

While ordinary visitors to these attractions might settle for pure amazement, Vanhaelen shows that learned visitors such as René Descartes and John Evelyn cultivated their responses (recorded in letters and other sources) in accord with the Neo-Stoic ideal of restrained emotion, replacing wonder with controlled appraisal and curiosity about the technology behind the effects. Apart from the Oude Doolhof, a focal point of Vanhaelen's analysis is the tavern called *D'Os in de Bruiloft* (The Ox at the Wedding), where the Mennonite scholar, printer, inventor, and publican Jan Theunisz gathered with friends to study Arabic and Hebrew while delighting customers with mechanical waterworks, talking animals, and trick drinking vessels (109–117). Vanhaelen is less interested in how such marvels were achieved (she mentions hydraulics and compressed air) than in how they prompted philosophical engagement with deep questions about the nature of human existence (95). A figure crafted by human hands may move and even speak, but it cannot think or feel.

Approached with contemplative intent, a visit to the doolhof became a journey of self-discovery. As Jan Amos Comenius wrote, life is like a labyrinth in which the traveler without a guide will surely lose his way; the only true guide, of course, is Christian faith (55). Calvinist moralists greeted the deceptive realism of the moving statues as a dangerous form of secularized idol worship (20). Pagan mythological imagery, centered at the Oude Doolhof around the legendary excesses of Bacchus and his followers, did

little to dispel this perception, but performances of biblical parables offered moral instruction. Vanhaelen connects this imagery with the apocalyptic and millenarian goals of Dutch Protestant ideology. Among the few remaining physical traces of the Oude Doolhof are the colourful painted statues of David and Goliath (the latter 486 cm tall), now in the Amsterdam Museum, that once starred in a mechanical stage play celebrating the giant's downfall (78–79, 165–168).

As Vanhaelen notes, the responses of “women, non-Europeans and lower class visitors” were seldom recorded, but she argues that the doolhovens' central purpose was “to make inventive and exclusive forms of art and technology accessible to a broad mix of people, in the process attempting to transform them into civil, informed amateurs” (15). That said, not all visitors were treated with equal respect. Elite viewers scoffed at the ignorant reactions of gawking commoners, and concealed jets of water were designed to spray upward under women's skirts, causing them, as the city historian Tobias van Domselaer wrote, to shriek and “hop about like new-born calves” (47). Foreign culture, particularly that of the Ottoman Turks, was satirized by dressing automata in exoticized clothing, a feature Vanhaelen compares with the colourful character types painted by Rembrandt and his contemporaries, even as she shows that the doolhovens' inventive technology owed much to Arabic precedents. This paradox hints at the complex tensions at play in the entrepreneurial culture

of Amsterdam, where citizens faced daily challenges to reconcile the foreign with the familiar.

Like its subject, *The Moving Statues of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* offers a journey of discovery and delight, bringing new attention to a long-overlooked feature of material culture in the Dutch Republic. Deeply researched and engagingly written, this book will be of interest not only for specialists in Dutch cultural history but for anyone concerned with sculpture, ephemera, and other forms of public art, as well as the history of politics, religion, philosophy, technology, urban design, and popular culture. This reader could not help feeling a connection to contemporary circumstances: as we confront global competition for technological innovation and the rise of artificial intelligence, the instinctual wonder evoked by “moving statues” takes on uncanny relevance for today.

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Boris Groys

Philosophy of Care

London and New York: Verso, 2022

112 pp.

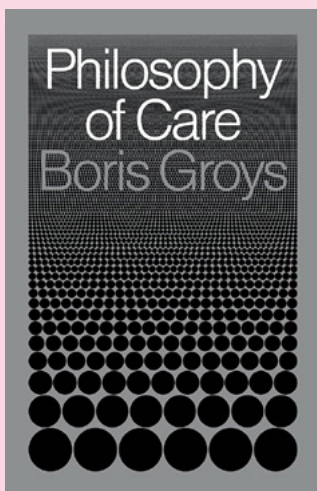
\$25.95 (hardcover) ISBN 9781839764929

Mirra-Margarita Ianeva

Philosophy of Care is a timely meditation on the presence and role of care in contemporary society. According to art critic, media theorist, and

philosopher Boris Groys, care is increasingly pervasive in our lives. As he states in the book's opening lines, "[t]oday the most widespread mode of work is care work. The securing of human lives is regarded by our civilization as its supreme goal" (1). Extending well beyond the walls of the hospital, it is practiced by a growing range of actors who attend not only to our bodies as such, but also to the material conditions necessary to their health—such as housing, transportation, and clean water and air. Our culture also constantly produces and collects symbolic extensions of our physical bodies—in the form of medical records, death certificates, social media accounts, books, artworks, and more—securing their material after-life in archives, libraries, and museums. Taking stock of these developments, Groys boldly asserts that we live today in a full-blown "society of care" (49).

