistic values, forcing creative workers to double as bona fide social care workers (Belfiore, 2018; Bishop, 2012). The article makes three main contributions. First, it introduces the concept of care as a useful tool in the study of creative labour. Second, it sketches out a caring inquiry through which creative labour manifests itself as a labour of compassion, involving a hands-on practical maintenance and repair of 'a better world'. Third, it elucidates that artists' provision of 'unpaid informal care', driven by an unobligated, altruistic affinity to embrace the concerns of the others as fundamental to everyday caring action, and their 'paid formal care', executed under the auspices of funding schemes that require artists to engage in social work, are not mutually exclusive but complexly interlocking. The caring inquiry therefore illuminates the incipient politics of care, self-care and self-interest in creative work.

Care-less-ness in the Creative Industries: Self-Centred, Individualized and Passionate Labour

In sociology, creative work has frequently served as an expedient case and emblematic illustration of social developments, labour market changes and shifting work trends in conditions of 'advanced modernity', marked by the rise of individualism and the dissolution of traditional collectivities such as families, communities and labour unions (Beck, 2002). Sociologists working within the purview of individualization theory (Beck, 2002) and, later, neo-Foucauldian governmentality theory, have conveniently explained how 'do-it-yourself biographies' that posit 'individualized' solutions (such as self-branding, self-enterprise, self-exploitation) to systemic challenges such as diminishing welfare benefits, employment protection and security operate in the working lives of people in the creative sector (McRobbie, 2016a). Unsurprisingly, sociological studies typically define creative work as 'individualized labour' (Banks and Milestone, 2011; Lee, 2018); that is, a type of labour that prototypically embodies the 'artistic critique', with its demands for unique individual talent, passion, autonomy, self-reliance and self-management (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006). Accordingly, creative workers are cast as individualized, autonomous and de-socialized agents. There is virtually no sociological study of creative industries that does not thematize and hence reproduce the idea of creative work as 'passionate labour' (Arvidsson et al., 2010; McRobbie, 2016a; Umney and Kretsos, 2015) or 'a labour of love' that is in essence 'an act of self-love' (Tokumitsu, 2014) performed primarily for personal reward, self-expression and self-realization (Thompson et al., 2016). The most consistent underlying premise of these studies is that the production of labour value and economic value in neoliberal creative industries is

tantamount to the production of subjectivity via the self-branding, self-disciplining and self-governance of 'passionate labourers' (Naudin, 2017; O'Doherty and Willmott, 2009; Scharff, 2016). Sociological studies drawing on neo-Foucauldian governmentality theory unravel the processes of subjectification whereby creative workers become self-exploitative 'entrepreneurs of the self' (Duffy, 2016; Lee, 2018), increasing individual performance through total quality management of *the self*, including sustained work on one's body, mind and soul through the execution of 'aesthetic labour' (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006), 'affective labour' and 'emotional labour' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010).

Critical scholars thus unveil, what Lynch (2010) calls 'a culture of care-less-ness', structurally encoded in neoliberal creative industries. In this view, creative industries do not care but instead outsource responsibility for failure, upskilling, branding and psychosomatic health to individual workers, causing self-blame, anxiety and burnout (Ross, 2009). They demand care-free 'always-on' workers: 'Opportunities are not set up for those who care' (Smith and Thwaites, 2019: 596). For example, primary care responsibilities such as childcare and elder care, which sit uneasily with self-enterprise, have been found to hinder career progression for female creative workers (Smith and Thwaites, 2019) and to 'ideologically' entrap them in 'gender-appropriate' uncreative 'caring roles' such as communication and admin jobs (Alacovska, 2015; Banks and Milestone, 2011).

Studies of creative work implicitly presuppose an a priori care deficit, thus relinquishing the analytical potential of the concept of care for the analysis of creative work. As a result, creative workers have been reductively presented as *care-less* of the other (community, neighbourhood, environment) while caring self-centredly either for their art (intrinsic rewards, the cult of artistic personality, symbolic capital) or for commerce (individual monetary benefit), or indeed for attaining a self-interested balance between the two (Aspers, 2006; Bourdieu, 1996; Gerber and Childress, 2017).

