

## 4 Relation(al) matters

### Vulnerable pedagogies, care and *carriance* as (c)air-ful(l)ness in higher education

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As critical feminists, how can we still teach and learn in the neoliberal university? This is the overarching question that our chapter grapples with. Without romanticising the classical – in other words, colonial, Western, Eurocentric – university, its neoliberal conditions today imply what we want to articulate here as an *end of trust*. What current epistemic and economic conditions in the educational sector do to us globally has led to a foundational loss of trust in the very structures in which we work, both as teachers and as students. Yet, as we ambivalently decide to stay within academia, in this chapter we want to explore *how* we actually do this. What does it take for us to work in these increasingly suffocating conditions? What we have learned from our collective reflections is that a continued desire for care and trust drives our teaching and learning practices. This desire holds on to hope and commitment in academic spaces and aims to counter neoliberal patterns of exclusion (the continuation of the unequal and colonial framework of the university), indifference (“it’s nobody’s responsibility”) and carelessness (“there is no alternative”). Yet, we must stress here that at the very beginning of the chapter, working for trust and care isn’t about purity or innocence – pretending that we can overcome the conditions of neoliberalisation and epistemic injustice simply by using the right pedagogical tools. Rather, what we aim for in this chapter is to carefully sense out what it means to teach and learn “in the ruins” (Tsing, 2015) of the university, and how, inspired by Bracha Ettinger, we learn to find “trust after the end of trust” (2015, p. 344; cited in Kaiser & Thiele, 2018).

Our critical intervention into the current conditions of teaching and learning in higher education is situated in the current state of our own institution, Utrecht University, where it has become common practice – as in many other academic institutions – to present education as a tool for acquiring transferable skills while the value of critical thinking as a form of social engagement is decreasing. We witness our institution disciplining students to become outcome-oriented rather than enabling them to experience education as a learning process of wondering, which includes getting lost and being surprised by one’s own curiosity. With

growing pressure to perform, we see efficiency becoming the biopolitical force of subject formation in educational settings, and we also see fast scholarship and fast pedagogies as effects of this neoliberalising force. These are the suffocating conditions on which we focus here, and in which we ask about the trust we aim for in our teaching and learning in higher education.

As scholars situated within the western neoliberal university, we are implicated in the very operations that we want to critically address.<sup>1</sup> So, for us, it would be an oxymoron to suggest that we could simply reject the neoliberal structures and effects of our university. Avoiding any such oppositional argument, in this chapter we attempt to think through how to resist the hegemonic structures in a more ambivalent manner, or what we call “from the belly of the beast.” This requires a thorough engagement with the *conditions of relationality* that form the pedagogical spaces in which we work. It is our relations with each other and how we practise and care for them that shape the classroom in multiple ways. Speaking of our ambivalent desire for trust and transformation in such affirmative ways, the main focus of this chapter will be to work through experiences of teaching and learning in terms of *carefulness*. We want to use care as a tool for transformation that has the potential to enable “trust after the end of trust,” but we also put emphasis on the amount of critical attentiveness needed in such an endeavour. Care for us isn’t a mere addition to the neoliberal university, one that could fix the current state of things. Embedding our discussion in a feminist ethics of care, we approach care as the condition/-ing of relationality, as Joan Tronto outlines in *Caring Democracy*: “Human life is fragile; people are constantly vulnerable to changes in their bodily conditions that may require that they rely on others for care and support” (2013, p. 31). Care is a condition for living, and as such it is a relational practice. In a similar way, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa also argues for care as a condition of our interdependency when she states that “[f]eminist ethics of care argue that to value care is to recognize the inevitable interdependency essential to the existence of reliant and vulnerable beings.... Interdependency is not a contract, nor a moral ideal – it is a condition” (2017, p. 70). With Puig de la Bellacasa, we see care as a condition of relationality and as such a condition of “our” vulnerability. Yet notably, as an intersectional feminist understanding of power relations has taught us as well, vulnerability is not a homogenous or universal condition. Rather, vulnerabilities and thus also care conditions are always specific; they are embedded in and as asymmetrical power relations. As such, it is also the aim of this chapter to discuss care as a condition of relationality in pedagogical settings of *differential* vulnerability. Practicing vulnerability in the classroom is not about turning the classroom into a “therapy session.” It is about seeing how vulnerability can be a force of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988).