The book begins by tracing the origins of the society of care to the birth of biopolitics, which—as narrated by Foucault—marks a shift in state power from the "right to kill and let live" to that of "making live and letting die." According to Groys, it is because of this new imperative to "make live" that the state begins to assume a more prominent role in caring for the well-being of its population in the nineteenth century (81). This epochal shift culminates in a society in which "medicine has taken the place of religion, and the hospital has replaced the Church" (1). It is no longer the salvation of the soul but the safety, strength, and longevity of the body that is the main concern of modern secular institutions



of care. While we might suspect that productivity is the end goal here, Groys points out that medicine "also treats the bodies that will never be economically functional again and were perhaps not ever functional" (9). In his view, rather than being subordinated to work, the society of care has completely transcended it. Just as museums—another modern institution of care that figures prominently in this text—take certain objects out of public use and turn them into artworks to be looked at, medicine "defunctionalize[s]" the bodies of patients and turns them into "precious objects of care" (83).

While enticing, the picture Groys paints is far from utopian. If care is necessary to our survival, it can also feel oppressive, even damaging to our health. Groys highlights the various ways in which this "ambivalence of weakness and strength" manifests itself in everyday life (10). For instance, while care is the most basic and necessary kind of work, it "is unproductive, remains forever unfinished, and, thus, can be only

deeply frustrating" (8). Our society "tends to reject all forms of decadence, passivity, cultivation of one's own illnesses" (8); accordingly, we are expected to constantly care for our bodies even if we have little insight into their workings. Actively participating in medical discussions about our bodies and choosing from among different treatments often requires taking a "leap of faith" (4); it "presupposes [our] ability to judge... medical knowledge... from a position of non-knowledge" (9). Moreover, to the extent that protection of our physical bodies is mediated by our "symbolic bodies" (2), that is, all the documents that describe our bodies and their history, they are integrated into systems of surveillance that operate "without our knowledge and consent" (5). While the medical system relies on conventions and rituals that can provide us with a sense of comfort and stability, the more we rely on these "skeletons," the more they become "ossified" and "inflexible" (96); they trap us in alienating systems of rules, rights, and duties. When these interfere with our ability to get the care we need—as when a patient is expected to find health insurance before seeing a doctor—we begin to suspect that the system of care "is less interested in our individual health and survival than in its own smooth functioning" (2). As Groys makes clear, the demands of institutional care do not always coincide with the empowerment and health of individuals. On the contrary, as medicine, society, and the state deploy more efforts to keep our bodies alive, they increasingly objectify us, treating us as weak and ill. Groys identifies this as the main

tension at the heart of contemporary biopolitical society.

Mining this tension through an original reading of the history of philosophy going from Plato to Alexander Bogdanov, Groys shows the different ways in which philosophers have conceived the relation between dependence on institutions of care and autonomy from them, as well as the process leading from the former to the latter, and vice versa. Each of the book's twelve chapters addresses a distinct aspect of this relation, including: the suppression of bodily desires, false opinions, and pragmatic concerns involved in the guided transition from non-knowledge to knowledge (Plato); the violent revolt against tradition that defines the struggle for freedom conceived as the progressive movement of history (Hegel); the role of our vital bodily forces in pushing against the boundaries of the biopolitical state (Nietzsche); the protest against the dominance of work through excess and hazardous self-destruction (Bataille); the redemptive role of art in recovering a caring relation to the world, lost with the emergence of bourgeois culture (Wagner) and modern technology (Heidegger); the devaluing of care as a form of unproductive labor and the discovery of the self as truly alive only in pain (Arendt); and the possibility of revolutionary care (Bogdanov), among others.

As this genealogy illuminates, many philosophers have looked for an unmediated access to freedom outside the protective institutions of care. According to Groys, "Philosophy and culture in general were always attempts to find a way

out of...the tedious, monotone, repetitive rituals of everyday life." Because the "ideology of creativity...dominates the individual and social imagination," care is systematically devalued (30). Yet, some of the philosophical tradition's most iconoclastic thinkers also unwittingly relied on systems of care, such as those that "keep memory of the ancient habits, rituals and customs," or on entities like the public and the spectator that ensure that art and other products of creative work do not go unnoticed (49). Therefore, complete independence from institutions of care may not be desirable or even possible. Groys concludes that institutional care and "self-care," that is, the practice of asserting our own needs and desires against those of society and the state, are dialectically linked; freedom is inconceivable outside public forms of protection, recognition, and memory, even if their inevitable ossification over time requires that we constantly transcend them (49).

