Cura, the Curatorial and Paradoxes of Care

Ed McKeon

Published online: 18 Jul 2023.

Submit your article to this journal ⬀

Article views: 154

View related articles ⬀

View Crossmark data ⬀

Cura, the Curatorial and Paradoxes of Care

ED MCKEON

In this article I aim to address how care is intimately woven into how a feeling for time is produced. If caring has become urgent now, I claim, this is not least because of a felt exhaustion – rather than an 'end' – of 'modern' history. I develop this proposition through the topos of the curator, familiar to the tradition called 'the West' as a figure of care tasked in its museum habitat with the dual responsibilities for preserving and generating historical understanding. In a further temporal twist, I consider its own chronology – not its genealogy but its morphology. This will allow reflection on the current ubiquity of 'curation' beyond the museum and gallery not as an aberration, but perhaps as a symptom of our temporal malaise, a pathology for which we have been repeatedly told 'there is no alternative'.

Attempts to consider the origins and significance of this profession have remarked on its etymological derivation – from the Latin *cura,* care – and its institutional articulation: from Roman curators through to its reappearance in the late Renaissance as one responsible for the care of natural history collections, botanical gardens and zoo animals, and into the early modern public museum (Fowle 2007). Such approaches tend to glide over historical detail in order to extract general lessons. While a full account is beyond the scope of this essay, I will dwell a little longer on moments in this unfolding – incorporating additionally a consideration of church curacy – in order to tease out dimensions of care that touch on our own predicaments. Care is not only shaped by time, I argue, but is intimately concerned with its mutability.

This approach complements the philological work addressing 'care' of Hans Blumenberg (2010) and especially that of John T. Hamilton (2013) by considering the term 'curator' through its history of use. By grasping the significance of its appearance in the early modern period alongside the museum concept, we might gauge its renewed potential – its embodiment of care – with the ongoing disintegration of that model.

PERILS OF CARE

Both Blumenberg and Hamilton begin with the problem of the beginning – or first cause – as elaborated in a creation myth, 'Cura'. This opens with the Goddess Cura, mid-stream, divining a being that she then crafts using clay from the riverbank. She entreats Jupiter to give it breath, at which point there is a dispute over ownership – over essence – conveyed through the right to name it.

The tale's origin is itself appropriately ambiguous: it (re)appeared in a collection of *Fabulae* by 'Hyginus' in 1535, but the textual source was lost after publication. While attributed to Gaius Julius Hyginus, the head of the Palatine Library during Augustus's reign (31 BC–AD 14), this is contested (Smith and Trzaskoma 2007: xlii–xliv). 'Cura' is one of two Latin exceptions within this anthology of Greek legends, yet itself appears nowhere else despite implying an earlier model (perhaps a counterpart to the Promethean myth). Although its origin lies in doubt, however, its modern legacy has been distinctive. Joseph Gottfried von Herder's 'The Child of Care' (1787) provided a poetized Christian retelling from which Goethe borrowed his figure of Care for the end of *Faust* (1832). That became the inspiration for Heidegger's dwelling on Care in *Being and Time* (1927) and subsequent philosophical treatments (Hanisch 2021).

The work of care and carelessness involved in materially preserving and retelling the fable, opening it to processes of translation, revision, reinterpretation, comparison, and so transformation over time, provides something

of a parallel for my approach to the curator as a proxy for Care. I will not reprise Cura's reception history in detail in the following, but I do want initially to draw out three aspects that provide a framework for my account.

First, the fable poses the problem of the origin, of creation *ex nihilo*, both in its form and content. It begins *in media res*: 'When Cura was crossing a certain river, she saw muddy clay, picked it up, pondered for a moment, and then molded a human.' It is immediately ambiguous whether this form preceded the making – perhaps from the Goddess's self-reflection as Blumenberg speculates – or whether it manifested experimentally in the making itself. *Care appears when certainty of the foundation is in question* and its appearance provokes concern and worry. As Hamilton notes, 'care' also lacks a definitive root: it is not directly cognate with *cura* but 'derives from the Old English *caru* or *cearu* – anxiety – and related through Old Saxon, Old High German and Gothic to sorrow, lament, trouble and grief' (2013: 78).