Therefore, in resonance with Tronto and Puig de la Bellacasa, this chapter approaches care as matter(ing) condition that is essential within educational settings. Our intervention is structured in three parts in which – polyvocally and yet with strong resonances with each other – we will address how we see care as a vehicle for more trust-ful(l) relations in teaching and learning. We begin with

Magda's discussion of the teacher-student relation in view of vulnerability, care and power. Thinking through her teaching practice with her Assistance Dog Rubi as working for breathability (or (c)airfulness), this section elaborates our overarching question of care as condition through an agential realist perspective (Barad, 2007). It discusses care relations as the intra-active, differencing and power-ful(l) conditioning of agentiality in the classroom. From there, we move to Kathrin's section, which builds on this conceptualisation of relationality and dives deeper into how teaching with care as condition/-ing can become a pedagogical game shifter. With the help of Ettinger's reconfiguration of care as "care-carrying" or "*carriance*" (2015), this section engages care as practicing of care-ful(l)ness, which enables "trust after the end of trust" as the horizon of teaching and learning. Finally, Pinar mobilises her experience as a student to further discuss the concerns of care addressed in the previous two sections. In evoking learning experiences in the classroom, this part relates care and trust to practices of learning otherwise in view of a transformed curiosity and hope as enactments of (c)air-ful(l) teaching practices. The choice to speak from our personal experiences, which led to the polyvocal writing of this chapter, emerges from our conviction that the critical intervention that we hope to make with our contribution is not to provide a recipe or *the* solution in view of the current conditions in higher education. Rather, by daring to mix our personal experiences with the theoretical argument, this intervention aims to create pockets of (c)air and care-ful(l)ness in which we can sense how in the ruins of the university – as an "undercommons" practice (Harney & Moten, 2013) – learning and teaching can still work as a leap of trust.

*Vulnerability, Care, and Power:  
An Agential Realist Approach to (C)airfulness*

*Breathe in.*

*One, two, three, four.*

*Hold.*

*One, two, three, four.*

*Breathe out.*

*One, two, three, four.*

*Repeat.*

*I sit in a classroom and do a silent and invisible breathing exercise. My Assistance Dog, Rubi, lifts up his head, looks at me, observes me. He decides to climb on my lap. We sit together. I stroke his fluffy coat; his smell enters my nostrils. I breathe. I listen to the student's presentation. I facilitate their discussion. I add my affirmative comments and guide us towards a critical engagement with the topic. One, two, three, four. Repeat. Does anyone notice? What do they think seeing Rubi on my lap? Are they worried about me? Should I worry about them potentially worrying? I see exhaustion in the classroom. Tired faces, bodies that hold themselves upwards while clearly needing a break. What are we doing*

*here? Rubi is still on my lap. I need to break the silence about the elephant in the room, our shared, while very different, exhaustions. How did we get to this suffocation?*

Teaching in the suffocating setting of a neoliberal university requires a constant search for possibilities of developing breathable practices for critical feminist pedagogical engagements, practices that enable inhabiting the settings differently and creating careful and air-full – or rather (c)airful – spaces. As we argued in the introduction, developing breathable pedagogical practices necessitates recognising care and its relationality as a condition. But care and relationality in the classroom do not take place in a vacuum. They are constituted by and constitutive of operations of quotidian individual and structural power relations. As such, care is always power-full and its relationalities are always asymmetrical. To engage the power-fullness of care, in this first part of our chapter, we want to discuss how the teacher’s vulnerability of living with mental health issues – that are made visible through teaching with an Assistance Dog companion – affects the classroom relations and requires the development of breathable, (c)airful pedagogies.