A key strength of *Philosophy of Care* is that it pushes against uncritical genealogies of care that tend to identify it strictly with emancipation. Groys clearly exposes the limits and dangers of institutional, state-organized care, conveying the many ways in which it can oppress and objectify us. Yet, his analysis leaves unaddressed another equally if not more fundamental contradiction at the heart of the so-called society of care—namely, the spread of precarity. As other theorists more attentive to issues of access have pointed out, to the extent that the state fails to distribute care evenly across populations, contemporary

society is more accurately described as undergoing a "care crisis."¹ This crisis alerts us to the fact that, to use Foucauldian terminology, the biopolitical state not only "makes live" but also "lets die." If, as Groys argues, care is becoming more pervasive for some—to the point of imposing itself on them without their knowledge or will—precarity defines the lives of a growing number of people. Groys does not engage with the latter, focusing instead on the dangers at the heart of the imperative to "make live." What his analysis does make clear is that even the prospect of a "total biopower," where the state cares for everyone equally, raises concerns for freedom that need to be addressed as part of a critical approach to care (81).

As most theoretical discussions of care today focus on the medical context, one of the book's main innovations is to also consider how the dynamics of care play out in the cultural realm. Groys's insight is that the imperative to care operates not only at the level of our physical bodies but also at the level of the symbolic, through the massive proliferation of images and documents of the self. As a media theorist and art critic, he is especially attentive to how these symbolic extensions are created, used, and circulated on social media and in art. This unique perspective allows him to establish eye-opening parallels between art and care. For instance, he invites us to think beyond the traditional conception of art as a creative endeavor and to consider how, alongside language and other rituals of mutual understanding, it might serve various protective and stabilizing

functions. He discusses figures like Marcel Duchamp, Kazimir Malevich, and Donald Judd as signaling a shift in the function of the artist—from that of creator to that of curator who takes care of objects by making them visible and accessible for contemplation. Lastly, *Philosophy of Care* can be read as an extension of the author's earlier explorations into the role of museums as cultural archives. In his reading, museums, like hospitals, have sublimated the function of the Church, representing a turn to material immortality; their function is to resist material destruction and oblivion. What *Philosophy of Care* accomplishes that is new is to integrate this analysis into a discussion of the broader dynamics of care today, bringing to light the cultural ramifications of biopolitics. Ultimately, Groys's concern is with how the society of care turns life itself into art. In his view, the state's imperative to "make live" leads to the "radical museumification of life," whereby the human body is turned into an artwork to be looked at (81). While to be cared for in this way may feel liberating and satisfy a deep-seated desire for recognition, Groys enjoins us once again to remain critical and to consider what this might entail for the prospect of freedom and democracy.

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1. Emma Dowling, *The Care Crisis: What Caused It and How Can We End It?* (London and New York: Verso, 2022). See also Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

Gilles Lapointe et Louise Vigneault (dir.)

François-Marc Gagnon et l'art au Québec. Hommage et parcours

Montréal, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, collection « Art + », 2021

222 pp. 39 illus., couleur & n/b
39,95 \$ (papier) ISBN 9782760643666
27,99 \$ (ePub) ISBN 9782760643680

Bernard Lamarche

Il existe des figures qu'on ne voudrait jamais voir déboulonnées. Au moment de commencer la rédaction de la présente recension de lecture, je me demande si certains biais cognitifs et émotionnels ne risquent pas de teinter ma relation avec l'ouvrage qu'il s'agit ici de parcourir. Ayant accepté l'invitation à commenter la publication *François-Marc Gagnon et l'art au Québec. Hommage et parcours*, sous la direction de Gilles Lapointe et de Louise Vigneault, deux figures de proue de la recherche en histoire de l'art moderne québécois, respectivement associées à l'UQAM et à l'Université de Montréal, il est de bon aloi de divulguer la possibilité que ma lecture puisse être habitée par l'admiration que j'ai pour l'historien de l'art et professeur que nous appelions, ses étudiant-es, Monsieur Gagnon. J'ai appartenu à ce groupe choyé puis, sur plus d'une session, été son assistant d'enseignement à titre de correcteur de copies pour les populaires cours d'histoire de l'art moderne qu'il livrait au petit écran de la Télé-université. Aussi ai-je pu, lors de mon passage à l'Université de Montréal dans les années 1990, côtoyer celui



qui démontrait un enthousiasme inépuisable pour la transmission des savoirs et des découvertes qu'il faisait, doublé d'une curiosité sans retenue pour l'autre.

La monographie prolonge les travaux menés lors d'une journée d'étude tenue en présence de Gagnon lui-même, le 19 octobre 2018, au Musée de l'imprimerie à Montréal. Intitulé *François-Marc Gagnon et l'histoire de l'art au Québec*, ce colloque a été organisé, sous l'égide de l'Association québécoise pour l'étude de l'imprimé (AQEI), par Pierre Hébert, président de l'AQEI, Gilles Lapointe et Jérôme Delgado, critique d'art au quotidien *Le Devoir*. C'est à ce dernier que revient l'idée d'organiser l'événement, dont les visées étaient de mettre en évidence le rôle de premier plan joué par Gagnon dans la discipline que le titre de l'événement exposait. Dans cette foulée, *François-Marc Gagnon et l'art au Québec* réunit des spécialistes qui ont participé à la rencontre de 2018 : Louise Vigneault, Gilles Lapointe, les historiens de l'art Dominic Hardy