The contest over naming rights registers a dispute over the being's ontology – or rather, over the ontology of being. Jupiter's gift of living breath is countered by the Earth Goddess, Tellus, whose clay provided its material form. Crucially, the competing rights are not resolved in favour of one. Saturn adjudicates, deciding that its spirit and body will return after death to Jupiter and Tellus, with Cura possessing it so long as it lives. Its name would be human (*homo*) because it was made from earth (*humus*).

Second, then, *Care appears to bind together or unify that which lacks foundation* – at least whle human beings live. The donation of human form or essence arrives without precedence and without subsumption by a transcendent principle or material cause. The token of its name, its entry into language and discourse, would also then be exchangeable, an ever-present reminder that it fails to coincide with its essence.

Hamilton emphasizes the temporality of this arrangement and its implications. Care is intimately attached to mortality. To be separated from or without care – *sē-cura* – implies a timelessness of being, a division back from dust to dust or to the immortal spirit realm of the Gods. To have care removed therefore brings anxiety that we may lose our humanity: 'how can we be without care without care?', in Hamilton's memorable conundrum (183–6). The ambivalent desire to be absolved of care's concerns thereby invokes the security apparatus as counterpart to practices of self-care. Security offers the dubious reward of removing the cares that come with the awareness that our time is limited and so precious and vulnerable.

Cura therefore offers a further and crucial paradox. If no human can live carefree, at risk of carelessness, what happens to Care herself when we – as individuals – perish? While we each dwell with Care, Care is transindividual, concerned with the continuity of mortal Being beyond one life. This is troublesome because, as the fable shows, humanity lacks an origin or model that would guarantee its repetition *essentially* unchanged. This absence of essence provokes the unprecedented originality of each person – what Arendt termed 'natality' (1998: 9). As a corollary, for Care to be sustained requires us continually to remember the Beings that we are: always differing, always unique, always ephemeral, irreplaceable, ever renewing. Care concerns the morphology of Being.

Our attachment to Care therefore disturbs any absolute sense of autonomy. We cannot be independent of Care. Care is not the individual's sovereign property because the individual is not sovereign. We are born into and pass away, hopefully, through the care of others. Care attaches us to those who come before and those who follow. We are 'possessed' by Care through the being of others, and this – temporary – property right is conferred by Saturn, the God of Time, on behalf of Tellus and Jupiter to whom our divided (individual) selves are returned. Third, then, *care acts through delegation*, not by self-possession.

The operation I aim to trace can therefore be summarized as follows: Care appears when the origin (of being) is anxiously in doubt to bind (the human) together over time through the authority of another. Moreover, it is precisely this *devolved* character, this apparent assignment to another – to a functionary – that opens the way to Care's institutionalization, its separation from the individual into a discrete function.

Hamilton (2013: 51–63) notes that the notion of *securitas* emerged with Cicero in the first century BC. Following Plato's Idealism, he argued that the self could be unburdened of care through the judicious use of reason to control the body's 'disturbing passions' of desire, fear, distress, pleasure and anger. As the Roman Republic collapsed and the Empire emerged, the concept shifted from the individual to the state as a notion of military or governmental protection, with the emperor represented as the one 'who had taken on all the *curae* of the state and its citizens'. It is in this period also that the first curators were appointed.

A detailed account is beyond the scope of this essay, but a few broad points can be made. Responsible initially for public works (*curator operum publicorum*) such as water supply, festivals, temples and other buildings, these positions were appointed directly by the emperor from his most trusted members of the power elite (Várhelyi 2010: 100). They were not simply civil servants.[1] Operating in the name of the citizenry but *under the mandate of a higher authority*, their role served *to stabilize the imperial order* from fragmentation *in the image of its absent but constantly mythologized origins*. They enabled the empire's expansion by binding its unwieldy parts together. Not only did Rome mark time from the assumed date of its foundation, but this conditioned the possibility and significance of the new. Its power was predicated on the trinity of religion (*re-ligare*, 'to be tied back', a binding of the *polis* to the origin), authority (*augere*, 'augment', a superior power inherited from and amplifying that of the founders) and tradition (transmission) that maintained the foundation's legitimacy across generations (Arendt 1961: 120–5).