In 2018, I started teaching with my Assistance Dog Rubi, who became my metaphorical and literal lifeline. While helping in my daily struggles of gasping for breath, in a pedagogical setting teaching with such a non-human companion unsettles the conventional concept of a university teacher by making the teacher’s vulnerability explicitly visible. It also puts pressure on teacher-student relations as it requires the teacher’s trust in students’ “response-ability” (Barad, 2007; Ettinger, 2006; Haraway, 2008) – in other words, how the teacher’s vulnerability resonates or dissonates with the students. A rather stigmatising effect of hegemonic concepts of vulnerability may lead to questioning the teacher’s position as a subject. As a student said to me once, “How can I see you as an authority when you sit with a dog on your lap?” Counter-intuitively to the harsh-sounding statement of the student, it was meant as a compliment. It was an articulation of the student’s experience of my pedagogical practice that mobilises care for vulnerability in order to reconfigure the position of authority. The statement articulates a tension between the attempt to create breathable educational spaces (where openness to and care for vulnerability are an integral part of the space), and the very daily negotiations of forms of professionalism associated with holding a university teacher position that tends to undermine vulnerability.

Care for vulnerability is an ambivalent practice. On the one hand, this practice aims for creating (c)airful spaces. The visibility of vulnerability exposes and undermines hegemonic concepts of a teacher’s authority, which is often associated with emotional and bodily composure, control or self-assurance. Making such normative concepts of authority – and of the teacher’s subjectivity – visible helps in examining teacher-student relations. This examination creates the possibility of students not reproducing their normative understandings and enables establishing those relations from a position of questioning, and opening spaces for being in the classroom otherwise. In every class I start to teach, I explain how

living with mental health issues is part of my pedagogical and research practice, and I explain the work Rubi and I do when we are in the classroom together. This, in turn, gives the students an opportunity to examine their differential conditions of vulnerability – not as inadequacies or failures, but as atmospheres of their learning practices. In such a practice of care for vulnerability, the authority of the teacher doesn't disappear. Authority transforms. The deconstruction of the "proper teaching subject" allows for a different classroom setting, in which the relations of self and other can be experienced differently. What this creates (at its best) is a space for transformation towards other modes of engagements: engagements that resignify common binary notions of success and failure in relation to academic roles; engagements that create space for curiosity towards inhabiting knowledge-production settings differently.

Yet, on the other hand, care for vulnerability also shows how caring is itself a vulnerable practice. Care carries risks – for example, risks related to the students' refusal to engage differently, or the risk that as a teacher I am now seen as an improper teaching subject. Thus, vulnerability can also produce a sense of suspicion, a sense of doubt of capacity, and for some, it can overshadow competency altogether. Because the Cartesian heritage in the western approach to knowledge prioritises narrowly defined (disembodied and non-affective) rationality, openness about living with mental health issues requires a lot of carefulness. It requires, for example, a careful contestation of pedagogical settings as they are normatively constituted, a careful articulation of situatedness in which relational knowledge is produced in a classroom, and a careful response-ability in relation to vulnerability.

Importantly, in practices of care and response-ability both teachers and students are embedded in power relations. However, teachers and students do not hold power simply in relation to each other. Rather, the relations "of" teachers and students and the situated positions they create are themselves power-full. This understanding of power-fullness can be conceptualised through the agential realism of Karen Barad (2007). For Barad, phenomena (such as classroom dynamics) are relations of intra-actions – of a specific causal material-discursive production through which the boundaries and properties of phenomena materialise and become meaningful. In the enactment of phenomena, none of the "components" (e.g. teachers or students) that materialise within the intra-active processes pre-exist these processes themselves and have any pre-given essence. These components, or *relata* as Barad calls them, are always bound to the phenomena and they come to exist, and acquire boundaries and properties, within specific intra-actions and/as differentiations. The phenomenal differentiations take place through moments of agential separability – enactments of phenomenal boundaries. These boundaries are materially-discursively, spatially and temporarily situated. And they are also dispersed in broader "contexts" such as geopolitical relations. Therefore, for Barad, phenomena emerge as materially-discursively specific and situated "sets" of agentially intra-active and differential relations, which themselves materialise and become intelligible and delineated within this intra-active and differencing process of enactment

of the phenomena. Importantly, it is phenomena (power-full-teacher-student-relations), not the relata (teachers, students, and power as separate entities) that are the primary onto-epistemological unit for (c)airful practices. The intra-active dynamism enacts power as a specific, situated classroom dynamic. Simultaneously, the differential aspect of this dynamism articulates how power is not flat simply because it is intra-actively constituted (as it is sometimes interpreted in relation to the concept of intra-action). Rather, it exemplifies how power operates in its differencing manner. Differentiability articulates a dynamism productive of asymmetrical relations – for example, of power-situated subjects and their classroom relations (how they are privileged and deprivileged in a society and how these dimensions resonate in the classroom). In this sense, power intra-actively and differentially constitutes care relations.

