

LEONORANA 4
CUIDAR
CARE

Porto
2020

WHAT IS CARE?

Central to our practice is the idea that care is collective and the so-called mental health and illnesses are affected by manifold dimensions of existence. Uncountable states of being confer the same multivalence of care. We are told mental health is something material, built by the place we call home, the roof over our head and the weather above it. It is chemical, and interpersonal. It is also the social fabric that surrounds us, our neighbours, friends and families, the time we have available, the good we can see in the world, the future we see ahead and the past trailing behind. It is our labour and our love, what we do for work, for a living. It is the chemicals we embody and reproduce, and what we tell ourselves. Since care depends on these things and more, care is interdependent, always calling for attendance and forever changing.



Other Ways to Care Meeting on skype, September 2020.

MENTAL HEALTH IS POLITICAL

We understand that mental ill health and distress are indiscernible from political circumstances. The history of madness is also a social and political history. A critical attention therefore requires a sense of 'history of the present' as we have been reminded by Michel Foucault. Getting to the core of mental health struggles requires us to locate ourselves at the intersection of other struggles. We believe in coming together — survivors, psychiatrists, nurses, citizens, artists, experts by experience, researchers, collectives and individuals — to unpack conceived notions of care, track patterns and extract meaning from shared and fragmented experiences to construct platforms of common struggle. This is our activism, a form of care by way of the empowerment of common voices.

MAKING COMMUNITY

Since 2018 we have been facilitating annual assemblies for groups and organisations to come together and share their critical practice. Each assembly has been inflected by the state of us as a collective and as 'us' in a grander sense. Our first assembly in 2018 existed before we did, and took the form of a focused workshop on alternative psychiatric and psychotherapeutic practices of care; from it we took our name. The 2019 assembly was the result of our continued conversations, of getting our heads together and reaching out to all of our individual connections in order to render them shared, establishing the roots of community. Our third assembly took place in June 2020 in the necessarily virtual form of a radio-show. Its contributors shared reflections, stories, songs, fragments, and manifestos which were presented as a live broadcast so we could join together remotely and intimately.

Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has broken social networks and distanced many of us from the support that sustained us, we have sought to create alternative spaces to still be and think together. This is how we began experimenting with online film screenings. We wanted to interrogate what care has meant and attend to our shifting experiences of isolation.

BEYOND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW SPACES OF CARE

THE COLLECTIVE FILM SCREENINGS

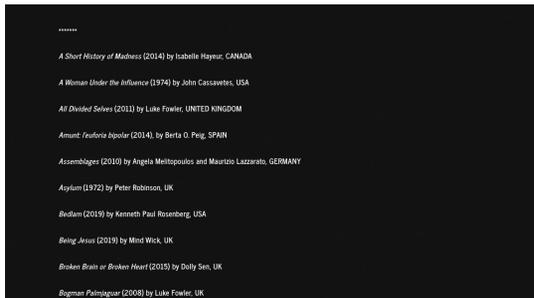
The idea of watching films together has been around since the beginnings of our collective. Already at our first assembly [owtc#1] we used excerpts from the films *Le moindre des choses* (Nicolas Philibert, 1996) and *Le Droit à la Folie* (Igor Barrère, 1977). Concerned with how we could continue to meet, back then we considered a film club as a possibility. In the year between owtc#1 and owtc#2, what could have been a one-off event became a collective, and this was a development that took place in part as we informally met in each other's houses to watch films together.

Under lockdown, we continue searching for other ways to care, to connect among ourselves and with others. We built a website and shared our work-in-progress filmography, that continues to grow through your suggestions. This list is by no means comprehensive nor representative of ideal explorations

of mental health. Rather, we thought that the films and the list itself may offer different starting points for new conversations.

We are more concerned with the forum created as we watch a film together than with the film per se. The experience of watching and discussing a film collectively feels artful in itself. We are interested in this shared experience of engaging, perceiving, making and unmaking sense in dialogue. If the film is the text, the side chat-box becomes the margins, and our conversations a kind of co-production/collaboration.

