Project Result 1
Aesthetics of Care and Ecology

Combined Summary

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Definition: 'Aesthetics of Care with Ecology in Technological Education is a process. Its aim is ethically responsible action. The process is informed/activated by sensory experience, and shaped by knowledges and aesthetic consciousness. This entails a caring for ourselves, others and the planet'

1. Questions of care
2. Questions of aesthetics
3. Questions of Ecology
4. Questions of Technology and Education
5. Example of Practice

1. Questions of Care:

Foregrounding a demand to care for our world and environment can form the basis for an AoC that encourages practices and processes of caring in the design and use of our technologies but also more importantly in our education and way of being in the world. One of the most useful definitions for our purposes comes from Joan Tronto and Bernice Fischer (1990) who characterise care as a "species of activity that includes everything we do to maintain, contain, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web." (Fisher & Tronto,

1990, p. 40) In this, we can see the seeds of references to questions of technology, sustainability, relationality, and circular economy that we will address in later sections. Notions such as 'conceiving', 'maintaining' and 'repairing' can be directly applied to processes of design which cultivate a caring about the life-cycles of our socio-technological milieu and their effects on the environment.

Questions of care have been extensively reworked in feminist discourse where, within a patriarchal society, care is traditionally identified as a 'feminine ethic'. A feminist ethic of care resists this notion of patriarchy and points to how care needs to become a central value to contemporary society and ethical and political concerns (Gilligan, 1982, 2011), (Noddings, 1984).

Care covers the range of attention, worry, guardianship, safe-keeping, medical care, fostering and caution. Used uncritically the term may have paternalistic and negative aspects. There is also such a thing as "bad care". Kathleen Lynch, for example, would see practices of capitalist violence as "anti-care." The significance of moral education is found in its articulation of the moral culture we idealize. It is a mirror of the moral culture we prize and thus seek to pass on to succeeding generations (Hunter, 2008).

The above definition emphasises the importance of ethical responsibility in shaping our actions towards a more caring and sustainable future. The concept represents a shift away from an exclusively utilitarian approach to technology, towards one that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all beings and environments and as well as the impact of our actions on the world surrounding us.

2. Questions of Aesthetics

The recent thematization of "aesthetics of care" (Saito, Robinson, etc.) seems to be a reaction to a general "forgetfulness" of the essence of the aesthetic in the context of care. We maintain that critical processes of care include an aesthetic dimension as they necessarily entail knowledge and sensory experience. Aesthetics, as a process shaped by different disciplinary knowledge(s) allows for a better understanding of the consequences of our actions, it helps us in the making of informed decisions.

Knowledge is not enough on its own, aesthetic consciousness (our sense of harmony, beauty, etc) adds a dimension of emotional connection and meaning to our understanding of the world. Attending to aesthetic matters encourages individuals to engage with the world through their senses, rather than solely through a rational or an analytical lens. In common parlance the term aesthetic is associated with the appreciation of beauty in art. Our usage is in keeping with both the original use of the term (by Alexander Baumgarten) where the discipline was conceived as a science of sensory experience, and feminist perspectives that also promote a pluralistic conception of aesthetics.

These approaches negotiate and challenge the traditional categories of aesthetic value, disinterested attention, and aesthetic perception. Our approach eschews the reification of universal standards of aesthetic excellence that often valorise artistic autonomy, the distinction between art and craft, disinterested aesthetic perspective, the concept of genius and other notions of aesthetic judgement that are surreptitiously biassed toward masculine concerns.

This privileging of care, insofar as it is grounded in sensory experience, as ontologically prior to any form of disinterested, individual form of aesthetic judgement of art and design. "Care" here involves not only perceiving, reflecting, understanding, judging, but also being active or at least engaged, not only at the level of the creator, but also at the level of the recipient. In this regard aesthetics can be considered as a 'beholding' that invokes affective relations that entail new ways of thinking technology and the environment beyond economic extraction. (See Fraser 2016, 2021 and Lynch 2022)

Viewing 'aesthetics' in this light demands attention to issues of diverse identity, particularly attentive to affective differences that need to characterize our own understanding and working definitions of AoC. It asks us to consider aesthetics in our everyday practices on ethical and political grounds (Rancière, 2006). Considering aesthetics and care as inextricably bound locates aesthetics more concretely within the remit of practice, that reinvents, creates and cares. In doing so it rehabilitates the notion of techne as not merely the act of making and doing but as potentially an affective form of caring.

For example, an aesthetics of care could consider the nature of 'sensory experience' in the context of the contemporary world of social media, algorithms and AI. What is 'sensory experience' in an age of 'deep mediatization', where 'all elements of our social world are intricately related to digital media and their underlying infrastructures' (Hepp 2019)?

