speaking of shared matters

a dialogue on grief, existential care, and class accountability

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*In the end, it is about **the politics of our relationships**. Those who we have been told fulfill our need for care in an inevitable and natural way, and those who have been reduced to feel very limited responsibility for each other.*

“Sometimes we need distance to follow a thought. Sometimes we need to give up distance to follow that thought.” Sara Ahmed - Living a Feminist Life

Kim: It's clearly noticeable that navigating the overlapping dimensions of violence and destruction is taking an increasing amount of energy from everyone around us, right? Crises are omnipresent.

And what's interesting is, I think there has been a real shift in how quickly even casual conversations can move from a more light and surface level to a different one that makes space for sharing feelings like overwhelm, worry, or anger. I often realise this in fleeting moments, like when you meet someone on the street and pause for a chat, exchanging *how are yous*, or you talk to someone at the occasional event. I have also experienced, though, that shifts in the way we relate can feel a bit shaky. I've both sent and received apologetic texts after brief encounters where one of us shared our concern of having given off a too-negative vibe or overshared our distress. I have been socialised to stay in a zone of comfort and stability in conversations with people I don't consider to be very close, and I reckon many people have, perhaps, to not cause each other discomfort, or radiate an attitude of expectation. But that construct seems to be getting a little bit fractured.

It feels like how we are doing, or rather how burdened most of us are moving through everyday life, is increasingly recognized as symptomatic of the political and social realities we're navigating – both the ones we share and the ones we do not. It's come to the point where people expect you to be down, which is an assumption based on experience, and fair enough. I've had moments in the last year where, in a moment of a good mood and sparkly energy, I shared that I was doing "really good," leaving the other visibly surprised, expressing that they hadn't heard that reply in such a long time.

I have to say, though, besides the utter despair I often feel, besides the anxiety that inhabits my bones, this gradual shift towards collectively sitting with pain is something I appreciate.

I want to look at this slightly shifted modality of my brief encounters as one step towards collectivising our increasing emotional, physical, and structural precariousness in this world.

So in this spirit, how are you?

> **Lua:** To be honest, I struggle to respond to this question. It usually takes me some time to figure out the scope, scale, and depth with which to respond to it. Also, there is a limit on how clearly I can separate how I'm doing from the realities of those around me, the people I care about and live alongside.

Many people close to me are struggling, or have been for some time, and that inevitably affects me in various ways. Not just emotionally, as I carry worry and concern, but also practically. It shapes the amount of care-work needed, influences how tasks and responsibilities are distributed at home or between the people I organize with, and ultimately impacts my ability to carve out space for myself, both in daily life and in my own head.

So, when someone asks me how I'm doing, I'm thinking: How am I and how are my close ones? Are our existential needs met? This can refer to very material things in the present and go as far as questions around affectedness by shifting and dissolving futures around us. I'm referring here to the impacts the different dimensions of crises have on our livelihoods, ideas, and hopes. Some we can hold on to, but others we have to adapt or let go.

In short, what you're writing resonates a lot with me! I have definitely noticed that shift, and I really appreciate that little space that we try to hold for each other, even in brief moments in which we can insert some of the complexities we all carry around with us.

Kim: Do you want to dive into the concept of existential care? A notion of care that will accompany us as we go on. It's a term that you started using some years ago and thatgradually found its way into our shared practice as well.

Lua: Essentially, the term emerged out of the desire to deepen our sense of responsibility for each other and ended up being quite useful for making a specific layer of needs *(we have)* and care *(we need)* tangible. If I were to try to define it, I would say *existential care* is the practice of sharing the resources, responsibilities, and labour for what is necessary to meet our physical, mental and material needs, in ways that support our sense of agency, and, ideally, our capacity for joy. Especially looking at the here and now, but also in times and in anticipation of existential crisis and the fears most of us carry around. A certain and very valuable form of accountability for each other. One that explicitly goes beyond the exchange of tips and encouragement and instead tries to look at each other's existential needs as shared matters.

That also implies very concrete questions for me: Does someone have enough money to cover food, rent, and other essential needs for their basic well-being? Is their housing situation secure?

Do they have a source of income that is not only sufficient, but also sustainable, something that doesn't completely drain them? And of course, are their mental and physical health needs being met? This can look very different from person to person, ranging from regular access to medical specialists to informal or peer-organised support networks. Existential needs encompass all the conditions that must be in place for someone to feel grounded and able to envision a future with some sense of positive potentiality. Within that, I would emphasise that material conditions play a central role when I speak of existential care.

Kim: *Existential care* offers a very concrete container for these specific needs and desires, and at the same time, further shapes them. It also offers a certain legitimacy; there is something empowering about it. I really appreciate emerging terminology like *existential care* it's been very helpful for me and continuously informs how I relate to others.

When we speak, think and write about our struggles, it is important for us to recognise, that if put in relation, they are what the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective (GTDFC) identifies as low intensity struggles. This is the place we're writing from and also the place we're writing to.

Lua: I would like to bring up something else that I believe plays a crucial role in this shift we're seeing and feeling at the moment, and that I think is a slow, often painful, and at times, awkward move towards an engagement with grief. I understand it as more and more entangled with questions of crises and transformation, the realities this conversation is embedded in.