These online screenings have developed into a practice of their own. We do not think they should be understood as a replacement to in-person screenings. We hope and wonder if this energy will lead us to such screenings in the future. However, we are reluctant to frame the in-person as ‘the ultimate medium’ or an elevated endpoint. Such normative positioning fails to adequately account for crip film encounters and other crippling ways of being in-the-world more broadly. In the context of the global pandemic, disability theorists and activists continue to challenge conventional notions of restriction, access, and relationality in arts cultures. The *Not Going Back to Normal* manifesto created by the Scottish disabled artists Collective earlier this year flips the script on ableist curating and is one example of technological radical practice we seek to honor. Yet, as we will go to address, there is still much for us to learn and overcome in terms of our own technical understanding and material application of digital accessibility.²



Filmography section on website (<http://www.otherwaystocare.org/filmography.html>).

Turning to virtual spaces is something we share with other groups in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. This Spring, *CinePop Buridda* and Elena Boschi moved their practice online during the lockdown in Genoa and so did *ActivaMent's* film-forum during the lockdown in Catalonia. *Hearing Voices Network* has also been hosting various online sessions dedicated to films since April. In Lancaster, CCRAMHP film group has been meeting online

to watch and discuss films since May. And, in Buenos Aires, the Cultural Centre Haroldo Conti organised *La Locura y La Norma*, an online film screening series and *conversatorio*, this September.³

La Rara Troupe, a collective that has been meeting since 2012 to work around psychosocial discomfort, self-representation and first-person narration, also moved online last March to continue their current project *Rodando el Límite* (2019-2020). La Rara Troupe has developed its audiovisual practice progressing from watching to making their own videos and films. Their practice feeds us an horizon.⁴

We want to make a road trip to the Radical Film Network Meeting 2021 in Genoa. We dream of films. Sometimes, we dream of making a film together. Dreams too are a means of production.

WHY INTERRUPTED SCREENINGS?

Our attention to the space of the film screening is inspired by the screenings of *cine militante* in Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly the practice of Unidad Móvil Rosario within Grupo Cine Liberación. We are also inspired by contemporary practices of interrupted film screening such as those by independent scholar and film curator Elena Boschi.⁵

With the interruption we are saying that those watching the film are important. We also want to collectivise an experience. We are interested in the screening not simply as a singular event but in its totality, including the period of preparation towards the screening moment, the screening itself and the post screening period – what we call the after-effects or feedback effects. The screening in our case is the process, not the film. With the interruption we are stating the importance of this process.

The interruptions are anti-coercive in nature. We are working with people and in systems which inherently coerce through acts that are described in bad faith as care. By interrupting the dominant voice we are inviting people to take a minute, recalibrate and reflect on the story being told, what has been said and what is suggested. This process can be silent or voiced (type), private or collective. In these ways, interrupting is building solidarity.

Our practice evolves, and with it so do we.

Each screening is different. However, from the start we asked ourselves some important questions. If you plan to organise an online film screening, we think you may find yourself debating with similar questions. Below are some of those questions and our current efforts to answer them. At the moment this is what we think:

1. HERE AND NOW. WHICH FILM SHOULD WE SCREEN? HOW IMPORTANT IS THE CHOICE OF FILM?



Index box with film titles, and notes per film.

Whether cinema can do more harm than good is a crucial question for us. We agree that there are many films full of problematic representations. Yet, we are exploring an expanded idea of cinema that includes what happens around films. This explains our choice for interrupted screenings, where we hope even a “bad film” can open up much-needed conversations and bring about change. We are interested in screening both ‘problematic’ representations — for thinking through those problems together, and films whose storytelling is fairer and wiser in truly experienced ways.⁶

We consider whose voices come through in the film and chats. Given the nature and content of the films we choose to screen and the life experiences of those who may join us, we pay attention to the potential effects of this interaction. Putting it differently, we feel a heightened responsibility to create a space that feels safe despite the often difficult content of the film and