Is it really the case, however, that all creative work is so self-centred and care-less? Sociologists studying creative work have long recognized the need to develop a stronger critique of the tendencies – engendered by neoliberal exhortations of individualism and self-reliance – of 'de-socialization' and 'de-politicization' in creative work (McRobbie, 2002; Umney, 2017). Sharing a normative working hypothesis that 'the social critique', involving considerations of solidarity, equality and security, should not be incompatible with 'the artistic critique', scholars have recently started investigating the communitarian dimensions of creative work as they occur in collaborative co-working spaces (Gandini, 2015; Merkel, 2019) and within alternative self-organized spaces of resistance to individualism, such as artist cooperatives (Sandoval, 2018) and labour rights movements (Percival and Hesmondhalgh, 2014).

Beyond social critique approaches, recent scholarship has challenged the de-socialized nature of work and postulated a moral economy thesis of creative labour (Banks, 2006; Lee, 2018; Umney, 2017) that recognizes the capacity of cultural workers to act in opposition to for-profit individualized market rationality by cherishing non-instrumental ethical attachments to the autonomy of creative work – its collectively shared norms of excellence, communities of practice and contributions to human well-being (Banks, 2017; Hesmondhalgh, 2017). Such an understanding of 'moral work' enables these scholars to make an important normative argument for 'good work' and

'creative justice', whereby workers 'care about' changing and bettering society by leveraging the symbolic, emancipatory, politically progressive value of their artistic products to enhance people's lives (Banks, 2017; Hesmondhalgh, 2017). Sociologists have recently also empirically documented the ethical motivations within specific art worlds, including considerations of fairness and egalitarianism (Sandoval, 2018; Umney, 2017), social change (Serafini, 2018) and 'social enterprise', encompassing creative workers' 'commitment to wider community, ecological and social issues' (McRobbie, 2016a: 118).

Despite these outstanding efforts, the socialized dimension of creative work remains undertheorized. As a corollary of the predominance of the individualization thesis, sociologists have focused almost exclusively on studying freelance project-based work within established, commercial or publicly subsidized cultural institutions. Creative work in third-sector non-profit artist-run cultural production, wherein considerations of civic engagement and care for local communities are paramount, has been largely neglected despite social practice art being a long-standing form of viable creative employment and socio-political activism (Kershaw, 1992; Mutibwa, 2017). While all art possesses socially relevant content, social practice art enacts social care in situ via action-oriented participatory projects (Bishop, 2012). Social practice art happens outside traditional institutional structures. Referred to as post-studio or post-theatre art, it is antithetical to the established art world that privileges finalized artistic products, individual authorial vision and idiosyncratic aesthetic techniques. In social practice art it is community-based social interaction and a caring orientation to the other that constitutes the (art)work itself. This is not to say that care relationships obliterate relationships of self-care, including efforts to accomplish artistic aspirations and economic sustainability. Practising care in creative work involves a reflexive concern about what type of life and art one practises; it is care for the other that provides coherent structure to one's personal and professional life (Heidegger, 1996).

In order to better understand the practical everyday enactment of caring and compassionate orientation towards others in creative work and to strengthen the analytical apparatus for studying its socialized and socially engaged dimensions, I propose a phenomenological theorization of care and sketch an ensuing caring inquiry. A caring inquiry reorients the analytical locus from passion (i.e. the individualistic achievement of an 'artistic subjectivity') to compassion (i.e. sympathetic everyday involvement with the world and interdependence with others). Simultaneously, a caring inquiry allows self-care and self-interest to surface as requisite for the sustenance both of long-term community engagement and sustainable, meaningful careers.

A Promise of a Better World: Care as a Fundamental Mode of Being-in-the-World

Although the notion of care inundates policy and media discourses, care remains an elusive and ambivalent theoretical concept in social sciences (Thomas, 1993; Tronto, 1993). Owing to its legacy and its origin in the studies of care as 'women's work', care has long been considered merely an empirical category: a 'common-sense construct reflecting the concrete [gendered] manifestations of the types of activities society recognizes as

"looking after people"'), devoid of epistemological validity and status (Thomas, 1993: 665). Such particularistic and gendered treatment overlooks the theoretical potential of the concept of care in the analysis of work and social relations that are neither situated 'on the frontlines of care provision' (Stacey, 2011) nor obviously associated with 'looking after people'.

The profound significance of care and caring for social life is nonetheless undisputed (Noddings, 2010; Tronto, 1993). Care has been recognized as a fundamental existential and universal mode of human existence. It is therefore through a phenomenological conceptualization of care that I seek to restore the epistemological currency of the concept of care in the study of creative work, while transcending the gendered public/private paid/unpaid dualisms that have hampered the analytical flourishing of the concept.