The institutionalization of the delegated function of care can best be grasped from the role of *procurator* – indeed, 'proxy' derives from the archaic term *procuracy* (Hamilton 2015). In Roman law and custom, procurators were appointed to handle business affairs by those who could not be present or were otherwise incapacitated, such as minors or those too ill to represent themselves. This individual

deputization provided the model for the *procurator provinciae* under Claudius (41–54 AD), an imperial official with substantial judicial and military power, forming a basis for the systems of legal and political representation with which we are familiar.

As Hamilton explains, this ambiguous role both speaks in the name of another, but also with the voice of authority that validates it – precisely the structure of the performative speech act elaborated by J. L. Austin. Just as this could be troubled by infelicities, misfires and misinvocations arising from the separation of words and speaker, so the misleading identity of the procurator with the body of the represented party affords misdirection and corruption. 'In this regard, the problem of representation – of one person speaking or acting for another – is ultimately bound up with the ambivalence of security, insofar as both institutions are directly tied to equally ambivalent notions of *cura*' (Hamilton 2015: 15).

This structure should be borne in mind for the institutionalizing of the priesthood, whereby the Christianized ancient tradition of pastoral care – and its cure of souls (*cura animalis*) – provided the essential framework. The role of curate arose after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and initially applied to all of those with spiritual responsibility for a body of laypeople, especially those performing mass, conferring the Eucharist, giving religious instruction and curing sin through penance. The curacy provided a *delegated* mechanism for the One True Faith to *bind together* the disparate practices encompassed by its *universalizing mission* and expansive territorial compass on the Roman model, but with the crucifixion as its *founding event*. Baptism and burial likewise gave the curacy its power in defining the natality and mortality of subjects, their entry into and preservation within the recorded memory of the community. Granted powers of remembrance, the curacy could extract payment for keeping the dead in living memory through indulgences.

Faced with the counter-power of monarchs on the path towards the nation state, it also enabled the Roman Church to operate through the emerging political boundaries that divided Europe by focusing on the relation between its

[1] Curators were distinct from the *curia*, which corresponded to an earlier representative operation of government and its meeting place, with its etymology of *co-viria* ('gathering of men'). It is from this example that Pope Urban II (1088–99) formed the Papal curia, and from which we derive the similar meaning and attributes of 'court'.

'flock' and anointed 'shepherds', in particular through the new annual requirement for confession by each parishioner to their priest (van Engen 2008: 635). The task of curing souls was then standardized through a new literature of 'pastoralia', instructional texts based on Scriptural citation directed at trainee priests and lay clergy that encouraged doctrinal orthodoxy (Stansbury 2010).

Foucault (2009) argued that this process of institutionalizing pastoral care marked a critical shift in the construction of 'governmentality', that is, in 'the entire history of procedures of human individualization in the West … the history of the subject' (184). His analysis focused on the changing status of the metaphor of shepherd and flock – on the pastorate – in the understanding of governance, but it can also be approached, as here, through the problematics of care. The importance of the pastoral metaphor for Foucault was the distinction it introduced: instead of *securing* a fixed territory and its machinery of rule, the mobility of the shepherd constantly moving his sheep between safe pastures defined the novelty of a mode of *governing people*. Similarly, we can register this difference between the Roman curators and the Catholic curacy. This was not a power marking its domain only by its glory, symbols and visibility, defining time from its founding; it also ruled through its beneficence, its 'power of care' (127) directing the living towards the Resurrection to come.

In this mode of producing self-governing subjects, procuring control over body, soul and behaviour and so also of social relations, Foucault drew attention to three key features. First, as noted, the cure of souls was directed to 'salvation', a future-oriented return to a heavenly foundation. The self-discipline it imposed was never done, never without care until death, requiring constant vigilance and spiritual supervision of the flock. In contrast with natality, the casting of individual potential without origin, it was the mortal path to salvation, a finality without guarantee, that was unique. 'Curing' involved attention to the singularity of every being in the name of the divine whole – like its medicinal counterpart, identifying and tending to its diverse ailments and cares, each with its own treatment. Second, curates represented not only the Decalogue as a set of prohibitions and rules, but the supreme authority of divine lawfulness, the law as universal that demanded not simply observance but total submission to His will through earthly proxies, and of the body to the mind. Lastly, then, the curacy was charged with directing congregants in the way of truth, of good conscience and self-examination through confession, a means of making visible the heart's hidden secrets.