Aiming at a better understanding of the world and connection to the environment and its inhabitants, can lead to a greater sense of care and of responsibility. By formulating an "aesthetic of care," we seek a deepening of the relationship between each term. Such a formulation is thus not to be understood as a new intellectual approach, but rather as a current emphasis and revaluation of the relational aspect outlined above, which is inherent in all creative and aesthetic-receptive activity.

3. Questions of Ecology

We understand care as always referring to relational processes. Relationality points to more than caring about something specific, it can encompass caring for the environment[1]. Inspired by questions of ecology we conceive of an aesthetics of care in terms of circles of care.

The Circles of Social Life (as the base of Circles of Sustainability) approach proposes that principles for sustainability should be grounded in a general framework that concerns the human condition, rather than just a set of proposals that are added together from different current or fashionable concerns (James, 2014). It begins with the idea that there should be fundamental principles that relate to the basic domains of social life: ecology, economics, politics, and culture. This approach treats each social domain as part of an integrated social whole and represents an attention to care itself explicitly.

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[1] From Peter Singer (1981), the central idea is that altruistic tendencies originally functioning exclusively for kin and tribe in premodern humans, then deliberately and rationally expanded outward via utilitarian moral principles to encompass strangers (Singer, 2015) and other animals (Singer, 1975). As we have expanded our moral concern to our global ecosystem (Bourdeau, 2004; Brei, 2013; Knauß, 2018) not uniquely for utilitarian reasons, we could generate moral behaviours (notably 'care') towards sustainability.

For example, this approach is being used in urban contexts; however, it is adaptable to other spatial and demographic situations (James et al., 2013). Each domain of the Circles of Social Life carries one large principle (further divided in second-level principles). Here is the description of its first-level principles: ecological, economic, political, and cultural. The Circles of Social Life approach is largely based on the actions of all stakeholders in one specific temporal and spatial context. We can argue those actions are informed by centrifugal and centripetal forces not only from individuals but from institutions as well. Those actions inform how sustainable places are and could be.

A centrifugal force plays out over time, pushing from the centre of the moral circle (family, community) out to the outermost circles (all humanity, other animals). This centrifugal force conflicts with another powerful force in the moral circle (Graham et al., 2017) – a centripetal force pulling inward toward the smaller and more immediate circles of kin and tribe[2]. The centrifugal force can also be motivated by both rational and intuitive factors, including familial attachment, ingroup loyalty, threat and scarcity, principles of duty and obligation to close others, and contamination concerns about maintaining physical and social boundaries.

If we're morally concerned for someone or something, it means we care about/for that someone or something. How far should we extend our circle of care? Should we care for all humans, or extend it even further? Should we prioritise the needs of our immediate community? Should we care equally for all without prejudice, or afford moral concern for some more than others?

For example the distinction between "caring about" vs "caring for" is informative here. While "caring for" may be viewed as a more concrete and physically proximal kind of activity, thus more akin to conventional ideas of embodiment, Milligan & Wiles argue that "caring about" should not be regarded as a thoroughly "disembodied experience" (742). This distinction echoes the dichotomy between "centrifugal" vs

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[2] Such a force can be motivated by several intuitive and rational factors, including compassion and empathy for increasingly distant social targets, aversion to the prejudice inherent in drawing the line between any two categories (e.g., moral concern for countrymen but not foreigners), concerns of fairness and equality, and utilitarian principles of maximizing welfare regardless of social proximity (Graham, Waytz, Meindl, Iyer, & Young, 2017). Even those who advocate for egalitarian forms of effective altruism (Bloom, 2017) have expressed the conflicting intuition that people normatively should devote more moral concern to close family members than to non-kin, or that people should care more for proximate others than for strangers in other parts of the world (Wraight, 2011).

"centripetal" forces. One of the roles of technology can be its ability to "bridge the gap" between these opposing forces. In principle, caring about relates to 'generalized relational and affective elements' (Milligan & Wiles, 741) that may not be rooted in actual closeness between the carer and the cared-for, but continuing 'advances in information and care technologies' (Milligan & Wiles, 741) imply that care 'can [now] occur across space and time zones' (Milligan & Wiles 742).

4. Questions of Technology and Education

At its core, the "aesthetics of care" seeks to foster a culture of care in technological education. The design and use of technology must be grounded in an understanding of the complex systems and relationships that exist in the world around us and the sense of empathy and compassion must be incorporated in actions that truly serve this world and the one of the future generations. It is not enough for technology to be functional and/or beautiful, it is also required to be conceived with a deep consideration for the well-being of ourselves, others, and the planet.

In the context of the discussion concerning European debates on technology and the nature of technological education we point to a specific approach to techne, that understands technology in terms of praxis and not merely as an instrument.