Care occupies a central place in Heidegger's (1996) phenomenology of being as one of the most important structures of our subjective consciousness of being-in-the-world (*Da-sein*). Care is the basic structure of the inseparable connectedness of human being with the world. 'The being of Da-sein reveals itself as care', contends Heidegger (1996: 171), and thus all human involvement with the world, including one's relationship to oneself, happens by means of an understanding of being as care.

An a priori 'sense of care' structures all past, present and future involvement in and with the world. For Heidegger, care has a threefold temporal structure: of *already-in*, being-thrown-in-the-world that existed beforehand (past); of *being-amidst*, encountering things and others (present); and of *being-ahead-of-itself*, projecting an authentic self (future). As such, care is a mode of ontological being that is factual – that is, possesses facticity – and that 'makes itself an issue' (Dreyfus, 1991: 238), disclosing itself in moods, projections, coping strategies, psychological processes and orientation towards other entities in the world, and thus makes manifest the basic structure of care as a mode of 'being-together-with-one-another'. The temporal structure of care therefore does not imply 'a priority of practical over theoretical behaviour', since care is already always imbued with the 'caring attitudes' and 'positions' of *Da-sein* in the past, the present and the future (Heidegger, 1996: 180). Care thus ontically reveals itself as 'a human behaviour' that is 'full of care' and which is 'guided by a dedication to something', manifesting itself as 'care-fulness', 'dedication' and 'anxious effort' oriented towards the achievement of good for the other and for the authentic self (1996: 184–186).

The interconnected and relational significance of the totality of 'care-ful involvement' (Alacovska and Bissonnette, 2019) with the world thus presupposes an analytic of everydayness that concentrates on the everyday practices in which care ontically discloses itself as 'taking care of'. If *Da-sein* is dedicated to Others then the everyday world discloses itself as a communitarian, convivial and compassionate place filled with everyday care-ful action. Care-ful dedication to others is what Nussbaum (1996: 28) defines as 'compassion' – 'a basic social emotion' that is 'the central bridge between the individual and the community'. For Nussbaum, compassion is not reducible to a mood, affect or sentiment, nor to an arrogant kind of benevolence (see Berlant, 2004 for an analysis questioning 'the ethics of privilege' and 'the logic of dependency and vulnerability' denoted in compassion), but is rather a certain form of moral capacity and judgement as to what constitutes 'the well-being of others' (Nussbaum, 1996: 28). In this sense, compassion prompts 'caring action' whereby the resources employed to meet the needs of the other are not means

of privilege but of existential self-orientation towards ‘being-together-in-the-world’ (Heidegger, 1996). According to Tronto (1993: 105), ‘caring seems to involve taking the concerns and the needs of the other as the basis for action’. Entangled in a totality of relational involvements (Heidegger, 1996), ‘the self’ possesses moral bonds with others-in-the-world that compel it ‘to act “other wise” rather than “self wise”’ (Lynch, 2007: 555).

Proponents of feminist care philosophy have consistently argued that care is not only a cognitive disposition (as in compassionate ‘caring about’) but a hands-on practice of acting ‘other-wise’ (as in ‘caring for’ and ‘taking care of’ something/someone) (Held, 2006; Tronto, 1993). Care has thus been defined as a set of activities ‘that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our “world” so that we can live in it as well as possible’ (Tronto, 1993: 103). Care thus reveals itself when a practice is intentionally aimed at maintaining, continuing and repairing the world and the relations to others that arise from being-‘an authentic self’-in-the-world.

If acting other-wise is the ontological ‘care-structure’ of human being, then autonomous, passionate and individualistic activities (which are typically imputed as characteristic of creative/artistic work) do not constitute care. On this basis, even feminist care philosophers have contended that ‘to create a work of art is not care’ (Tronto, 1993: 104) and that artists are careless, self-sufficient agents. The assertion that creative work is ‘non-care’ is fallacious, however, since it ignores the fact that caring is an ontological mode of being that already always imbues everyday practices, including art-making practices (Heidegger, 1996). Art has always been ‘inextricably bound to the promise of a better world’ (Bishop, 2006). It always implies fostering, if only symbolically or affectively, social relations, social change and civic engagement (Rancière, 2013), prompting the rhetorical question: ‘What artist *isn’t* socially engaged?’ (Bishop, 2012: 2, emphasis in original). Social practice art, moreover, has long represented a distinct art form that is explicitly predicated on relationships of care and is aimed at ‘repairing broken communities’ and mending the world at large. Socially engaged artists ‘care about and/or care for the communities they are working with’ (Shaughnessy, 2012: xiv; see also Brodzinski, 2010).