As I will show, these themes resonate with the role of early modern curators, but to appreciate this transition it is helpful briefly to follow Foucault in acknowledging forms of resistance to this mode of care. If being cured meant unending discipline, submission to the will of an intermediary, purging the body and exposing desires as sinful – at least for those unable to pay for remembrance – many preferred the disease or milder treatments. Ascetics submitted not to another human but directly to divine will, while religious communities like the Anabaptists refused to recognize the Papal authority conferred on pastors, initiating their own sacramental rituals. Mystics insisted on an immediate relation to truth, the soul seeing itself without another's scrutinizing gaze; and others approached scripture, especially once translated to the vernacular, as a site of revelation without priestly exegesis. The Reformation was not, Foucault claims, a doctrinal conflict so much as a pastoral one – a dispute over caring regimes – that divided into two forms: a hierarchically supple Protestant version; and a more pyramidal orthodox mode of the Counter Reformation.

The laity and untrained curates in particular were prone to errancy and dissidence and so restricted in their rights to confer sacraments and to preach. With the English Reformation, an emphasis on academic training provided the priesthood with a new legitimacy and raised its *professional* status, such that by the mid-sixteenth century 'curate' came to designate only the subordinate and supporting role of the unbeneficed cleric (Barrie-Curien 1988). In this Protestant pastoral order, Learning displaced Latin and Rome's authority as the

source of care's power, marking a shift from unquestionable doxa to interpretive method. With this path to social improvement, university life flourished in searching for universal principles.

These transitions can be found in the life of Robert Hooke (1635–1703), the first modern professional curator in the emerging scientific method of producing knowledge. His position indicated a changing feeling for time – early modernity – with a novel curatorial sensibility. Where Roman curators emerged to secure a territory and bind Imperial subjects to its legendary foundations through the authority of tradition, and curates to consolidate the universal kingdom of souls in the name of a promised yet precarious return to the Maker, curators now (re-)appeared to direct human purpose towards the destined accomplishment of Absolute truth.

BECOMING CURATOR

Hooke was born on the Isle of Wight, a curate's son. Education in London was his route to advancement, procured by his father's Royalist connections shortly before his death, which followed closely on Charles I's capitulation to the Parliamentarians. In the Reformation, questions of allegiance made the curate's role perilous. Rather than being prepared for the Church, Hooke was given a more technical, mathematical training fitting for a new kind of employment as assistant to 'intellectual virtuosi', men of rank and learning pursuing scientific enquiry and its profitable use (Jardine 2003: 61). Alongside his studies at Oxford, he made novel scientific instruments for private patrons, developing roles as assistant to John Wilkins and as 'operator' in Robert Boyle's laboratory. On the Restoration of the monarchy (1660), it was the group around Wilkins who formed the Royal Society (1660), one of whose first appointments was Hooke to the newly minted post of 'curator'. The Fellows 'were inventing a new role, the norms for which had yet to be determined, and creating a new meaning for the word' (Pumfrey 1991: 2).

The term was initially applied to any member 'taking care of' experiments, 'and it is clear that,

in these early years, it is this simple and original Latin sense of *curator* that is implied' (4). In contrast with Pumfrey, I suggest the term was not so 'simple', not least as the 'original Latin sense' carried a history and set of values that was more than pragmatic.[2]

Two aspects bear on this. First, as I have shown, curators' authority is conferred. The 'virtuoso curators' were class representatives and self-appointed inheritors of the power of abstract reason. Hooke's social status complicated this, resolved uncomfortably by designating him 'Curator by Office', one whose intellectual work was not instinctive and leisured but paid for and mixed with the manual labour of constructing, maintaining and operating scientific instruments (Pumfrey 1995). As the task of performing and demonstrating experiments was increasingly left to a plurality of paid specialist curators, this structure of delegated authority became clearer, especially as credit for discoveries was usually attributed to the 'virtuosi' (philosophically justified by John Locke's considerations on property). Curatorship became 'the key site at which pressure from competing interests could be exerted in order to control the production of natural knowledge' (Pumfrey 1991: 2).