Therefore, in (c)airful teaching settings, care for vulnerability does not eliminate power relations. Vulnerability, power, subjectivity, social norms and institutional and economic structures intra-actively and differentially constitute not only the practices that we as teachers try to oppose and change, but also the breathable practices we aim to create. In developing (c)airful pedagogical engagements with vulnerability, power dynamics have to be analysed, transformed and enacted by attending to their situated (e.g. a specific classroom, asymmetrical subject positions in that classroom, subjects' asymmetrical relations to the canon) and dispersed (e.g. constitution of classroom subjects in relation to asymmetrical social power structures, embeddedness of the university in a geopolitical context) materialisations (see also Górska, 2016). Thus, developing (c)airful pedagogies is not simply about adding vulnerability to otherwise unchanged practices. (C)airful pedagogies are about working with/in situated and dispersed power-saturated relationalities of vulnerability.

Often, however, the suffocating neoliberal conditions of our contemporary university make it difficult to trust in the transformative potential of (c)airful pedagogies. How can we trust in power-full care for vulnerability when it clashes with the university's bottom lines that structurally undercut what our trust asks for? Or, to say it with Ettinger, how can we “trust after the end of trust” and become “subject[s]-in-carriance” (cited in Kaiser & Thiele, 2018, p. 104)? And how can we also incorporate the importance of the human-non-human-relationality-in-carriance? The vulnerable teaching practice with Rubi became such a leap of trust for me. It is a leap of trust that in the neoliberal institution at least a slightly different, (c)airful, relationality is possible. Yet, “trust after the end of trust” is not a movement of simple overcoming. It is a process of forming relationality that both is implicated in neoliberal structures and simultaneously, hopefully, makes them more breathable.

### *Care-ful(l)ness in Teaching and Learning: Care as Carriance*

*Walking to my teaching room for “Theory and Critical Research 1” – the graduate seminar I regularly teach in our Graduate Gender Programme – I catch myself again rehearsing a quote from bell hooks that always seems to get me*

*into the right spirit: "Thinking is an action. For all aspiring intellectuals, thoughts are the laboratory where one goes to pose questions and finds answers, and the place where visions of theory and praxis come together. The heartbeat of critical thinking is the longing to know – to understand how life works" (2010, p. 7). I feel an activating calmness and realise: this is what teaching for me is all about. hooks' wisdom gives me trust to teach critical thinking and close engagements with theory in the neoliberal university as a mattering worlding practice.*

"Trust after the end of trust," the guiding motto for our discussion to express commitment to teaching and learning in the face of neoliberalisation in higher education, has everything to do with how we as teachers and students care for – or are cared for – in our practices of teaching and learning. Today's reality in higher education – we all know it – has become an atmosphere filled with anxiety. A level of stress and acceleration reigns that often hinders education being an experience carried by experimentation and joy. So, the question I ask myself as a critical feminist teacher committed "to educate as the practice of freedom" (hooks, 2010, p. 8) in view of my teaching practices is the following: How do I work towards the transformation of the always so easily re-institutionalised hierarchical space of knowledge production and knowledge transfer into a pedagogical wor(l)ding in which a different breathability (c)airs us? One that is conditioned by diverging relational practices which, with Isabelle Stengers, we could experience as an "ecology of practices – not a stable harmony or a peaceful coexistence but a web of interdependent partial connections" (2018, p. 91)? We have already shown in this chapter that lessening the current neoliberal condition with/in teaching and learning won't happen when teachers or students merely negate the structuring force of power in the classroom – and of relationality as the condition of *what is*. Caring for or being committed to care in higher education requires other sensitivities. We are in need of a different transformative engagement and an atmosphere of care-conditioning in which subjective agency lies neither in the mere compliance with the given structures of authority, nor in doing away with or overcoming what subjugates "us." Proposing care as condition/-ing teaches a different (and always differential) practical commitment: care-carrying as *carriance* (Ettinger, 2015). To approach the condition/-ing of care as care-carrying helps to reconfigure the neoliberal experience of the end of trust towards "trust after the end of trust."