In the following caring inquiry of creative work, I mobilize a phenomenological understanding of care as ontically revealing itself in the everyday hands-on practices of acting *other*-wise and striving to maintain, repair and ratify ‘a better world’ while also preserving ‘an authentic self’. A focus on caring practice must thus get to grips with all the contradictions, confrontations and ambiguities of care and self-care.

Caring Inquiry: Exploring the Meaning of Care in Creative Work

I became aware of the importance of care in creative work in the framework of a project investigating the subjective experiences of work in post-socialist creative industries in South-East Europe. For this project I conducted, with the help of local assistants, 83 in-depth interviews with performing artists – 40 musicians (of whom 18 were women) and 43 theatre actors (of whom 22 were women) – in a variety of urban areas in North Macedonia and Albania. The artists were recruited via a regional artists-run non-profit organization, with subsequent snowball sampling. Interviews lasted from 1 to 2.5 hours

and were conducted face-to-face in local languages by the author and three younger assistants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thorough anonymization has been undertaken to preserve the privacy of the study's participants.

The analysis abided by the principles of abductive analysis (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). Abductive analysis refers to the inferential process through which 'surprising' or 'anomalous empirical findings' are explored against the background of established sociological theories. In order to generate novel theoretical insights, 'surprising empirical evidence' that defies extant theoretical models is subsequently 'cased' in alternative novel theoretical frameworks (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012: 169).

Following these abductive procedures, I first coded the data for experiences of work individualization and precarity, since these are central tenets in existing creative work theories. The experiences of post-socialist creative workers largely fitted into the extant model; that is, work was experienced as individualized and precarious, with a plethora of psychosomatic sicknesses, such as burnout, anxiety and stress.

However, once I narrowed the focus on the subjective meaning level of action and intentionality (Aspers, 2006: 166), surprising and 'seemingly unimportant things' became visible – things connected to everyday and mundane relational acts of living together with others (Back, 2015) that are obscured by an analytical lens tinted by theories of individualization. What underpinned the experiences of work for post-socialist creative workers was attention to and orientation towards others in the community, involving care, compassion and mutual aid. The prevalence of these instances in the data-set contradicted the dominant critical sociological approaches that see creative workers as victims of a neoliberal 'creativity dispositif' that instils 'voluntary' acceptance of precarity, pain and inequality in return for self-expressive, individualized work (McRobbie, 2016a; Scharff, 2016; Umney and Kretsos, 2015).

Post-socialist creative work remained until recently under-researched in sociological studies of creative labour that develop theoretical insights on the basis of empirical evidence generated chiefly from a handful of western creative hubs and neoliberal creative industries (McRobbie, 2016a, 2016b; Scharff, 2016). The post-socialist creative industry context may itself have enabled relationships of care to surface more forcefully than in a neoliberal context. Social practice art has flourished in post-socialism as 'a privileged vehicle of utopian experimentation' following the receding of the socialist project from the political imaginary (Bishop, 2012: 4). Philanthropic foreign funding schemes supporting the rebuilding of civil society from the ashes of socialism compensated for state deregulation and privatization of the art world with resulting dwindling arts subsidies and vanishing public art spaces (Galliera, 2017). Deeply socialized and informal creative labour practices, often sustained in third-sector institutions and grey economies, proliferate in post-socialist creative industries as a 'survival' and 'hopeful' response to constant financial, social and economic distress (Alacovska, 2018a, 2018b; Ozimek, 2019).

Additionally, 'an element of chance' may have facilitated our observation of 'unanticipated, anomalous' data 'inconsistent with prevailing theory' (Merton, 1968 [1957]: 157), namely the importance of care in individualized work-worlds. The performing arts have always been at the forefront of socially engaged practices, 'since participatory

engagement tends to be expressed most forcefully in the live encounter between embodied actors in particular contexts' (Bishop, 2012: 3). By its very nature, such an 'accidental context' yielded a 'fortuitous by-product'; that is, 'the serendipitous' surfacing of the importance of care and acting other-wise in creative work (Merton, 1968 [1957]: 162). In line with abductive analysis, a new set of theoretical constructs, namely the concept of care, was mobilized to theorize this 'accidental observation', a process in which we adhered to the principles of 'a caring inquiry' (Ray, 2013).