Second, without insisting on a direct connection to the proximate term 'curate', it is significant that the 'natural knowledge' that formed the object of care was approached by Fellows of the Royal Society as divinely ordained.

> What united [the devout group around Wilkins] was the view that rational explanations could be arrived at for everything in the natural world, and that such forms of explanation were confirmation of the existence of an all-knowing God, whose representatives on earth – the Anglican clergy – were the custodians and guides on behalf of those unable to rise to full understanding on their own. (Jardine 2003: 79–80)

It was in this sense that Boyle's self-image was as 'Christian Virtuoso' or 'priest of nature', a claim echoed by Elias Ashmole (another Fellow): 'it would not be rash to infer, that if the world be a temple, man sure must be the priest, ordained (by being qualified) to celebrate the divine service not only in it, but for it' (Fisch 1953: 255).

This turn to 'natural theology' emerged as

[2] Other terms were available, notably 'custodian' or 'keeper' commonly used in Italy to refer to those responsible for proto-scientific collections and their heuristic display.

a search for a new foundation and a durable world following the collapse of the old, a divine and divinely human origin that shifted the dispute over pastoral care played out through the Reformation and Counter Reformation, and that would provide a new settlement for the emerging social order (Gillespie 1987). If the nature of God was increasingly in doubt, the scientific exhibition of God's natural order offered conviction. Humanity's destiny was to make Creation manifest, to see it with His eyes: a timeless perspective on ephemeral forms. 'It was … in the course of its search for a strictly secular realm of enduring permanence that the modern age discovered the potential immortality of mankind. This is … the actual content of our concept of history' (Arendt 1961: 74–5).

This history of gathering wisdom was expressed in the emergence of *museaum* collections in the Italian Renaissance. Indigenous material cultures, flora, fauna and cosmologies encountered by adventurers and missionary priests in colonial voyages of 'discovery' were incorporated along with local finds and treasures within encyclopaedic, totalizing systems of knowledge (Findlen 1994). The accumulation and display of specimens, objects and curiosities to be investigated complemented the system of experimentation and demonstration in affirming or challenging the authority of ancient texts (by Aristotle, Galen and others) proliferating in new editions of the printing presses. Indeed, the collection bearing Ashmole's name – which incorporated that of John Tradescant (first curator of Oxford's botanic garden) and his son, named 'The Ark' – provided the basis for Oxford University's Ashmolean, Britain's first public museum (1683).[3] The collection of Sir Hans Sloane, President of the Royal Society, likewise formed a basis for The British Museum (1753), to which the Society's own artefacts were soon added.

The transition between regimes of care – from the curacy to museum curation – is registered in shifts to Foucault's paradigmatic characteristics of the pastorate, summarized earlier. First, where 'salvation' provided a means of binding mortal souls to the promise of eternal life through personal discipline, the art of curating salvaged perishable objects and granted them a kind of permanence in collections. Just as each individual was saved in the name of all humanity, so each artefact was uniquely ordained as part of an encyclopaedic whole, ordered on taxonomic principles assigning its rightful place within the natural order.

The faithful awaited a Day of Judgement at the end of time; the fragments of creation held by museums, however, were subject to reappraisal. They exist in an ambiguous temporality of display, at once both immemorial – timeless, embalmed – *and* historical, staged on the progressive path to enlightenment and total knowledge. They are both antique and antiquated – a tension structuring the 'quarrel' of the 'ancients and moderns' according to the location of wisdom in the origin or the destination. In the field of art, curators separated Old Masters from contemporary artists. Operating as the first recognized public exhibition space for living artists (from 1818), the Palais du Luxembourg in Paris was explicitly considered a '*musée purgatoire*', its works awaiting the sanctification of history and eternal glory in the heavenly collection of the Louvre (Lorente 2011: 51). The new had to die before it could win immortality and rebirth – a sacrificial principle later attacked and reversed by the Futurists and avant gardes.