Like aesthetics and care, technology is not built in a vacuum but in and for society and by developing a specific philosophy of technology which sets out distinctions between *techne*, techniques and technology. Technology is no longer understood simply as a tool from an anthropological perspective but as a process of becoming human, a process of mediation in the world. Furthermore there is an embedded relation between technology and ethics, technology has ethical consequences (ante, during mid res and after). The presupposition is that ethics is a form of praxis in the world aligned with technology as a form of praxis, therefore practical wisdom (*phronesis*).

Education implies questions of care, care of the self and other, care of the planet etc. The Latin origins of education as both educare (train or to mould), educere (to lead out), remind us of the care involved in the transmission and transferral of knowledge. Both Latin terms are synthesised in the term education but rub off each other. Educare implies a form of rote learning and

training while educere suggests a more porous form of education through learning and creativity. If, as we argue, the aesthetics of care is to be a 'process', how is it to be cultivated in a formal educational setting?

We understand that the process is ongoing, never fully complete, requiring constant reflection, re-evaluation, and adjustment as the world (and our understanding of it) evolves. This is an education that recognises that our world is a rapidly transforming world and new technologies are continuously being developed and environmental challenges are constantly arising. The process must lead to ethically responsible behaviour, awareness of the broader implications of our actions, minimization of harm and advocating for positive change so we can create a future in which technology is used for the betterment of all, rather than for selfish gain.

This is an education that aims at an aesthetics of care that critiques contemporary terms of production and the physical impact of consumption. This is a critique that must begin with attention to the potential for sustainable models of resource use, the terms of labour conditions and new models of contributive economies and education that distinguish between work, employment and labour. This education entails building on practices grounded in a therapeutics of care (Stiegler, 2010) (Stiegler, 2018). In this regard there is a need to decouple curriculum design in education from the short termism of the labour market and reorientate it toward critical considerations of technology as a mode techne (see Aristotle, Heidegger) that inculcates an ontological mode of thinking/caring. The things we care about/for are then altered by our previous experiences and our (future) expectations. Education in Aesthetics of Care could develop centrifugal forces that can trigger sustainable behaviours/actions in technological education[3].

A parallel list of practices, methods, and examples should be created.

add your practice here. Something that will illustrate how AoC could work in different disciplines. Include images!

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[3] For example: The Anatomy of an AI project.

- The 'Anatomy of an AI System' project seems an obvious example. This investigation into human 'interaction with Amazon's Echo device' and the 'vast matrix of capacities' that the former invokes ('interlaced chains of resource extraction, human labor and algorithmic processing across networks of mining, logistics, distribution, prediction and optimization') covers various iterations of the aesthetic. For instance, the exploded view and the different images that accompany the extended essay are aesthetically significant because they are 'about something and … [possess] meaning' that is 'embodied' by them (Danto 2006: 125). They are likewise something 'that is both given to sense and intellectual—where we grasp a meaning through the senses' (2006: 127). There is arguably an analogy between the vastness of the exploded view and what the authors point out about 'the true costs of [AI] systems – social, environmental, economic, and political' remaining largely 'hidden'. It can also be argued that the project includes examples of a more inclusive idea of the notion of aesthetics as 'was used by Alexander Baumgarten, where it generally refers to what is given to sense' (2006: 127). Significantly, the essay opens with a description of human-to-AI interaction that is laden with elements of sensory experience:

> A cylinder sits in a room. It is impassive, smooth, simple and small. It stands 14.8cm high, with a single blue-green circular light that traces around its upper rim. It is silently attending. A woman walks into the room, carrying a sleeping child in her arms, and she addresses the cylinder.
>
> 'Alexa, turn on the hall lights'
>
> The cylinder springs into life. 'OK.' The room lights up. The woman makes a faint nodding gesture, and carries the child upstairs.

A concern with care is likewise present, if more indirectly:

> … each small moment of convenience – be it answering a question, turning on a light, or playing a song – requires a vast planetary network, fueled by the extraction of non-renewable materials, labor, and data. The scale of resources required is many magnitudes greater than the energy and labor it would take a human to operate a household appliance or flick a switch. A full accounting for

these costs is almost impossible, but it is increasingly important that we grasp the scale and scope if we are to understand and govern the technical infrastructures that thread through our lives.

5. Examples of AoC practice in the artworld/ heritage sector

An aesthetics of care covers a range of practices. Fundamentally, these practices are ways of approaching and relating to the world ethically both in terms of action and thinking. "Aesthetics is not a superficial or 'extra' concern that shrouds more fundamental issues or realities; it is the means by which we come to understand them."[4] The aesthetic, cannot be reduced to the realm of art, is actually and more extensively carried out in the wider framework of everyday practices (see Yuriko Saito 2008), politics of sense and sense-making (Rancière, 2010), and the environment and ecology (see Arnold Berleant, 1994). Yet, the practices of an aesthetics of care in the artworld context are illustrative:

Andrew McClellan argues that museums are "identity machines"[5] that work to establish amongst other things the notion of nationhood and deploy narratives of civilization and progress. For example, in programs such as Creative Industries and Visual Culture, Fine Art, and Visual Communication at the School of Art and Design in TU Dublin, an aesthetics of care in technological education ought to cultivate learners to critically engage with such processes.