If we look closer into this notion of care as *carriance*, we learn that Ettinger invented the latter in order to express a transversally enacted human(e) condition in which (to) care is inherently linked to the praxis of a trans-subjective care-carrying as agential ethico-onto-epistemological reality. As primary – or matrixial – condition/-ing of the human(e), her theorisation of care-carrying enables delinking at least to a certain degree from the dominant ideational framework, according to which we as subjects are purely the result of processes of subjection and subjugation.<sup>2</sup> If we use Ettinger's theorising of (trans-)subjective reality in the context of teaching and learning, we are aware that her work is not

developed to speak directly to pedagogical practices, nor do we want to misconstrue the sphere of matrixiality as a simple alternative to the hegemonic understandings of subjectivity, as if in direct opposition to who we are as Subjects.<sup>3</sup> As Griselda Pollock has argued, “In Ettinger’s theories, the Symbolic is shifted and retuned, rather than overturned” (2006, p. 6). Yet, this shifting or “surf[ing] beneath/beside the phallic” (p. 6), as Pollock goes on to say, is precisely what makes Ettinger’s work for us so inspirational for a pedagogical rewriting of the classroom situation as an intra-actively caring, or care-ful(l), spacetime-mattering (Barad, 2007). A classroom in which an intra-active relational practicing with each other is the horizon – one no longer based on categorical self|other splits – has to very carefully negotiate the hierarchically exclusive set-up of neoliberalised higher education settings in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality and ability. But if work is put into transversal care-carrying as classroom condition/-ing, this different practice can become a game shifter.

Similarly to the teaching practice with an Assistance Dog, I see a shift happening when I teach-practice with/in care-carrying: being openly *partial* as teacher and taking literally *all the time it takes* to care-fully engage with the questions and comments students make in their experience of the course material makes a difference. In being partial and allowing for a different temporal rhythm in class, I pay attention to the work it takes to reconfigure the classroom structured by authority and hierarchy into a more care-carrying relational practice that implicates us all. The care-work for this partiality and a conscious slowing down, as dimensions which create a different interconnectedness, *are* this teaching practice, which inherently links up with issues of vulnerability, too. We (have to) let go of some of the most significant agential powers usually ascribed to teaching when practicing partiality: being the expert, being disinterested and striving for universalisable objectivity. But seeing teaching as working for an atmosphere of care-carrying or *carriance* as transversal practice, I no longer care for these established educational standards. Instead, I work for lessening neoliberal carelessness through a more conscientious practice of material-affective care-ful(l)-ness with each other, which also does its best to stay attuned to the structuring force of asymmetrical power relations that condition our regained (c)airfulness as well.

On another level, an enriched understanding of who we are to begin with (“subjects-in-*carriance*”) also helps to lessen the grip of the symbolic, wilful and rational “I think, therefore I am” – this famous condition/-ing of “us” in the genre of human as Man (Wynter, 2003) – which should also not be underestimated as the continued ground(ing) of the neoliberal university. If we learn to pay attention to more than just one layer or form of subjective agency in our classroom conversations, which also has everything to do with letting the planetary condition seep into our academic discussions, this can push the boundaries between what so often is considered “real life” outside and a “closed-off” academic inside. As one of my students beautifully stated in a reflexive research report, “I have never perceived the walls separating the inside from the outside of the academia as so thin.”<sup>4</sup> So, if it works, if we really learn to swim in our partial connections and more-than-human wor(l)dings in the classroom, a



relational care-carrying as care-ful(l)ness can be practised, which might be called an ecology of practices in Stengers' sense. While Ettinger's concept of *carriance* touches a specifically human(e) condition, with her we do not return to the human exceptionalist (phallogocentric) Subject as Man (Wynter, 2003). Rather, care-carrying or *carriance* as (matrixial) condition/-ing is always/already, in other words intra-actively, at work in the here and now "beneath/beside the phallic," as we have learned. And it always/already conditions each one of us in transconnectedness, as Ettinger asserts:

I insist on the duration of dwelling and wit(h)nessing to achieve com-passion, on the process of co/in-habit(u)ation and on the awareness to this process. To carry is also to en-dure: to sustain and support. We are here, hence we have been carried. Each one of us.... We have experienced transconnectedness.... I care-carry *ergo sum*. Caring has here at least the same value as thinking.