Second, submission before God's representative in the name of divine law – and making the body obedient to the mind – likewise transformed into a worship of natural law and its priesthood. To be educated and enlightened gained a moral character. Museums and curators played a key role in narrating human 'progress' after the model of natural history and its stages of development, rendering this visible through galleried displays as a technique of walking through time. Artistic periods and styles were ordered on the logic of Linnaeus's binomial taxonomic schema for natural systems, with genus and species rendered as chronology and 'school' as a founding principle for the Louvre (McClellan 1994: 80–1). This structure not only 'naturalised' the racist distinction of cultures between those with and those without a 'history'; in the revolutionary era, it implied that history could be 'made', opening a way for the public domain more broadly to become an object

[3] Ashmole's collection was first housed in what is now the Museum of the History of Science, Oxford, ordered according to a hierarchy of visual knowledge: its laboratory was in the basement, lecture space at ground level, and collection displayed on the upper floor. Moreover, 'the very word "museum" entered the English language as a result of this building: the University of Oxford did everything in Latin, and university premises were labelled in Latin over the doorways, so the translation of Ashmole's Repository was Musaeum Ashmoleanum. This first purpose-built public museum thus became famous as *the* Museum' (Ackerman 2016: 78–9).

of governmental experiment in the name of 'social science' (Arendt 1961: 79–86). Temporal unfolding was ordered to provide lessons for constant improvement. Humanity's destiny – as Herder (1997) argued in a founding argument of comparative anthropology – was progressively to perfect itself. Goethe's *Faust* illustrated the troubling consequence that 'obstructions' to advancement had to be removed.

Third, just as the good curate guided his subjects to confess their innermost thoughts and desires, the curator was charged with revealing nature's concealed truths using new optical technologies such as the microscope and telescope. Natural collections were regarded like a second Bible whose interpretation required skilled reading to fathom their hidden depths. Visiting publics could then be convinced not by a transcendent authority or blind faith, but through elaborate visual demonstrations and displays they could observe for themselves (Pumfrey 1995: 154). To see was to know, as the French sa*voir* makes evident.

Yet this 'careful looking' emphasized a peculiar affect – curiosity (also from *cura*) – an aesthetic visuality distinct from its ethical form. Early collections were often held in 'cabinets of curiosity'; distinctive specimens (from *specere*, to look) were collected for their novelty, provoking a desire to order it, to master and name it. This God-like perspective had a peculiarly modern dimension. As Blumenberg shows, Enlightenment writers like Fontenelle showed a fascination for 'cosmic exoticism', a fantastic gaze on the world as if from the other end of the telescope, from the heavens or other planets (Blumenberg 1997: 32). For Voltaire, this immortal view compelled a curious concern for all mortals, human or otherwise, echoed by the instinct to run (*courir*) in aid of those seen in distress. The Abbé Galiani disagreed:

> Since animals are not capable of curiosity, the curious human is *more human* than any other … As a curious being, man is receptive to every spectacle. Almost all sciences have arisen out of curiosity. And the key to everything lies in the security, in the unsuffering condition of the curious being. (Blumenberg 1997: 40, my emphasis)

This optical affect of care was, he claimed, exemplified by the theatre (etymologically,

a 'place for viewing'), a specifically human capacity to feel for another secured by the knowledge that the viewer was not himself in mortal peril. From this paradoxical and seemingly carefree perspective, 'incurious' and so 'less human' beings could be ordered and disciplined along with other animals, specimens and objects. Publics, meanwhile, could be educated in curiosity, a project manifest in the work of museum curators and especially those displaying collections of *visual* art (Bennett 1995). The distinction between an education in looking, as a scientific perspective on creation, and a narcissistic looking *at* looking as a specifically human modality can then be observed in the gradual separation of collections into 'natural' and 'cultural' artefacts – reflected, for example, in changes at the Ashmolean (MacGregor 2001).

IS EVERYONE NOW A CURATOR?

As with Foucault's (2009) elaboration of modes of 'counter conduct' resisting the curacy's power of care (191–226), it is important to acknowledge that the modern regime of care has also come under constant challenge – in philosophy, for example, by Nietzsche, Heidegger and Arendt; in art by the avant-gardes and especially by those denied the secure God-like perspective of white bourgeois men.