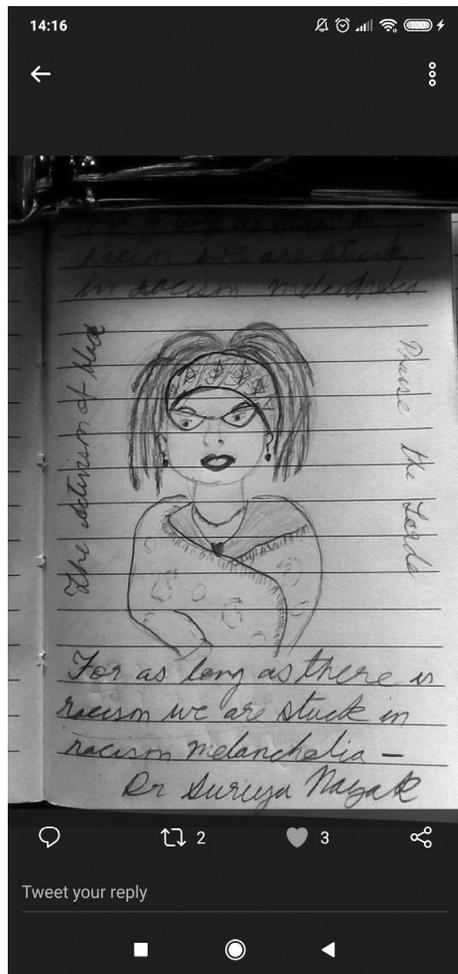
conversation. Access to this kind of space is crucial to challenging uncomfortable and oppressive dynamics as experienced in the realm of mental health care provision. This is not to suggest an aversion to producing negative feelings, but rather that we aim to enable dialogues that accept and respond to difficult elements. We try and do this simply by speaking with warmth and solidarity and being mindful of potential affects. We might reach out to people who seem low or uplift people whose voices get lost in the flow of the chat-box as messages pile up. We also do this by offering basic content warnings ahead of the screening and mentioning in our invite emails that we welcome anyone who wants to speak to us about anything before or after the film.⁷

We understand that a safe space is that which provides the conditions for everybody to feel brave. We borrow the idea of ‘brave spaces’ from Mad Studies Birmingham, where it was kindly introduced by Allison Joseph. Yet, we suggest our own understanding of it: to create a space where it is possible to share personal experiences, ask uneasy questions, type our anger and sorrows, share resources and songs, or simply say our peace. We do this also by inviting everyone to gently consider the feelings and possible experiences of everybody who joins us.⁸

‘Brave spaces’ stands also as an example of the way in which we engage with alternative and activist cultures, practices and knowledges. We think that it is important to acknowledge and signpost these companions, those who we are and we want to be with.

2. HOW DO WE MAKE THE FILM EXPERIENCE MORE ACCESSIBLE?

In terms of access, we consider the social anxieties and expectations which often accompany in-person events. There may be also other physical or material reasons that complicate someone attending a film event, which may be more easily resolved or unapparent when connecting online. These issues are far from unique to our film screenings and we are sure this has been discussed in detail and at length to useful ends in other contexts. We feel that while the ‘interrupted’ nature of our screenings has theoretical underpinnings, it also helps construct an environmental accepting of breaks, stretches, shuffles and twitches, and as such meets each person where they are. In times of zoom-fatigue, we also appreciate not having to perform in front of a camera to be able to come together with others. We enjoyed this very much at our RadioCare session and decided to continue working in the same line for our film screenings. This is why we



Drawing by Sonia Soans for the 15 Park Avenue (2005) screening.

appreciate having found a platform with a chat-box. Still, we are aware that this may represent an obstacle for those not comfortable with typing.⁹

Each platform-software comes with difficulties that we strive to address and so do the copies of films we have been able to access — many of which had no captions, subtitles, or audio descriptions. We use the platform Metastream, an in-beta platform developed as part of the wider Discord community. We use it because it provides a relatively user friendly interface and has an integrated chat-box allowing all to contribute in a live commentary on the film. It has many draws, some of which we have touched upon, but it is not perfect. For example, we cannot add our own

captions to Metastream if we are not the original uploaders of the video. And if we are, some platforms such as Vimeo do not carry over the subtitles when broadcasted on the Metastream platform.

