

The Practice of Care

It has tragically taken a global pandemic to remind us of our mutual interdependence and vulnerabilities, and the vital need for robust networks of care.

Over the past few decades, ideas of social welfare and community have been pushed aside for individual notions of resilience, wellness and self-improvement. This has been promoted — and monetised — through a ballooning ‘self-care’ industry that reconstitutes care via a neoliberal lens.

Care has been reified into a material acquisition. Its inherent unselfishness and fairness diluted and inverted, compassion funnelled increasingly inwards, away from others and towards the self. It has been subsumed by the capitalist matrix: bastardised for a free market doctrine (of people, products and ideas) and its social Darwinian illusions.

The crisis of care has become particularly acute over the last forty years. Governments have embraced neoliberal capitalism and fortified its positioning of profit and exponential growth as the organising principles of life. It has systematically prioritised the interests and flows of financial capital, while ruthlessly dismantling welfare states and democratic processes and institutions.

Despite this, Covid-19 has compelled many of us to adopt new forms of care. Grassroots activity, responsiveness and flexibility have proved effective tools in building bespoke models of care, which less agile systems and institutions couldn’t conceive of. Within our communities, we have witnessed mutual understanding and built allyship from the ground up. Genuine acts of care have reinvigorated welfare, creating alternatives to capitalist markets, as well as caring across borders.

Through this programme, The NewBridge Project would like to build on notions and approaches of care. We want to look at the ways we can practice radical care for ourselves, each other, our places and the planet. We will seek out new and alternative approaches to care; and we are eager to learn from voices, traditions and cultures that have been too often marginalised, ignored and denigrated. We want to challenge the roots of neglect and suffering. We will doggedly confront iniquitous structures of racism, misogyny, ableism and classism — demanding ethical accountability beyond hypocrisy. We all imagine safer and more caring workspaces, but we want to help make them a reality.

Radical care proposes mutual recognition and mutual aid; it envisions alternative forms of solidarity and acts of sharing. But radical thinking demands radical action. Communities, activists, artists and organisations must work together to change the conditions of equality, togetherness and diversity.

This letter is a collective push back against the destructive nature of individualism perpetuated by arts institutions — and society more widely. It is a signal of our collective solidarity and a demand for radical change. We hope we can work together, with you, to ignite this *Blazing New World*.