You called it "collectively sitting with pain" and that is also a very fitting description, because the sitting indicates a slowing down, a shift of attention, rather than an inconvenience that must be overcome.
But yeah, now that the walls are closing in on even more people,[1] although at radically different speeds, there is this collective destabilisation and unease that can be clearly felt. And yes, I agree, that feels more aligned somehow.

Kim: I'm also glad you brought in grief and I think it is a good moment to invite it into the conversation. It makes me think of a situation that happened recently, actually. I had a conversation with someone from my massage training, someone my age, let's call him Thomas. We've practiced on each other a few times, and during one of our exchanges where we met at my home outside of class, I tried to open up a political dimension to what we're learning. I shared my thoughts about how massage, as a form of care, isn't equally accessible, how many people can't afford it, or don't even feel entitled to that kind of care and attention. I said I thought it was important to keep this in mind when setting our prices so that those who might need this type of attention and care the most could receive it. But we didn't connect over that at all. It wasn't even

a disagreement, more like what I said just hung there, completely unacknowledged. Still eager, or maybe already too deep in, I kept going, trying to make the connection, sharing more of my views, gradually moving away from this concrete topic towards the general pain I feel in the face of social injustice.

Looking back, I realise it came across as pretty desperate. I could sense it, and Thomas later told me that he chooses not to open himself up to that kind of "negativity." I can't lay out the entire exchange here, but what really struck me was that I think Thomas ended up feeling genuinely sorry for me. It probably didn't help that I kept repeating, I'm not sad or frustrated all the time. It makes me laugh now, but at the time, I had to sit with this deep feeling of being completely misunderstood. What for me could have led to more connection and ultimately meaningfulness and joy, to him felt like I was dragging him into my sad place. That moment stayed with me, especially the question of allowing for complexity in our encounters. And how one-dimensional this binary understanding of a "happy conversation" and a "downer conversation" is. I think, in a way, this is really connected to grief. For me it was a vehicle for connection and transformation, and for Thomas I reckon it felt like there was absolutely nothing to gain from the conversation. The evening ended after he asked me for a good Sushi place nearby and left, seeming very relaxed compared to me.

Malkia Devich-Cyril, Grief belongs in social movements. Can we embrace it?

Malkia Devich-Cyril writes, "Joy is not the opposite of grief. Grief is the opposite of indifference."[2]

Grief can and will be linked to this conversation in various ways, I believe. I think of existential care and grief as inherently linked, because we're navigating each other's needs and wishes for a good life in a world of constant loss. I reckon even a perfect world would be one of loss, so that's fine. But as you said, there is a particular shift happening at the moment that feels different.

Looking For The Cracks with Dr Bayo Akomolafe (Video on Youtube, 2024)

You wrote about shifting and dissolving futures. I feel like a lot of the people around me are in the midst of navigating this. We need to grieve for the fact that so many of us don't feel like the future we're moving towards will care for our safety. Barton writes that we need space to grieve our stolen imagination.[3]

So, I think it's so important to not think of grief solely as a backwards motion. Because I've essentially been taught to think of grief as something that one: one passes through, two: that once passed through constitutes some sort of closing after which one returns to the original condition and three: that it's inherently private.
But this idea of linear grief that should and can be overcome is not very helpful in my opinion. Grief has this gift of sensitising us – it can make us receptive and present.

It's almost like it adds three-dimensionality to ongoing transformations. Bayo Akomolafe speaks of grief as something that opens new worlds for us.[4] So I try to honour it as the recognition of harm, loss, and injustice embedded in the very conditions that shape our lives.

Camille Sapara Barton writes on this note, "Tending to my grief enabled me to orient to and understand the power dynamics and histories I am entangled in that were keeping me separate from many of my kin."[5]

Sobonfu Somé, Embracing Grief: Surrendering to your sorrow has the power to heal the deepest of wounds.

And at the same time, we can also grieve things we're letting go because we know they no longer serve us.[6] And something very crucial I learnt from others is, there can be agency in grief. It does not always burst upon us as if we are passively exposed to it – we can turn towards it and cultivate a relationship with it. Bringing grief into our middle and allowing it into the different dimensions of our lives is really important in order for us to move. Not forward necessarily, but perhaps it can assist us in moving sideways.

Yet I do think grief is about death, loss, and falling apart, but in a much broader sense than we tend to allow it to be.

Lua: Since grief gained a strong presence in my life in 2023, when my father, Micha, died, it has served me to stay connected to my own history as well as the current times and what happens around me. So, I resonate with much of what you've written, and also with Barton's remarks about grief dissolving feelings of separation and fostering a sense of connection and belonging.

This unlocked grief for things that, although strongly connected to my biography, go way beyond it. I was grieving the gentrification and capitalist takeover of East- Berlin, the place I grew up in and where he still lived till the end. I was grieving the escalating housing/rent crises and the increasingly challenging cir-cumstances of making a living. I was grieving the accumulation of all these things that are pushing more and more people like my dad into poverty. I felt and saw these things before, of course, and I actively opposed them. Yet it was through this loss of him that I started to really grieve them.