We have a growing awareness of the different capabilities of each platform and how they relate to each other with mixed results. The screenings have required us to develop our limited technical knowledge — particularly when there is no funding for licenses and associated powers. However, we have come across invaluable roadmaps such as a walk-through guide to adding captions on YouTube videos. This kind of open-sourced collective knowledge empowers us to challenge prevailing ableist discourses within online culture. Practical steps such as adding alt-text and images descriptions in the events promotion, sharing access information and considering specific access needs — e.g. choosing screening times that make it feasible for those joining from different time-zones, are all ways of advancing in this direction.¹⁰

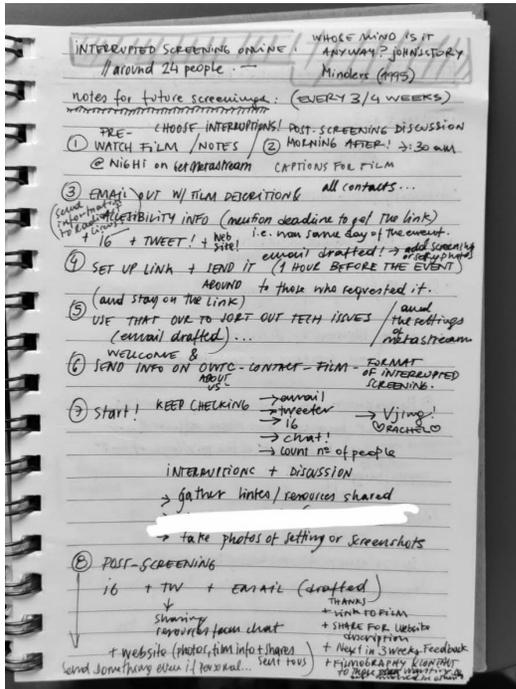
One critical barrier to accessing screenings is that Metastream is not supported on smartphones, a device used by many to access the digital sphere. This proved especially impactful in our screening with The Outsiders Project. We have also been thinking about the social media channels we use and which platforms speak to which groups.

Deepening our practice is only possible through continued discussion around questions of access between ourselves and our collaborators. We have found many have reached out for our tech support via email or in the chat and we have often, yet not always, found ways to muddle through our shared glitches and imperfection.



Drawing by Sonia Soans for the 15 Park Avenue (2005) screening.

3. WHAT IS OUR ROLE? ARE WE MODERATORS/FACILITATORS? HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE THE FILM AND WITH PARTICIPANTS, BEFORE AND AFTER THE EVENT?



Paola notes for the John Story screening.

The screenings come about through a series of pragmatics including sourcing watchable copies, promoting the event ahead of time and using shared screening software. Sometimes collaborators bring film copies ready to screen, sometimes image quality and legality all become considerations.

Connections via Twitter, Instagram and Gmail add to the materiality of the screenings. The liveness of Metastream made us question the benefits of accompanying the films screenings with panels or group discussions on video. We sought for a different kind of space in which to have our conversations, one less reminiscent of so many 'fatiguing' zoom calls, that anticipates no more participation than is desired and might lessen the social anxiety of contributing to a group discussion.

During the screening there are practicalities like technical support (via the chat-box, email or even by phone),

signposting of expectations and timings (creating a set of slides shared in advance and while waiting for the beginning of the screening saves repetition) and friendly check-ins with old and new. The novelty of the platform for some has meant we have at times fallen deeper into the role of tech-troubleshooters than we might have expected. It feels like we toggle between this role and that of holding the space for conversation. Over the past year these practices have become the lingua franca of good online meeting practice, and here they help us to recreate the sense of holding together in lieu of the physical space of the cinema.