(Cited in Kaiser & Thiele, 2018, pp. 106–107)

The "trust after the end of trust" that speaks through this passage is about establishing neither new nor purified conditions of care, with/in which we as teachers and students in pedagogical encounters are saved from the oppressive structures in today's neoliberal times and institutions. Rather, what seems important here is the leap of learning to intra-relate care and thought into care-carrying as transconnecting practice. This way, a different – a more (c) air-ful(l) – spacetime-mattering of shared response-abilities can work (us) in our classrooms.

### *(C)air-ful(l) Classrooms: Practicing Curiosity and Hope*

*As I slowly run my finger on the bottom of the coffee cup, sensing the vibrations of the questions and pulsing of the thoughts that swirl inside the small classroom, I dig deeper into the "personal is political"; what I perceive we do, facing each other from our seats, transcends the texts in front of us, texts that some would call theory that has nothing to do with "real life." Yet, when I read there with my peers and my teacher, when I listen to a question asked, or ask a question with a sense of curiosity that feels like a slow, forceful stream of water, I experience an embodied concern for thinking critically, and an openness towards the minds and hearts present in that classroom – all pounding in the pauses that we inhabit carefully between spilled sentences of reflection, confusion, and curiosity.*

From a student's perspective, the neoliberal university and the scholarship that it promotes is structured around a stifling mode of transfer and attainment-oriented knowledge practice. The same structure positions success which, in its hyper-individualised mode, only means fast, quantifiable production and attainment of high grades in razor-sharp contrast with failure. Fixing students and

teachers in a hierarchical and linear model of relationality, this kind of classroom fuels competition, which in turn obstructs any imagination of a collective by putting the focus on the student's study results instead of intellectual and political transformation. Yet, (c)airful and care-ful(l) pedagogies, as practised and worked through in classrooms where vulnerabilities and differential power relations are critically and carefully attended to, can create other relationalities in which care enables curiosity and hope "after the end of trust."

In certain theory courses I took, I witnessed and became a part of the attempts at practicing academia otherwise, of reconfiguring the relationalities in the classroom by rethinking the conditions we embody in relation to one another. These classrooms are still situated in the individualised model of neoliberal education. There, too, we become aware that within such a university setting, different vulnerabilities are not only dismissed or masked, but also new vulnerabilities emerge through the fast, product-oriented scholarship which always pushes for more and faster outputs: performance anxiety and pushing oneself to the point of a burn-out are only some of these conditions that force students and teachers to "deal with" their vulnerabilities in isolation. The worry that we all strive towards an academic career, but only very few might actually remain in the research world makes it all the more difficult to challenge the educational system out of its competitive structures that operate through an economic scarcity model. This stifling atmosphere is where we try to breathe, survive in the economic system, and learn and unlearn in our educational practices.

Acknowledging each other's vulnerabilities in the classroom is a step towards doing relationality and subjectivity differently. Yet, without care, this acknowledgement would lack the maintenance it necessitates. Care-ful(l)ness in the classroom starts with working for an openness to the other in an intra-active and response-able sense, enabling a (c)airful atmosphere. This openness, however, is continuously challenged in a pedagogical setting in which power is always part of relationality. It is not only the differential power relations of teacher and student that makes (c)air-ful(l) pedagogies tricky to practise, students' feelings of intimidation in relation to one another also tend to hinder openness as it becomes another vulnerability that needs to be addressed within the classroom. As imposter syndrome, a reality of neoliberal higher education, turns into silence or feelings of shame, openness can become uncomfortable to inhabit. In classrooms where students and teachers try to work for (c)air-ful(l)ness through critical thinking, the experience of discomfort remains (Boler, 1999; Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas, 2015); yet there, thinking, reflecting and un/learning together touch the core of our subjectivities in vulnerable ways. With a caring attitude that spreads like gossip in the classroom, we slowly start practicing care as *carriance* in our relations. We push against the relational systems of the neoliberal university – a move that, for us, means taking a leap of trust. (C)air-ful(l)ness, thus, becomes a mode of handling vulnerabilities, which, in turn, reconfigures the form of relationality in the classroom by challenging subjectivities out of the ontology of "Cogito *ergo sum*" towards "I care-carry *ergo sum*" (Ettinger cited in Kaiser & Thiele, 2018, p. 107).