Specifically, Barton's acknowledgement of stolen imagination as a source of grief made me think of him. On two levels, actually, first because it was already before his death that I began to grieve the fact that I was losing a

sense of future with him. And second, because I think this type of loss was deeply engrained in his biography.

When he was 31, which is also exactly my age now, the German reunification and what followed, I guess you could say, "stole his imagination" of a different socialism emerging from the old. The GDR was gone and the basis for moving towards an anti-authoritarian socialism was a really different one. I don't think he ever wanted the old times back, but the feeling of being part of a powerful movement gesturing at a more liberated future.

Now it's more than a year ago that you, Joni and I were shoveling a hole at the head of his grave, pouring foundation and setting the just finished headstone in. It was a meaningful relief for me, marking the end of a 6-year period of navigating the challenges in our relationship, and my sometimes intense feelings of responsibility for him. It was when I realised that he had no health insurance and barely enough money to pay his rent that I was starting to rethink our relationship and the role of care within it.

As Micha's only child, I rejected the inheritance after speaking to the debt counselling, so as not to inherit his estimated 30.000 euros of debt. What comes with this rejection, though, is that one loses the right to any material legacy of the deceased.

He didn't own many things and even fewer of value, so there were only a couple of sentimental objects I would have taken with me, but the warnings by the police and debt counselling I received had intimidated me enough not to takethe risk. It activated childhood memories of witnessing my parents, each of them individually, struggling with money and the threats and claims of state institutions. I had to suddenly realise that this still sits in my body. It was never gone, it was just waiting for the moment to properly make me feel the class-system-divide again.

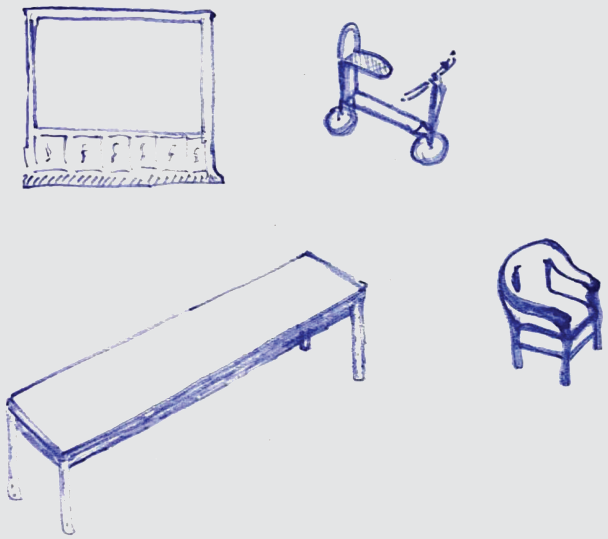
That feeling was powerful enough to make me shy away from the few objects that carried deeper meaning and positive feelings for me.

I'm still grieving the loss of these objects, which would give me material continuity to him. Where is the space for class grief, I'm wondering.

The objects were the following: a wooden chair with armrests, a mirror framed in wood with tile elements and an unusually long, narrow table,

and last but not least, my old blue scooter with a seat.

I will draw them.



Now that I'm over 30, living and loving in times of economic recession, I feel my background catching up with me more than ever before. The sensation of class mobility that I felt a few years ago is fading, what is emerging in its place since Micha died, is a fear of precarity and a much more conscious and realistic understanding of my lineage. It's an ambivalent feeling, but I do feel very connected now. That's not always been the case.

Some years ago, in spring I was attending a round table on anti-capitalist educational work in a ground-floor office in Berlin, Neukölln. It was right at the beginning when we were doing the introduction round with names, pronouns, plus, in this case, class positioning, when I received a text message from Micha, who I was supposed to meet later that day, asking if I could lend him 50 Euros and bring them with me.

Looking back, I wish I could have shared there how I felt getting that text instead of talking about the GDR and other significant markers in my lineage to try and give that nuanced brief account of the complex interplay of presences and absences of social, cultural, and economic capital[7] in my and my parents' lives, which I felt was expected from me. Speaking about your class background in front of 20 people without the proper time and space for what was really important to me felt performative.

What I would have needed was a smaller setting, the un-invitation of Pierre Bourdieu, and the invitation of details, the odd stories and the awkward memories. Maybe then I would have been able to speak about what I felt, and that I knew my father must have felt too, having to ask me for money, on my visit to Berlin, not having seen me for months. I could have spoken about what I think that could have meant and said about his financial situation and his networks and contacts being dried out.

So I guess without him, I would not be writing about grief, money, and existential care.

Kim: I would like to add something, and that's the structure of support that you created around Micha, and also around yourself while supporting him. With around 5 or 6 others, I was part of this second layer with whom you discussed on a regular basis the very questions of housing and the absence of health insurance, as well as fundamental questions like self-determination and the limits of pragmatic solution finding in complex terrain.

And I have my own thoughts on this, but in retrospect, can you put your finger on what made this kind of support, this fluid process, work for you?

It feels important to say that he also was kind of impossible. Almost incapable of asking for or accepting help, self-determination was incredibly important to him. Which was both a source of frustration and a profound lesson on support work, boundaries and autonomy.