We consider language to be very important. In experiencing an expanded and dispersed cinema, where our main means of communication are the chat-box, social media and emails, the care taken in and through words becomes amplified. In the chat we are both facilitators and participants, asking questions of our own, and engaging with those of others.

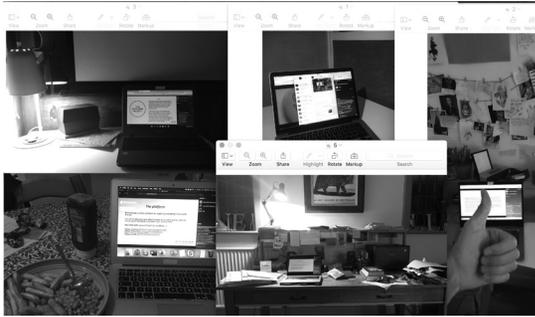
4. CO-PROGRAMMING AND CO-HOSTING. BEYOND THE FILM: FEEDBACK AND AFTER EFFECTS

For our first online screening, we chose a film and we worked on the mechanics of internal collaboration, that is to say we figured out how to run the stream live remotely between ourselves only. During this screening and discussion, references to other films were made and among them was *15 Park Avenue* (Aparna Sen, 2005) suggested by Sonia Soans. We took this as an opportunity for connection and suggested that we collaborate by co-hosting the screening of a film which Sonia was already experienced in speaking about and sharing with audiences. For our third screening, we developed a connection with The Outsiders Project through Twitter which quickly slid into another collaborative screening.

We do not make any discrete boundaries between ourselves and those who join us, and invite others to alter the shape, scope and imagination of each screening and dialogue. This looks like Whatsapp groups and co-drafted email invitations, a sense of patience and flexibility, and a forgiveness for the unanticipated. We are an open and evolving collective built around practices such as these.

We have realised that after screening a film connections materialize. Questions raised in one screening spark new ones and people get in touch and propose films or collaborations. This network has found nodes much further apart than might have

been the case with screenings in person. In these together/apart screenings the distance between each body and idea is diminished if not annulled; time is stretched in odd directions and the conversation seems tenaciously capable of bridging digital gaps.



Together/Apart. Dispersed screenings scenario.

WE: THE SCREENINGS ALSO FORM US

Watching films together was once, for us, a preparatory gathering, at different homes, with a haphazard, comment-filled excel sheet. We would go through our list working *towards* events, preparing and discussing and curating. In the early stages of lockdown it was an excuse to meet and talk among ourselves, while the act of building a filmography, of gathering titles was an activity open to us when so many others were closed. The list of films itself tells our own trajectory, it reflects many different openings: to new languages, intersections, lands and struggles. Gathering, choosing, watching films poses us with an ever longer and interconnected series of questions. How to engage with a working list of films? How to practice a filmography? Which thread of thought to pick up next?

Our practice has evolved informed by the films themselves, by the conversations and engagements. The screening practice continually forms us as a collective as it informs our notions of care. It provides a possibility of a back and forth, of continual feedback and change, and a real experience of giving and receiving care.

Past Film Screenings

0.
La Moindre des Choses (France, 1996) by Nicolas Philibert.

5th June 2020. Online film screening and discussion.

This music-documentary shows life at La Borde Clinique — one of the main historical sites of Institutional Psychotherapy, while residents and staff prepare for their annual theatre production. This screening was planned in the context of the Institutional Analysis short course run by Anthony Faramelli at Goldsmiths, University of London, by way of sharing the day-to-day life in the clinic as informed by particular methods and practices.

1.
Whose Mind Is It Anyway? John's Story (United Kingdom, 1995) by Lorraine Heggessey.

13th August 2020. Online interrupted film screening.

This first episode on the BBC 2 documentary series *Minders* (1995) tells the story of John Baptiste, a young man racialized as black and detained under the Mental Health Act. This screening took place in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder and in solidarity with Black Lives Matter, as we seek to think together through the intersections of racism, colonialism and sanism.

2.
15th Park Avenue (India, 2005) by Aparna Sen.