Given the damage wrought by capitalist growth models of endless accumulation, there is a requirement to approach the challenges of care with what has been called "Broken World Thinking,"[6] that valorises repair over production and challenges the "productivist bias" in the social approach technology by privileging repair as a creative and ethical practice. In practice, this approach entails a foregrounding of caring work, sustainability, circular economy, and the material and social ends of technologies.

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[4] Karen M'Closkey and Keith VanDerSys, Dynamic Patterns: Visualizing Landscapes in a Digital Age. 2017, xii
[5] "Museum Expansion in the Twenty-First Century: Abu Dhabi", Journal of Curatorial Studies 2012:278
[6] S. J. Jackson "Rethinking repair" In T. Gillespie, P. J. Boczkowski, & K. A. Foot (Eds.), Media technologies: Essays on communication, materiality, and society (pp. 221–239). MIT Press 2014

In the context of the museum "machine" and the wider context of heritage and cultural preservation, these practices include: Challenging the exhibition practices of display, surveillance collecting, ordering, and governing. These practices have been shown to be central to colonial projects[7]. Accordingly, the ethical duty of care in the museum context can be seen in the recent reckoning with colonial and decolonial histories in the museum sector ranging from re-hanging to re-labelling to repatriations[8].

Museums are not only institutions that cultivate national and global narratives. Nuala Morse[9] proposes the contemporary museum as a site of social care in terms of research, policy production and everyday practices of community engagement. An aesthetics of care can be recognised, for example, in the social work of Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums. The logic of care includes placements, community liaisons, consultation, school outreach etc. In these practices we can see practices of care in museum sites beyond standard curation.

Concerning the colonial and local social politics of the museum, the climate emergency highlights the need for an aesthetics of care in regarding objects themselves, heritage sites and intangible patrimony. Here Caitlin DeSilvey's radical embracing of preservation and conservation practices of decay is informative[10]. She argues that it is necessary to include the concept of "curated decay" in any account of preservation and conservation. This approach recognises that there are maleficent and beneficent forms of care and sometimes sites are past rescue and care entails managed decay. Furthermore, this enables the aesthetic appreciation of decay and passivity and an embracing of circularity and sustainability in the context of heritage. This approach to technological processes and care can be

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[7] See Bennett, Tony, Fiona Cameron, Nélia Dias, Ben Dibley, Rodney Harrison, Ira Jacknis, and Conal McCarthy. Collecting, Ordering, Governing: Anthropology, Museums, and Liberal Government. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2017.
[8] See, for example Hicks, Dan, The Brutish Museum: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution, London; Pluto Press, 2020.
[9] The Museum as a Space of Social Care. London; New York: Routledge, 2020
[10] Curated Decay: Heritage beyond Saving. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

extended to apply to philosophies and ideologies such as growth, individualism[11], technophilia, and technophobia. Miranda Campbell has recently argued for a stronger emphasis on creating together and reframing participation. Specifically, in the educational context she describes care as "[...] "architecture otherwise," a pedagogical and expansive space for reimagining [...]" Here we can take inspiration from the work of Kathleen Lynch9[12] who argues for a carecentric logics in resistance to capitalocentric logics and the wider literature on the politics of care[13] and care ethics[14]. Education necessarily entails teaching, learning and assessment. Lynch's "call to action" to bring "care talk out into the public spheres of formal and informal education, cultural practices, and community, professional and party politics" informs the requirement for visibility and publicity of aesthetics of care.

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[11] Reimagining the Creative Industries Youth Creative Work, Communities of Care, Routledge 2022, 15. See also How to Care More: Seven Skills for Personal and Social Change Rowman & Littlefield, 2022.

[12] Care and Capitalism: Why Affective Equality Matters for Social Justice, 2022, 10.

[13] See, for example, Sophie Lewis's argument for the abolition of the family as a practice of care (Abolish the Family A Manifesto for Care and Liberation, Verso, 2022).

[14] Key texts here include Joan C. Tronto's Caring Democracy Markets, Equality, and Justice, NYU Press, 2013 and Nel Noddings, Caring A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education, University of California Press, 1984 where ethical care is described as "a state of being in relation, characterized by receptivity, relatedness and engrossment" (2). See also, the Care Ethics group at Utrecht's University of Humanistic Studies https://www.uvh.nl/university-of-humanistic-studies/research/chair-groups-and-research-projects/care-ethics/introduction

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