Lua: It all started when I got increasingly burdened and overwhelmed about the complexity of his situation. The things I had tried up to that point hadn't brought much relief or proved effective. I had already been supporting him for some time together with my aunt. Our regular phone calls were often helpful and created a sense of connection, but it all felt emotionally preloaded, shaped by old dynamics and unresolved history. Over time, I came to realise that, because of the complex and conflictual nature of their sibling relationship, this isolated setup, with just the two of us discussing and handling things, was making the situation more complicated and at times certain forms of support impossible.[8]

We write family and other social constructs such as friendship in italics to make the constructed nature visible.

So it was around one or two years of being aware of his severe existential precarity that I got all of you involved. I believe it was crucial that I was making it about me, I was asking to be supported to support someone else. That's a relevant nuance. When I redirected this request away from the *family*[9] and towards people close to me, who I knew cared about me and whose experiences and perspectives were important to me, it changed everything.

What all these meetings had in common was that they gave me the opportunity to share information, thoughts and feelings with you as a group, to ask for perspectives and perceptions and, above all, to come to joint decisions, in relation to my possibilities, not Michas. It also meant that if sometimes we would hit a dead end, you supported me in sitting with that. That was very common actually, if you remember, and really essential. You were important witnesses to my feel-ings and became actively involved in questions around how and with what focus I continued my support.

That created a feeling of shared accountability, which was key for me to be protected from deeper emotional and structural harm. Making difficult decisions or often not being able to do anything at all was completely different from the point where the basis of action or non-action was a collective one. From then on, the rounds were repeated at irregular intervals whenever I felt the need and initiated them again. We had meetings in different places over the years, and also with a changing constellation of people. I remember one gathering in our communal kitchen in the countryside, and a particularly large one in my brother Max's allotment garden in Berlin.

It was a process that took years and only at the time of his death the real extent of how different we had already organised became apparent. It was people who were part of my support circle, who met the mortician with me and were able to be with me, support me, and again take many of the important decisions collectively.
Death is often a moment when above all those tied by blood or law come together and take over. But in our situation, information and accountability was already spread differently, and that shifted agency and possibility. Still now I'm grateful that the structures we created and nurtured over time made a different social tissue possible that I could lean into, and ultimately my aunt too.
I believe the most crucial aspect that made this possible was that the structure had been built already gradually over time before. That way, in the moment of crisis, it was already in place as a powerful resource and could activate itself. But I'm curious, what are your thoughts?

Kim: I really resonate with your reflections of that time and think the role of consistency can not be emphasised enough. That's what made the difference. Having to explain the context you're embedded in is a major barrier in moments that are already overwhelming. Navigating and organising support can then even feel exhausting, rather than what you described as a tissue to "lean into".

So in the end, it determines how safe it feels to shift the structural status quo. When Micha died, the structure that I and others were part of, inhabited a space that is traditionally organised by the *family*. It was really interesting, many members of your *family* were part of the process, but the *family* as such was neither the base nor the center as we came together.

I wrestle a lot with how our care relations are structured and I think it's more than fair to say that the *family* constitutes one of the most fundamental care as well as specifically existential care constructions yet. And its meanings, implications, and contradictions are so multi-layered that attempts to deconstruct it can quickly feel like important aspects are being left out, which they surely are.

M.E. O'Brien, Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care

However it's important to acknowledge that the *family* is not the only one. In *Family Abolition - Capitalism and the Communizing of Care*, M.E. O'Brien, rightfully points out that what we would summarise as existential needs, is today answered through three primary organizing institutions: "commodity exchange in the capitalist market, state-provided services, and personal relationships of dependency that typically take the form of the *family*."[10] So it makes a lot of sense to engage with the others as well

The role of the market is evident, sufficient financial resources dramatically reduce many of the risks and vulnerabilities one can face. This goes for every period of life, but I think we can see it in the clearest and most brutal form when people get older and their needs exponentially grow. Then your access to adequate housing, supplemental care, hired assistance, good food etc., determines your situation drastically. Accordingly, the corresponding outlook already determines how relaxed or anxious we can look forward to this time. The difference this makes can clearly be seen by looking at the different levels of ease we have in regard to the existential needs that will accompany our mothers aging. It seems obvious that commodity exchange on the capitalist market can and will not lead to a more existentially secured life for all. While it does provide those with sufficient financial resources with opportunities, those without them including a large number of those offering them on the market will be excluded.

But we've had quite a few discussions with others in which we had to justify putting so much emphasis on the transformation of relationships, rather than putting the state and larger society in the center of our practice. Do you remember?

> **Lua:** There's one moment in particular that I actually remember vividly. It was a couple of years ago in a class where we were asked to present our work and practice. We shared a map we had made around the topic of

existential care. It was clear that we were interested in looking at our relationships as sites for transformation. As I recall, the professor's response came quite quick and sounded something like this: "Thanks for sharing, but what about the big picture?" What this was implying was: You're looking at this from the wrong direction and you're getting lost in the "private" You're missing the big issues where change is really needed.

But it was precisely our engagement with these broader issues that compelled us to translate both our theoretical commitments and political aspirations into lived practice. It's a practice that is grounded in the relational, the embodied, the affective and the everyday. Of course they are shaped by broader structures of power, but in turn, they also shape those very structures.