20th September 2020. Online interrupted film screening co-hosted with Sonia Soans.

This fiction film looks at the life of Mitali — a woman in her thirties diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, and those around her. This screening sought to offer an occasion to think about gender and care, in social and family dynamics. It also was our first experience exploring more seriously how to co-host screenings departing from film suggestions.

3.
Tattoo (United Kingdom, 2020)
by The Outsiders Project.

21st October 2020. Online film
screening and discussion
co-hosted with The
Outsiders Project.

These short films explore
marginal live experiences
through tattoo stories. The
screening opened the
conversation towards creative
practices of storytelling and
community making. It was also
our first time sharing the
screening of a film with its
filmmakers.

Upcoming

4.
Goldsmiths Gold Paper Mental
Health Group
November — December 2020 /
online film screening series

1st screening session / *online
film screening and discussion*
Sola (2020) by Zoltán
Debreczeni + *Modern Times*
(1936) by Charles Chaplin
[first 20']

2nd screening session / *online
film screening and discussion*
I Am Somebody (1970)
by Madelaine Anderson

3rd screening session / *online
interrupted film screening*
State of Distress (2019)
by Maria Ruido

5.
Κλεισάμε (2019) by Sol Prado
2021 / *online film
screening and Q&A*

6.
Shades of Blue (2020)
by Damilola Lamomu & Sophie
Abramovici
2021 / *online film screening and
discussion*

7.
Mones com la Becky (1999)
by Joaquim Jordà and
Núria Villazán
2021 / *slow screening group*

- 1 Each of our public gatherings takes a number. owtc#1 [June 2018] was our first annual assembly at MayDay Rooms for AntiUniversity Festival organised by Susana Caló and Kevin Sawar-Polley; owtc#2 [June 2019] was our second annual assembly at Art Catalysts for AntiUniversity Festival 2019; owtc#3 [June 2020] was the third annual assembly at the AntiUniversity Festival 2020 and when we created RadioCare; owtc#4 [August 2020] was the first film screening 'Whose Mind Is It Anyway? John's Story' (1995); owtc#5 [September 2020] was the screening of 15th Park Avenue (2005), co-hosted with Sonia Soans; owtc#6 [October 2020] was the screening of Tattoo (2020), co-hosted with The Outsiders Project. owtc #7 is the present text.
- 2 Not Going Back to Normal Manifesto: <http://notgoingbacktonormal.com/home>.
- 3 CinePop project from Laboratorio Sociale Occupato Autogestito Buridda: <https://buridda.org/cinepop/>. ActivaMent, mental health collective for and by people with lived experience of mental distress: <http://www.activament.org/en/>. Hearing Voices Networks: <https://www.hearing-voices.org/>. CCrAMHP, stands for Critical and Creative Approaches to Mental Health Practice: <http://www.ccramp.org.uk/>. La Locura y La Norma film series at Centro Cultural Haroldo Conti: <http://conti.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/2020/09/la-locura-y-la-norma.php>.
- 4 La Rara Troupe: <https://raraweb.org/>.
- 5 We first learnt about Elena Boschi's practice at her Interrupted Screening workshop at the Radical Film Network Meeting Berlin on 3rd May 2019 (<http://radicalfilmnetwork.de/interrupted-screening-workshop/>).
- 6 We thank researcher and activist Jayasree Kalathil for sharing her film review of 15 Park Avenue, originally published in 2006 in Aaina, a user-led mental health advocacy magazine in India, and led us to think further about our film choices.
- 7 We are grateful to artist and filmmaker Chas de Swiet for speaking about film screenings and accessibility at the Access and Activism panel at Cripodium on 6th June 2020 (<https://cripodium.wordpress.com/access-and-activism/>).
- 8 Mad Studies Group Birmingham: <https://www.pinkskythinking.com/mad-studies>.
- 9 Radiocare (<http://www.otherwaystocare.org/open-call.html>) is our radio project, launched on 12th June 2020 during owtc#3.
- 10 Metastream platform/extension: <https://app.getmetastream.com/>.