A caring inquiry focuses on the meaning of caring for creative workers by acknowledging the primacy of their compassionate mode of being which takes the other as the basis of action in the effort to maintain, repair and enact a more liveable world. By bringing to reflective awareness caring as experienced in creative work, the caring inquiry directed the analyst's attentiveness to moments in which creative workers 'ontically' (Heidegger, 1996) acted *other-wise* instead of *self-wise* (Alacovska and Bissonnette, 2019; Lynch, 2007; Ray, 2013).

Acting *Other-Wise* in Creative Work

Creative work appeared from my study to be emphatically 'other-centred' (Lynch, 2007), involving considerations of mutuality, responsibility and commitment to maintaining and repairing the world in which a person is 'thrown' (Heidegger, 1996; Tronto, 1993). According to Lynch (2007: 559), other-centred work 'is directed in the first instance by the good of the other rather than the good of the self'. In the interviews I conducted, the practical politics of everyday caring was indeed evident in day-to-day concerns and interactions dominated by compassion and assiduous attention to the needs and well-being of others, social repair and infrastructural maintenance and mutuality, as well as fully fledged social care work.

Socially Engaged Artists: Caring as Social Repair and Community Activism

Such attentiveness to the other involves context-specific knowledge and personal awareness of local adversities, hardships and despair as the basis for caring actions. In a post-socialist context, marred by a lack of being cared for by governments, institutions or political systems (Primorac, 2007), it is affective community and neighbourhood ties that compel actors to take care of and for each other; that is, to act 'other-wise'. Various forms of social practice art emanated from such caring relationships, most notably socially engaged community-based art geared towards strengthening mutuality and solidarity.

Sasha, a 33-year-old pop musician is regularly involved in what he himself calls 'activist musical endeavours' to mitigate the 'dreadful living conditions' of 'bereaved neighbours':

> No one seems to care about us, the ordinary people. If they [government] don't care then we have to care about each other. It's that simple. [. . .] Last month for example we released a single and all the proceeds gathered are earmarked already for a family with four small kids that live in a house with literally no windows. We are collectively redoing the house. It's dreadful what these people have to endure. We're now halfway to gathering the amount we need. We all help – the radio stations, the clubs.

For all of the participants in the study, as in the case of Sasha, noticing the needs of others was always unforced and unobligated. Indeed, the ‘unobligated character’ of care arising from the interdependencies of humans as relational and affective beings (Heidegger, 1996; Lynch, 2007; Tronto, 1993) has recently been noted in studies of everyday kindness (Brownlie and Anderson, 2017). As an unobligated care labour, creative work cements relations of everyday mutuality and solidarity. However, performing voluntary care for the other also presupposes self-care. Such care labour, for example, reflected the kind of ‘authentic self’ (Heidegger, 1996) that Sasha wanted to be as a music professional; that is, caring, compassionate and kind.

Viktor, a 28-year-old rap musician, was acutely aware that practising care through creative work was a form of ‘self-care’ that afforded the formation of a personally valued professional identity:

> This is who I am as an artist! Most of my work is actually pro bono work. In this part of the world you cannot simply be a star – big and above all the others. [. . .] I play humanitarian concerts, lend my name to spread info about donations, get dirty and wet on the battleground as well. Now, for example, we’re collecting winter clothing, boots, jackets and hats to help out the Roma community. People freeze to death and no one seems to care. [. . .] Some friends of mine who are Roma hip-hop musicians initiated this and I immediately jumped in to help out. We played hip-hop and opened a gathering station in the city square where everybody could donate what is spare and do some rapping in the rain.

Socially engaged artists like Sasha and Viktor have taken a highly visible role in community activism and protest against social injustice. While never dismissing the self-branding value of caring work, our informants emphasized social engagement as a defining element of their artistic practice. Hall and Smith (2015) argue that it is the grounded and down-to-earth pragmatism of mutual help, upkeep and maintenance within communities rather than grand utopian self-fulfilment aspirations that drives the determination to work towards the creation of a better world. This is what Viktor referred to as ‘get[ting] dirty and wet on the ground’. This type of hands-on caring engagement was common among our participants. A caring and compassionate relationship to others is an act of ‘social repair’ in which creative workers reach out to those in the community for whom things have broken down in an effort to re-distribute opportunities for leading a ‘dignified life’ (Hall and Smith, 2015; Nussbaum, 1996). Caring offered generative possibilities of socially engaged art practices that our participants valued highly both aesthetically and ethically.