For me it's never been about committing myself to a binary either/or. Rather, it's about acknowledging the inescapable necessity of practice itself. I'm convinced that without transformation at the level of interpersonal relationships, networks, collectives, and households, broader systemic change cannot be meaningfully initiated, let alone sustained.

Kim: I remember these conversations and above all, I remember how misunderstood I felt afterwards. Of course, there is ambivalence, that comes with complexity, and it's crucial to welcome it into both one's position and practice. But it felt as if we were being accused of being naive. In a way, that was reducing the multi-layered and facetted notions of transformation, of justice-making, and quite frankly also of living a good life, to something very absolute and flat. And it made me really wonder: how come I can see the much needed large scale transformation so clearly entagled with the relational scale which I dedicate my practice to, but some others can't recognise their entanglement vice versa? This has felt quite intimidating at times, I'm glad it does so much less today.

Lua: I believe O'Brien's three-part division offers a useful starting point for highlighting the interconnectedness of these institutions in terms of their influence within society, and for illustrating how each sphere currently generates its own problematic or exclusionary dynamics.

I agree with what you said about the market, without radical redistribution, it extends the lifespan of those who have the means with little regard to, or even at the expense of, the marginalised.

The role of the state as an existential caretaker in welfare states like Germany or Austria is evident in its provision of essential services such as healthcare, childcare, and various social benefits. In this capacity, the state acts both as a direct provider, managing certain sectors, and as a regulator, shaping others through legislation and policy.

BAföG stands for Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz, and is Germany's Federal Training Assistance Act for students who attend secondary schools and universities

In regard to social services, I was born in the 90s and even though the neoliberal erosion of the welfare state had already begun, I still benefited massively from it throughout my whole education. The state paid for most of my school trips, be it to the lakes in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, to Scotland with my English class, or to go skiing in Austria. It financed a big part of my 8 years of studies, always on maximum BAföG[11] rate (from around 680€ a month when I started to 861€ last September when I got the last transfer). For some years it felt like I was in a better financial position than some of my middle-class friends whose parents were barely supporting them financially. It's a tough time for middle-class kids with stingy parents. For me, on the other hand, it was perhaps one of my most financially secure times thus far. I wouldn't describe what I feel as gratitude, but I def-initely have a feeling of humbleness towards the access and opportunities it created.

But of course, systems created by the state are and have always been ambivalent at best, harmful at worst. In addition to general holistic questions, they have always exploited the work of migrant communities and at the same time created a great level of exclusivity, e.g. making citizenship and legal status determining access factors, and leaving people in great need without care.

But even for those with access to it, we're witnessing a diminishing of the protective effect of the welfare state particularly in relation to rising living costs and the basic conditions for survival. What the state provides in terms of support and protection is increasingly insufficient to sustain people's livelihoods, be it minimum wage, or the pensions that have not kept pace with the rising inflation and become more and more insufficient in proportion to economic developments, or the regulation of urgent areas such as the housing market.

Instead, there is a significant rise in income inequality,[12] in-work-poverty,[13] as well as old age poverty. We're dealing with an immense increase in housing costs - from 2010 to 2022, "asking rents [in Germany] increased by 50% nationally and up to 70% in large cities."[14] And between 2020 and

2024, living costs in Berlin have increased by approximately 20%.[15]

"ReArm Europe Plan/ Readiness 2030" – All in all an investment of 800.000.000.000€.

Now, I'm jumping to the next scale, but this development also coincides with the EU's far-reaching armament programme costing billions.[16] In this context and against the backdrop of stagnating economic growth and shrinking state resources, austerity measures are increasingly targeting the cultural and social sectors, while further cuts appear not only likely, but politically accepted. This is not an abstract feeling anymore, as an increasing number of our friends, due to layoffs or the current hopelessness of funding in the cultural sector, are in the process of retraining, or newly registered at the Jobcenter.

Report on the costs of climate change in Germany. "The study concludes that the expected annual costs for the period from 2022 to 2050 will rise steadily over time, ultimately totaling between €280 billion and €900 billion." Deutscher Bundestag, 2024.

Kim: Another layer to anticipate (although often collectively suppressed) is, the costs that the ongoing reality of climate collapse will have, even for places like Germany in the coming years.[17] By costs I'm not referring to investments in far reaching, socially just transformations that would put the protection and needs of people and ecosystems in the center, nor the paying of reparation to those who have disproportionately contributed but are over proportionately affected by it. I think this is so important to show, even if I guess you know all of that, but it's not that we are dealing with one diagram going into the wrong direction, we have several different ones that create a situation in which demands for greater social justice are increasingly difficult to realise, paving the way for all facets of austerity politics and exclusion.

Lua: The outlined developments are alarming and reveal to some what marginalized communities have known for a long time, we need to create alternative networks of trust and existential care in order to navigate our lives long-term.

Kim: I would like to add one diagram, though, that's also steering, I don't want to call it "in the wrong direction," but in one that calls into question the structuring logics of both the welfare state that's relying on the intergenerational contract and the *family* as such – the demographic change. The aging population that results from a low fertility rate combined with a high life expectancy in places like Germany or Austria is so drastic, the only thing preventing actual shrinkage is migration.[18]

In the context of the state, this means that fewer young people are contributing to pension and healthcare systems, while more older people are relying on them. This growing imbalance threatens the stability of these systems.