In these classrooms, in which subjectivity is reconfigured as care-carrying and intra-actively constituted within the differential power relations, the teacher, by making space for the students to practise response-ability, steps out of the spotlight of authority and allows for a different form of attentiveness and trust to emerge. This reconfiguration of classroom relationality as (c)air-ful(l)ness enables a specific kind of curiosity. A revaluing, or maybe even uncovering, of curiosity in care relations not only makes transformation possible in our everyday relationalities for more care-ful(l) educational ecologies, but also allows for practicing knowledge otherwise for relating differently to *what happens* in that space of education. As opposed to the idea of knowing something through grasping it fully and with the sense of ownership (*having* knowledge), care-carrying pedagogies enable a knowledge practice that directs attention to curiosity. Following Astrid Schrader, curiosity does not have to mean “to seek to know more at the end of the day, but to seek to know differently” (2015, p. 670). This form of knowledge practice, then, means to reimagine curiosity in a two-fold manner: as a mode of practicing knowledge in the university and as a mode of relationality in the classroom. The first envisions curiosity not as a model of appropriation, capture or attainment through transfer (of knowledge), but as a relational mode that emerges through attentiveness. The second mode happens through being curious not only about the texts we read and discuss, but also about our differentiated and intersectional standpoints, prejudices, histories, ideas, strengths, scars, naiveties and consequently about how we relate to one another. Curiosity in this double sense – curiosity with and for each other – becomes a helpful move against the pressures of competition and success anxiety.

The connection between curiosity and care, as Puig de la Bellacasa shows us, is an intimate one: “Adequate care requires a form of knowledge and curiosity regarding the situated needs of an ‘other’” (2017, p. 90). Following Haraway’s engaged curiosity in more than human relationalities, Puig de la Bellacasa also reminds us of the mundane question, “*How are you doing?*” and draws our attention to its quality as “a communication device required for thinking with care in populated worlds.... ‘How are you doing?’ sometimes might mean ‘How do you *cope?*’” (2017, p. 92). (C)air-ful(l) classrooms try to take this mundane question seriously, and to keep asking why we care, how we care and what we care about. This relationality as moulded through care and/as curiosity enables trust in doing education differently; trust in our ability to keep imagining an otherwise that disrupts the individualised ‘success’ – and prestige-oriented fast scholarship. In the face of hopelessness that we sometimes feel in the university – as we struggle to be part of transformative knowledge practices – our curiosities and attention suffer from exhaustion and the anxiety and discouragement in higher education, especially felt in the humanities: a constellation of conditions we imagine here with Ettinger as the end of trust. Yet, a curiosity that emerges with care towards our differentially shared or individual vulnerabilities challenges this hopelessness and it enables “trust after the end of trust,” by which we do not mean finding a sense of trust that is already there, but rather working for it over and over again.

Care as *carriance* and as the condition of subjectivity in the classroom as “trust after the end of trust” enables, or rather becomes, hope. Practicing (c)air-ful(l) pedagogies revives the affirmation of the “personal is political.” Through paying critical attention to the relationality in the classroom as intra-actively and/as differentially constituted by conditions of care, (c)air-ful(l) classrooms resist the understanding of the personal in the “personal is political” as private or individual. Making not only politics but also education personal, (c)air-ful(l) curiosities push us to be moved and changed by our encounters. The power of this (c)air-ful(l) atmosphere comes from the practice and acknowledgement that nothing we do is pure.<sup>5</sup> Even though our excitement for critical thinking sometimes looks as if some of us want to make an “untainted” space of hope for political transformation, we who care for (c)air-ful(l) practices know that occupying a space of purpose, touching each other with our differences in vulnerable states, means a different kind of hope: hope as praxis in the sense of a continual process of reflecting and redefining (Haran, 2010); hope as “trust after the end of trust” – a leap into ongoingness without linear futurity.