While the work of curators was supposed to remain itself unseen, the function became visible from the late 1960s as visuality itself was brought into question, marking the postmodern turn from approved disciplines of painting and sculpture to the 'post-medium' or 'post-conceptual' condition – including to practices that troubled visual privilege, such as performance and time-based media (McKeon 2022). Their status increased precisely as certainty about what comprised art diminished. Curatorial work appeared disconcertingly performative, its proxy status challenging the singular authority of the artists for whom and whose works they supposedly took care, while simultaneously becoming implicated in the mushrooming market for contemporary art (Alloway 1975; Farquharson 2003). The value question was shifting from what made

significant art to what was significant curating, and as artists developed their own curatorial initiatives the distinction became yet more ambiguous (Foster 1996: 122; Green 2018). By the 1990s, the participatory or 'ethnographic' turn of social aesthetics compromised the role's purported neutrality, its objective and critical gaze; its divided responsibilities to the public sphere and to aesthetic production were not held separately but blurred (Jackson 2011). Barely two decades after its institutionalization through graduate study programmes, from 1987, gallery professionals began abandoning the term for more neutral and pragmatic labels, such as 'producer', 'exhibition-maker' or 'facilitator' (Smith 2015: 43).

On the one hand, this has coincided with a growing adoption of the discourse of curating within artistic fields not recognized by the museum or gallery, such as music and performance (Davida *et al.* 2019). On the other, the term has escaped its decorous confinement to signify supposedly intelligent – if not human – selection within a culture of superfluous production, notably of information (Balzer 2015; Davis 2019). As everything and anything can now be 'curated', the question of what links curating to care and ethics has once again become pressing (Martinon 2020; Krasny *et al.* 2021). No longer defined exclusively by the museum or by the category of art, the embodiment of and responsibility for care is being rethought and renewed. What, then, can we learn from this history?

Curation is now ubiquitous as the absence of both foundations and destiny – for the human, for art, for truth itself – has become palpable. Self-governing atomized subjects become their own curators, binding themselves for the recognition of others by choosing identities, beliefs and ways of being from readymade subject positions and bespoke filters. Incurious, we risk becoming simultaneously objects of power's gaze and of our own mirrored image, narcissistic and alienated.

By refusing both visual privilege and anti-ocularcentrism, however, other possible regimes of care remain that lay down the vicarious, curious, anthropocentric gaze. Art's 'way of looking' need no longer redeem us, endow us with a quasi-transcendental power, nor hold us apart from other worldly creations. Care need not be exclusive to aesthetics or to ethics, nor divided between them, but prompts a revision of practices that are simultaneously social *and* artistic.

Second, care is not identifiable, a noun, but active, shapeshifting and metamorphic. To that extent, it cannot be defined by its 'opposite', either carefree or careless security, a separation that inevitably differentiates 'insides' from 'outsides' (those with or without care), however ambiguously. Along with us, care has neither origin nor destination. It simply abides with us in our precarious being as a way of living with our gifts of natality and mortality, our unique potential and our temporal finitude (Lorey 2015: 10–15).

If we accept this, lastly, we can cast off proxy forms of care and acknowledge our lack of autonomy without fear or anxiety. We manifest care for one another. We are all curators, not as performers of the self or as would-be influencers but as necessarily relational beings, midwifing the new and remembering the dead – holding close to 'the heart that burns' (*cor-urat*, in Varro's etymology) all that perishes (Hamilton 2013: 74). Care involves the paradoxical and necessary work of preserving through renewal that which must not and cannot preserve itself.

REFERENCES

Ackerman, Silke (2016) *Museum of the History of Science*, Oxford and London: Scala Arts & Heritage.

Alloway, Lawrence (1975) 'The great curatorial dim-out', *Artforum*: 32–4.

R. Scott Smith and Stephen M. Trzaskoma (2007) '*Apollodorus'* Library *and Hyginus'* Fabulae: *Two handbooks of Greek mythology*, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.

Arendt, Hannah (1961) *Between Past and Future: Six essays in political thought*, New York, NY: Viking Press.

Arendt, Hannah (1998) *The Human Condition*, 2nd edn, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Balzer, David (2015) *Curationism: How curating took over the art world and everything else*, London: Pluto Press.

Barrie-Curien, Viviane (1988) 'The English clergy, 1560–1620: Recruitment and social status', *History of European Ideas* 9(4): 451–63.

Bennett, Tony (1995) *The Birth of the Museum: History, theory, politics*, London: Routledge.