Silvia Federici. Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle

Alongside a rise in old-age poverty, it has also pushed health and elder care into a profound crisis, the latter being a particularly neglected field. Silvia Federici describes it as one that "suffers from a double cultural and social devaluation:"[19] not only is it shaped by the broader devaluation of reproductive labor, but it is also impacted by the fact that older people are not seen as productive, and therefore not seen as valuable within capitalist societies.

So, this is another very relevant layer that can be added to the difficulties that you described above, that makes the state as a provider of care, under its current logic, increasingly unreliable and the general situation for people who need it more precarious.

But let's look at the relationships of dependency that typically take the form of the *family*. To be precise, let's talk about the *family* as the hegemonic form these relationships take, because this is the other site where we encounter the consequences of this development. Although pressure on it is rising, it is increasingly incapable of compensating the deficits produced by the state.

I'm aware that our critique of the *family* extends far beyond its increasing inability to sustain itself, and I believe we would feel just as compelled to interrogate it critically even if it were thriving. That said, the reality is that the *family* is undeniably getting weaker as a social structure, which has a big impact on people's lives. As a result, a growing portion of the population is already living without relatives or looking toward a future with few, if any, familial ties.

Freundschaft heute: Eine Einführung in die Freundschaftssoziologie

So for those who have the financial means, the market can fulfill many of their existential needs, though surely not all. Those without are not only confronted with the difficulties of the state's support and care not being sufficient, but on top with another essential one of the three institutions, the *family*, not being available to them. For this group of people, the "[…] need for safety and closeness can no longer be satisfied by traditional *family* living arrangements."[20]

This general shift we see in larger society is clearly visible, in small, in the household I grew up in, where everyone who is alive is now over 70. The same is true for almost every other member of my *family* I know and feel close to. I remember that, even as a child, I experienced a kind of anticipatory grief toward the inevitable dissolving of this structure over time.

So when I look at my *family* today, I can see that those who built a reliable care structure around me as I was growing up, when I needed extra nurturing, protection, and

care, will have a much smaller structure to rely on themselves when they in turn become dependent on extra care again.

I also want to share something I'm noticing as I write not just about *family* but about my *family*. It is this fear of the gaps I'm leaving. I think it is the act of writing itself.

Speaking allows for softness and fragments. In speech, incompleteness is expected. Writing, however, suggests coherence and finality. In that sense, it can feel brutal. Because for me, growing up mixed, *family* has meant very different things. It has been the name for a system that unfolded its functions daily, sustained by women from two generations, who have continuously been with me and still are today, and to whom I am grateful.

But it has also been the name for some who are geographically distant. A connection that, in some ways, has had little impact on my everyday life and, at the same time, is embedded in my body and identity in ways that inform my entire reality.

I don't want to fail to name them:

There is my father, Baba, who throughout my life was both extremely close and far away. He died in 2009, and my feelings toward him are many, but the strongest is love.
My grandmother Oumou, whose name I carry and who cries as easily as I.
And my beautiful brother Inuwa, whose birth, although not in my household, sparked so much joy in me.

And the many others who have claimed me as *family,* for which, even as I wish to critically examine and destabilise the concept of *family*, I remain grateful for.
I'm sharing this, because I feel like the most radical conversations around the *family* must hold so much complexity.

> **Lua:** I feel you. I understand what you're saying as that there might be a trap of (emotionally) symplifying too much when critically examining this concept. Simplifications make the path more straightforward perhaps, but actually they don't do our experiences justice. We don't want to strip this multi-layered construct of all its complexity and our own personal experiences of caring, meaningful relationships.

Kim: You are right, I see this as a kind of balancing act of acknowledging our lived realities and the meaningfulness of lineage, and yet, in order for us to be able to take on such a charged construct, we need to take a step back and examine it closely.

Because it might seem like the *family* has been this *natural* social unit forever, but actually, it has undergone quite a specific historical and politically charged development. Far from being a universal or neutral institution, the *family* was shaped by changing economic systems and ideological needs, its current form being the product of these power relations.

Gisela Notz. Kritik des Familiarismus: Theorie und soziale Realität eines ideologischen Gemäldes

If for instance we look back to ancient Rome, the Latin word *familia* still carried a very different meaning, and referred not to a group united by affection or blood, but to everything a free male citizen possessed, including slaves, land, and children.[21] It signified ownership and control and not the intimate relationship many associate the term with now.

It was up until the early modern period in pre-capitalist feudal societies that the concept of the *family* was far broader than today's nuclear ideal. The defining social unit at that time was often the "whole house" – a household community that included not only blood relatives, but also servants, apprentices, tenants, and unrelated dependents. Here, relationships were governed not so much by kinship but by position within the household economy. It was a unit of production and reproduction: care work, agricultural labour, and craftwork occurred side by side, without rigid divisions between domestic and economic spheres.[22]

Throughout this text, we use categories such as women and men in the context of historically gendered divisions of labor, particularly around care and reproduction. We do so with an awareness that these binary categories are socially constructed and that they have failed and continue to fail to do justice to the complexities of people's lives, identities, and experiences. We italicize these terms to signal that they are not fixed or natural identities, but political and relational positions: ones that may be claimed, imposed, or refused.