Infrastructural Maintenance, Solidarity and Mutuality: Caring as Resistance to Individualism

Most of the informants see their orientation towards others in the community/locality/neighbourhood as a political act of resistance to the injunctions of individualized entrepreneurial subjectivities in creative industries. Faced with a lack of well-developed local creative industry infrastructure, ever-diminishing public art subsidies and undercapitalized art markets (Galliera, 2017), many participants value acting together in solidarity

rather than competitively and individualistically so as to build strong local communities and webs of mutual aid. The relationships of care developed by the study participants also led to more vibrant and convivial local artistic scenes in which a central concern was that of mending broken industrial infrastructures and repairing fragmented occupational communities ripped apart by decades of underfunding.

Many participants frequently contested the purely economic and individualistic rationalities of creative work, articulating instead the primacy of nurturing and repairing relational infrastructures as compensation for an institutional and governmental 'lack of care' – or 'care-less-ness' (Lynch, 2010). Caring relationships 'ontically disclosed' themselves in a range of occupational caring practices (Heidegger, 1996). These practices included voluntary mentoring and career counselling for early stage practitioners (e.g. more established performing artists giving free-of-charge tutorials for future students), informal collegial support (e.g. more established artists performing together with younger artists, exchanging favours, sharing rehearsal space or lending expensive equipment) and upholding the vitality of local performing scenes (e.g. by charitable involvement in the organization of local drama and music festivals). All these examples are practical instances in which action was primarily motivated by the provision of care and compassion within occupational communities. Indeed, the local music and theatre scenes seem to have been held together precisely by such apparently minor but actually immensely significant caring acts of repair geared towards 'fixing broken industrial infrastructures and music scenes' (Vasil, 46, jazz musician):

> It's a weird sense of responsibility for the younger generation that keeps me going. The industrial infrastructure is collapsing. Local festivals are disappearing and the music scene is faltering. In a way everything is broken and we have to fix it now together. You know, from the bottom–up. This is where my voluntary engagement with the festival makes a lot more sense [. . .] There's no other way to inspire and educate a new generation of good musicians. If we don't act now we risk the complete extinction of local music scenes. (Vasil, 46, jazz musician)

Relationships of care do not exist completely outside of economic and institutional circuits, however. As basic forms of creative work in the region, caring and compassion are also institutionalized and formally organized in civil society arts organizations.

Social Practice Art: Creative Labour as Social Care Work

Artists' self-organization in non-governmental civil society arts institutions has been on the rise in South-East Europe of late (Barada et al., 2016), while arts activities across Europe are increasingly being supported by funding from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and philanthropic charities that pursue a pro-active social/political agenda (Bishop, 2012; McRobbie, 2016a; Serafini, 2018). Within non-profit civil society organizations, creative work is explicitly and purposefully framed and practised as fully fledged social care work oriented towards disenfranchised, vulnerable and marginalized groups and thus practised as socially engaged 'applied performance' (Bishop, 2012; Shaughnessy, 2012). Here, creative work was increasingly executed under a non-profit umbrella within

primary institutions of care such as hospitals and nursing homes, though also in prisons and brothels:

> It's easy to give up around here. It's crucial that we cultural workers make a positive mark now that the healthcare system is failing us all and unemployment is at the highest level ever, with poverty rates through the ceiling. It's high time to act with honesty, commitment and devotion. [. . .] My work is mostly in hospitals. I work with disabled children using drama as a method of self-exploration and coping with life circumstances. It is harrowing work. I am often heartbroken to witness these little people's suffering. But this type of theatre work gives me purpose and a sense of accomplishment. (Nada, 33, professional theatre actor)

The creative workers we interviewed cared for the communities they worked with. Even if they found their political, economic and structural circumstances hopeless and miserable, they were committed to carving out hopeful spaces (Alacovska, 2018a; Hall and Smith, 2015) of social justice, human well-being, healing and emancipation. Many creative workers saw not-for-profit caring as the raison d'etre of their professional work, as testified in the following account by Valentin:

> I do mostly prison performances. It's NGO work. It's very psychologically taxing, sometimes even dangerous, and it pays peanuts. But it's work I love doing. [. . .] This means co-creating, screenwriting and staging with inmates. Theatrical performance is basically used where it is difficult to talk. At the moment I'm working with men incarcerated for having committed sexual violence. It's a sort of rehabilitation work. In the dehumanizing and hopeless conditions behind the bars, musical performances humanize, makes people reimagine humanity and get to grips with their past. This is really what theatre essentially is and has to be. (Valentin, 42, performing artist)

The 'applied performers' cared for the participants in their participatory projects and act with 'conscience, integrity and commitment' within their communities (Shaughnessy, 2012: xvi). This is not to say, however, that the character of care work is not commodifiable.