Blumenberg, Hans (1997) *Shipwreck with Spectator:*

Paradigm of a metaphor of existence, trans. Steven Rendall, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Blumenberg, Hans (2010) *Care Crosses the River*, trans. Paul Fleming, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Davida, Dena, Gabriels, Jane, Hudon, Véronique and Pronovost, Marc, eds (2019) *Curating Live Arts: Critical perspectives, essays, and conversations on theory and practice*, New York, NY: Berghahn.

Davis, Steffon (2019) *The Rise of the Curator Class: Changing the way we buy, sell, and make everything*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Farquharson, Alex (2003) 'I curate, you curate, we curate', *Art Monthly* 269, pp. 7– 10.

Findlen, Paula (1994) *Possessing Nature: Museums, collecting, and scientific culture in early modern Italy*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Fisch, Harold (1953) 'The scientist as priest: A note on Robert Boyle's natural theology', *Isis* 44(3): 252–65.

Foster, Hal (1996) *The Return of the Real: The avant-garde at the end of the century*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Foucault, Michel (2009) *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fowle, Kate (2010) 'Who cares? Understanding the role of the curator today', in Steve Rand and Heather Kouris (eds) *Cautionary Tales: Critical curating*, New York, NY: apexart, pp. 26–35.

Gillespie, Neal C (1987) 'Natural history, natural theology, and social order: John Ray and the "Newtonian ideology"', *Journal of the History of Biology* 20(1): 1–49.

von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang (2009) *Faust, Part II*, transl. David Constantine, London: Penguin Classics.

Green, Alison (2018) *When Artists Curate: Contemporary art and the exhibition as medium*, London: Reaktion Books.

Hamilton, John T. (2013) *Security: Politics, humanity, and the philology of care*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hamilton, John T. (2015) 'Procuratores: On the limits of caring for another', *telos* 170: 7–22.

Hanisch, Halvor (2021) 'How care holds humanity: The myth of Cura and theories of care', *Medical Humanities*, DOI: 10.1136/medhum-2020-012136

Heidegger, Martin (1996) *Being and Time*, transl. Joan Stambaugh, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Herder, Johann Gottfried (1997) *On World History: An anthology*, eds Hans Adler and Ernest A Menze, trans. Ernest A Menze with Michael Palma, London: Routledge.

Jackson, Shannon (2011) *Social Works: Performing art, supporting publics*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Jardine, Lisa (2003) *The Curious Life of Robert Hooke*, London: Harper Perennial.

Krasny, Elke, Lingg, Sophie, Fritsch, Lena, Bosold, Birgit and Hofmann, Vera, eds (2021) *Radicalizing Care: Feminist and queer activism in curating*, London: Sternberg Press.

Lorente, J. Pedro (2011) *The Museums of Contemporary Art: Notion and development*, Farnham: Ashgate.

Lorey, Isabell (2015) *State of Insecurity: Government of the precarious*, trans. Aileen Derieg, London: Verso.

MacGregor, Arthur (2001) 'The Ashmolean as a museum of natural history, 1683–1860', *Journal of the History of Collections* 13(2): 125–44.

McClellan, Andrew (1994) *Inventing the Louvre: Art, politics, and the origins of the modern museum in eighteenth-century Paris*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McKeon, Ed (2022) 'Coming to our senses: From the birth of the curator function to curating live arts', *Turba* 1(1): 33–52.

Martinon, Jean-Paul (2020) *Curating as Ethics*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Pumfrey, Stephen (1991) 'Ideas above his station: A social study of Hooke's curatorship of experiments', *History of Science* 29(1): 1–44.

Pumfrey, Stephen (1995) 'Who did the work? Experimental philosophers and public demonstrators in Augustan England', *British Journal for the History of Science* 28(2): 131–56.

Smith, Terry (2015) *Talking Contemporary Curating*, New York, NY: Independent Curators International.

Stansbury, Ronald, ed. (2010) *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages (1200–1500)*, Leiden: Brill.

van Engen, John H. (2008) 'Conclusion: Christendom, c.1100', in Thomas Noble and Julia Smith (eds) *The Cambridge History of Christianity Vol.3: Early Medieval Christianities, c.600–1100*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 625–43.

Várhelyi, Zsuzsanna (2010) *The Religion of Senators in the Roman Empire: Power and beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.