The transition to capitalism disrupted this arrangement profoundly. As capitalist production demanded more specialized and centralized forms of labour, the once-unified sphere of the household was split into market (production) and home (reproduction). *Men* were increasingly defined as wage labourers in the public economy, while *women*[23] were pushed into unpaid reproductive roles in the private household. This division was engineered to meet the needs of industrial capitalism and the state, including the need for a stable labour force through gendered division of labour (unpaid reproductive labor) and the general privatization of care.[24]

During the 18th and 19th centuries, amid industrialization, the bourgeois nuclear *family* crystallized more clearly: a *man* as the breadwinner,[25] a *woman* as the housewife, their children as dependents, and marriage as the moral and legal anchor. The *family* was framed as a private and apolitical space, although it reinforced heteronormativity and gender hierarchies, as well as contributing to a certain form of individualism. It became the idealized site of emotional life, but also of social discipline – a space no longer communal but privatized, policed, and reproductive of capitalist norms.[26]

The nuclear *family* ideal was for many decades largely limited to the bourgeoisie, as working-class families relied on *women's* and children's labor. Its promotion excluded

many, and was used to enforce social hierarchies and norms of respectability.

Its creation was not incidental, nor is it incidental that it remains today. In contrast, it is to this day foundational to capitalist production, because it sustains and regenerates the labour force without incurring costs for capital. By offloading the work of social reproduction (childcare, eldercare, emotional support, domestic labor) onto the private sphere, capitalism externalizes these fundamental functions while continuing to depend on them for its ongoing profitability. At the same time, it continues to produce class structures, gender relations to enforce patriarchal norms, and excludes or pathologizes alternative forms of kinship and care.

Today, the *family* is a much less rigid construct, in the shape it takes, how power is distributed within and also in its temporality and absoluteness. Also, the outsourcing of care work in European and settler-colonial societies to migrant *women* from the Global South, the commodification of care under neoliberal capitalism, the expansion of lowpaid and precarious care work, and the crisis of social reproduction have and are shaping today's families and the realities attached to them significantly.

To understand the *family* and its position in society and our personal lives as well as the shifts and changes it has undergone over the last 300 years, we must see it not as a private refuge, but as a deeply political and economic construct.

What also prevails besides its material meanings and implications, is the immense political weight, and social and emotional meaning it holds, which can not be separated from, nor understood without the powerful role of familism, the ideology which makes the bourgeois nuclear *family* the model and norm for the social structure of state and society. On this note, it's also relevant to highlight the legal protection of the *family*. In Germany the first paragraph of the 6th article of the constitution is dedicated to it: "Marriage and *family* are under the special protection of the state order."[27]

And this is so important to stress, because although being such a politically charged concept, it has undergone a long and effective process of naturalization which produced the collective image of the nuclear *family* "(...) as the only form of cohabitation that satisfies seemingly inescapable human needs for security and affection."[28]

I think most people who do not reproduce the *family*, whether by choice or not, have been confronted with people's expectations, pity, or incomprehension. This isn't something I encounter much anymore as I move predominantly through queer spaces. Perhaps that's why it strikes me as almost strange when I do encounter it and get reminded that there is this deep rooted belief that whatever one lives beyond, aside

or before the family has less meaning or that it is simply a stopover before eventually coming around after all.

Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation

And it's true to many people, the *family* serves as an emotional refuge, a place of safety, protection, and ultimately care. Sophie Lewis goes as far as to say that „[*family*] is, at root, the name we use for the fact that care is privatized in our society."[29] So as demonstrated this affective association doesn't come out of nowhere, but is actually the result of the complex interplay of capitalist production and the oppression of *women*. Therefore I would say that an anti-capitalist and feminist positioning has somehow also incorperated a critical position on the *family*.

Lua: I agree, and I think it's baffling how much this sense of properness and legitimacy is still associated with the *family*. It's interesting that you said incomprehension; that's something that resonates with me, because it shows again that our sense of self and identity is not only formed and sustained internally, but also how we are seen and recognized. My experience is that it can feel very isolating to be misunderstood.

And sure, some view or wish to view the *family* as an emotional refuge. Some live that reality daily. But for many others, it's simply not the case. This is far more common than the romanticisation of the family suggests. It remains the core site for abuse, be it physical, sexual, or emotional, as well as femicidal.[30] And even apart from these extremes, very often, the *family* is a site of heavy contradiction, stress, and even trauma for those who won't or can't embody the values the *family* seeks to reproduce. This goes for many queer people,[31] for example. And yet, it remains apolitical in the collective eye.

But there is another point I would like to add concerning the apoliticality and neutrality of the *family*; these attributes are awarded very selectively along factors such as class and race. The *family* turns into an explicitly political site in public discourse, when poor and / or racialised families are being considered a threat and scrutinised. We see that when racialised and poor families are marked as sites of violence, when childbearing is accused of exploiting the welfare state, marriage accused of being for the papers, or *family* reunification of people with subsidiary protection status considered as dispensable, while no one calls out the political dimension of wealth accumulation and the exploitation of tax advantages by so-called *family* businesses.

Examples range from the Trump administration's proposed "baby bonus" to efforts by European states like Greece, currently investing billions in cash benefits and tax incentives to boost birth rates.