Practising creative work as fully fledged 'paid care' within non-profit organizations was one of the most desirable forms of stable employment among the interviewed participants (Barada et al., 2016; Bishop, 2012). In the absence of robustly funded cultural institutions and vigorous art markets, social care-driven philanthropic funding schemes represented the last refuge for workers intent on persevering as creative professionals (Galliera, 2017). Although socially engaged art reinvigorates both social care and artistic employment (Rutten et al., 2017), the costs of engaging in social practice art were immense for the creative workers who often found it excruciating to balance care work with self-care.

Balancing Care and Self-Care

Managing relationships of care was onerous. Caring relationships often did not cease with the termination of contractual arrangements: many informants reported cherishing 'intimate' attachments with the people they cared for long after projects had ended,

visiting them in hospitals and prisons and providing further compassionate care at the expense of their own mental and physical health.

Maria, a 34-year-old actress doing palliative care performances in an elderly home, confessed the following:

> I tend to forget myself. It is overwhelming to be in touch with dying people every day. I forget to listen to my own body. Have I eaten? Have I slept long enough? I have no tools to do mental hygiene. At school they taught us how to develop unique artistic vision, not to care for people. I have no tools to cope with all this suffering. I tend to over-attach and have difficulties letting go of the people. I keep coming back to the hospice.

The physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by a compassionate bearing of the suffering of others, prolonged exposure to pain and the realization that those being cared for may never recover caused compassion fatigue (Nussbaum, 1996). Untrained to dabble as social workers, creative workers found it difficult to disengage from the caring relationships and practise self-care. Self-care, however, does not refer to self-indulgence or the mindless positivity of self-help but to occupational self-preservation and professional integrity in the face of suffering. As a valued form of formal paid employment, creative-work-cum-care-work often involves a struggle to balance one's commitments to others with concerns for self-care and career self-interests (England, 2005; Lynch, 2007, 2010).

Although the performance of care work was frequently described as 'taxing', 'heart-rending' and 'emotionally draining', the majority of informants emphasized that caring was 'the essence' of their creative work, 'for-the-sake-of-which' they have committed themselves to lives as creative workers in spite of widespread work's precarity. Many participants projected a sense of 'self-care', that is a current and future professional 'authentic self', by expounding care-for-the-other as their fundamental 'being-in-the-world'. Using Heidegger's (1996) terminology and phenomenological sequencing, we can detect care manifesting itself as the principle reason for self-care, understood as the fundamental being-in-the-world of a creative worker. For example, by applying a phenomenological reduction one can syncretize Valentin's account with the following 'for-the-sake-of-which' ontological grounding (adapted from Wheeler, 2011): an artist using art ('with-which') in a local prison ('in-which') in order to produce an applied theatre play ('in-order-to') aimed at helping others, that is, male prisoners ('towards-which'), for the sake of being a *care-ful* that is, ipso facto, a professional theatre actor.

Conclusion: The Politics of Care in Creative Work

Creative workers have typically been positioned as ideal workers in 'the age of individualism' (Beck, 2002): self-expressive, self-enterprising and self-reliant. This article, in contrast, has examined creative work as 'other-centred work' – a veritable form of care work wherein creative workers do not act '*self-wise*' but '*other-wise*'. Considerations of mutual help, solidarity, human well-being and social engagement foreground creative work as 'other-centred' work (see also Alacovska and Bissonnette, 2019). Contributing to emerging studies of the socialized nature of creative work (Banks, 2017; Sandoval, 2018), this

article has argued that 'unobligated' relationships and practices of care and compassion, grounded in everyday pragmatism of 'being-with-Others' in the world (Heidegger, 1996), underpin creative work. Such care work rekindles hope in the possibility of the existence of 'a better world'. It repairs, maintains and preserves the social fabric of faltering and struggling creative industries by enhancing mutuality and relationality both within professional communities and surrounding neighbourhoods. It mitigates the 'care-less-ness' of welfare institutions and redresses the decline of local artistic scenes.