### Conclusive remarks

We started this chapter by asking how, as critical feminists, we can still teach and learn in the neoliberal university. Our intervention is specific to our situation in the Netherlands, but it relates to a general neoliberalisation of higher education. As we have emphasised, an always differential perspective is necessary in order not to homogenise specific educational conditions and distinct interventions they require. Our particular focus on power, care and *carriance* or care-carrying as an engagement with our question at the beginning of this chapter, therefore, in no way aims to present a general recipe against the continually exclusionary, indifferent and careless patterns so characteristic of the neoliberal university as a global phenomenon. It is also for this very reason that we have chosen polyvocality throughout this discussion. Unifying our experiences into one pedagogical formula is not the aim in co-writing this text. Instead, what we hope to have brought across here is that developing and practicing *(c)airful(l) pedagogies* in teaching and learning is all about situatedness and careful attention to *plurivocality* marked by unevenness and asymmetrical distribution of vulnerabilities.

The significance of the differentiability of vulnerabilities is the reason we started our engagement with care as condition/-ing by attending to power. Care-relations are power-full, (c)airful pedagogies are all about working with/in situated and dispersed power-saturated relationalities. In addition to attending to these conditions of relationality that matter in our pedagogical encounters, it is also important to challenge the assumed preconditions that continually keep everything in the logic of the self-same. Here, we turned to Ettinger’s care-carrying/*carriance* as an otherwise – trans-subjective and transconnected – sense of relationality, one that transforms our understanding of who we are as subjects. We explained this reconfigured setting for teaching and learning situations as a careful(l) pedagogical practice of taking time (slowing down) and

learning to swim in the in/determinate waters of partial connections. Thinking with these (c)airful(l) condition/-ings, in the final part of this chapter we have unpacked how experiencing and participating in (c)airful(l) classrooms can enable a different kind of curiosity, one that implies care-carrying *for* and *with* each other as essential parts of critical knowledge practices in higher education. This otherwise curiosity is a moment of pedagogical hopefulness which we link to Ettinger's "trust after the end of trust" as a *non-progressive* practice of care – a practice that is always in transforming/-formative ongoingness. We have not revived a new trust in a "better" university – our "trust after the end of trust" *refuses* to be instrumentalised in any reformist endeavour. But we might glimpse at a few pockets of (c)airful(l)ness that help us care-carry – from the belly of the beast – our response-ability regarding the systemic injustices that make up today's neoliberal university.

## Notes

- 1 For an approach to critique and criticality as a matter of "implicatedness," see Bunz, Kaiser and Thiele (2017).
- 2 "Not subjugation but carrying – this is the meaning of *Subject free from subjugation*" (Ettinger, 2015, p. 344). For us, Ettinger's work complements well the onto-epistemological approach of relationality of Barad's agential realism. As the thinker of matrixiality, Ettinger focuses throughout her artistic and theoretical work on questions of cosmo-subject-formation. By theorising more than the conscious/symbolic dimension of subjective reality, she transforms the theoretically so often unquestioned framework of subjectivity as self|other dichotomy (Ettinger, 2006). Her conceptualisations in the matrixial touch a more material-affective level of co/existence (from micro to macro), which is part of our subjective reality on the sub- and trans-subjective level.
- 3 Ettinger defines the matrixial as the "psychic sphere that is trans-subjective on a sub-subjective level" (2005, p. 703).
- 4 Anonymised from a course research report, written for my graduate course *Contemporary Cultural Theory* in the academic year 2018/2019.
- 5 What we mean by not pure is aligned with Haraway's "generic refusal of purity" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 88), and it is how we stay with the trouble. Puig de la Bellacasa takes this non-innocent way of thinking as linked to "the disruptive potential of thinking with care" (2017, p. 88), an approach that helps us acknowledge the challenges of doing (c)air-ful(l) pedagogies.

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