The observed centrality of practical and relational care in creative work is not a new phenomenon, albeit the predominance of the individualization thesis has long obscured its importance for sociological analysis. To say that care, understood as the effort of maintaining, upholding and repairing a better world, is central to creative work is tautologous. Care for a better, more just, fairer and freer world has always imbued art, not least in an abstract and symbolic way. Since the counter-cultural movements of the late 1960s, many artistic formations operating outside established cultural institutions but within local communities have adopted radical and collective alternative modes of production, including radical theatre, protest music, zine publishing and agit prop, performing practical, concrete and situational care-for-the-other. These artistic formations are explicitly predicated on effectuating social change, providing 'welfare' and 'socio-political impact' in communities (Kershaw, 1992). Cultural studies scholars have long argued that art has always been an inextricable part of social movements, with artists practising care by levelling radical critique at dominant ideologies while prominently endorsing pro-social causes in anti-war, anti-abortion and anti-racism movements (Eyerman, 2002). International development scholars have extensively documented the rise in 'celebrity humanitarianism', involving 'the caring activities' of film and music celebrities in 'global helping' as a response to the 'distant suffering of others' (Richey, 2015: 4). In contrast to glamorized and PR-driven global celebrity caring, theatre performance scholars have emphasized the direct involvement of professional artists with proximal local communities in socially engaged projects and social practice art (Bishop, 2006, 2012).

Despite care being intrinsic to creative work, 'caring' has remained, paradoxically, largely inchoate in studies of 'individualized' creative work. The everyday propensity to care, although constitutive of social life, remains often in the domain of the taken-for-granted and unarticulated. The phenomenological caring inquiry, advocated here, is useful for the sociological study of creative work, as it urges us to bring the everydayness and taken-for-grantedness of care to the forefront of the analysis in order to critically reassess and articulate the link between the existential affinity to provide care for the other and the pragmatic, instrumental engagement in care work for the attainment, for example, of career advancement or employment status.

There is an urgent need for a caring inquiry of creative work. When care, understood as a basic mode of being-in-the-world and self-care, understood as a self-centred engagement in work executed under the auspices of philanthropic and public funding schemes that require artists to engage in formal social care work, are complexly interlocking, then the political consequences for creative work are equally complicated. The last two decades have witnessed an intensification of efforts on the part of both social and cultural policy-makers to capitalize on the fundamental caring nature of art. Cultural policy scholars have long recognized that 'cultural policies are social policies by other means'

(Oakley, 2006: 256). Recent UK and European creative industry policies, for example, cast creative workers as de facto social workers, compelling them to demonstrate the instrumental value of artistic work in tackling social inclusion, crime prevention and poverty alleviation (Belfiore, 2018; Harvie, 2013). Simultaneously, social care scholars alert attention to the grave consequences arising from the rapprochement between social care and art as artists are called upon to 'cheaply' fill the void left by social workers retreating from public spaces of social change and emancipation (Rutten et al., 2017). In conditions of economic austerity, dwindling public arts subsidies, fierce labour competition exacerbated by rapid digitization and the proliferation of non-profit funding schemes, the field of social care has become a highly attractive employment option for artists (Bishop, 2012; Harvie, 2013; Shaughnessy, 2012). Creative work is increasingly being conflated with care work, while at the same time care is becoming commodified and onerous.

When government policies explicitly capitalize on the caring dispositions and practices of creative workers, care work becomes yet another excuse for further trimming of public arts subsides (Harvie, 2013). The prevalence of intrinsic and unobligated caring motives among creative workers – as their 'existential' artistic mode of 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1996) – can easily become self-victimizing factors that annihilate the necessity of 'self-care'. Creative workers can be turned in this way into 'prisoners of love' – a condition which, as scholars of social care work argue leads to downgraded pay and exacerbates exploitation (England, 2005; Thomas, 1993). Care work 'may in fact involve a net loss to them financially, socially or emotionally' (Lynch, 2007: 559). Given that care is their basic mode of being, creative workers will be reluctant to withdraw care in spite of abusive work relations and declining pay. The lack of training in managing relationships of care and self-care in creative work may further exacerbate occupational anxiety, stress and burnout.

Sociological understanding of the complexities of care in creative work thus requires attentiveness to the concrete, local and particular hands-on 'care-giving' practices of meeting the needs of others through in situ artistic work, as well as to practices of self-care involving activities of professional self-preservation and occupational self-identity. The consideration of care in creative work should recalibrate the ways in which hands-on caring work has been feminized and degraded as 'dirty' and 'poorly rewarded' despite its immense social salience (England, 2005). Since caring provides the basic structure of a professional self-identity and represents an increasingly popular form of artistic employment, moreover, considerations of self-care, including coping with the suffering of others, vicarious trauma and emotional exhaustion, should become central to the analysis of creative work. Taking the politics of care and self-care into account when theorizing creative work will require research designs unambiguously focused on care and compassion.

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