A stark illustration of this, dare I say, fascist double-standard is the push by governments in European and settler-colonial societies to incentivize higher birth rates in response to demographic decline,[32] while simultaneously suspending *family* reunification and sending non-white children to refugee camps and deporting them. This is such a blunt demonstration of white supremacy.

It is also the very same *familiarist* structure of society that is creating and deepening class relations. The access to *family* resources and future inheritances shape our class positions profoundly, and much more than the narratives around social mobility attempt to persuade us to believe otherwise.

This is clearly reflected in the statistics and data around the accumulation and transfer of assets, with Germany standing out as a particularly stark example. Every year, around €400 billion are passed on through inheritances and gifts. These transfers already make up more than half of all private assets, and this share is expected to continue rising.[33] On average, individuals receive €85,000 in inheritances and €89,000 in gifts, yet half of all transfers go to just 10% of the population, while the remaining 90% share the other half.[34]
In contrast, the bottom 40% of the population own almost no assets and are unlikely to inherit anything of significance.[35] There are also strong historical (East / West) and gender disparities: in Eastern Germany,[36] inheritances average €52,000, compared to €92,000 in the West. *Women* receive 37% fewer gifts and also 13% fewer inheritances compared to men. In addition, the values received by *women* are also, on average, 7% lower.[37] In short, the gender-specific power relations of the *family* are clearly reflected in who receives wealth and how much, while also the historically grown economic power relations between the East and the West are perpetuated.

In West Germany and Austria, studies show that the top-earning 20% are twice as likely to receive inheritances or gifts compared to the bottom 20%. The deep- rooted patterns of intergenerational class reproduction become visible here again: income, education, and status remain closely tied to one's *family* background. As a result, wealth is preserved within families and reproduced across generations, reinforcing the existing class positions.

Of course, what I'm bringing up here as critique of the *family* is nothing new; quite the contrary. There is long history of *family* abolitionist movements, early communism being one of them. Karl Marx and Friedrich

Engels already started arguing in 1845 that the *family* is the central unit of capitalist reproduction through creating isolated household economies based on private property, while securing male lineage and capital accumulation.

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Bini Adamczak. Beziehungsweise Revolution: 1917, 1968 und kommende

Of course, what I'm bringing up here as critique of the *family* is nothing new; quite the contrary. There is long history of *family* abolitionist movements, early communism being one of them. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels already started arguing in 1845 that the *family* is the central unit of capitalist reproduction through creating isolated household economies based on private property, while securing male lineage and capital accumulation. In their writing, it was stated clearly that "abolition of individual economy is inseparable from the abolition of the *family*"[38] and included the "abolition of all right of inheritance" in their 10-point programme in the communist manifesto.[39] So yes, I believe from an orthodox Marxist standpoint anti-capitalism would always also mean the abolition of the *family* and all right of inheritance.[40] However, how the *family* in the Russian revolution and in the real existing forms of socialism developed and played out is a really different story to tell.[41]

Kim: And almost 200 years later there is this new wave of *family* abolitionists, this time mainly queer communists and left theorists like Julianne Gleeson, K.D. Griffiths, Sophie Lewis, and M.E. O'Brien, who again make us imagine a world without the *family*. Their recent writings have been key to both our understanding and relationships to the *family*, and have influenced a lot where we stand. Lots of what we bring up against the nuclear *family* can be either attributed to them or has been broadly inspired by their writings.

They look at the *family* as a violent social structure, that often actively and always passively exercises control on its members and upholds systems of domination and in-equality in broader society by accumulating private property and power at the expense of others well-being.[42] O'Brien, who both of us felt particularly drawn to, writes: "To be a basis of human freedom and collective emancipation, *family abolition* must concurrently be the overcoming of capitalist society, including the state and wage la-

bor."[43] I highlight this quote because it touches on an important point that has caused much discussion between you and me. Namely, the question of whether overcoming capitalism is a condition for the abolition of the *family* or a movement that takes place simultaneously. In other words: can *family abolition* take place under the current conditions?

What role the language of the family plays in naming and marking these formations is a question that often comes to mind for me by the way and one I don't think we can adequately explore here. I do feel like this question is a contradictory terrain, as it operates somewhere between healing appropriation, deconstruction and reproduction.

I write this also because O'Brien, along with other abolitionists, does acknowledge alternative formations, such as queer kinship or *chosen families*[44] that consciously depart from oppressive *family* norms and the isolating structure of the private nuclear household. They are, she points out, rooted in diverse traditions of political liberation, including feminism, gay and trans radicalism, Black liberation, and anarchism.[45]

She calls them "radically alternative household forms [and] powerful expressions of yearning toward human freedom and articulations of *family* abolitionism in the present" and yet she quickly comes round with the limitations even these hold.[46] Aside from still operating within the logics of capitalism, a dynamic that puts damaging pressure on the internal relationships, she points out that "As they combine dependency and care like the *family* does, they are also potential spaces of personal coercion and violence"[47] and they preserve the exclusive character inherent to the *family* form.[48]

Lua: I would come back to that, but want to just add something on a more general note, which I is crucial to understand the vision of *family* abolitionist theory, because although, Sophie Lewis writes that everybody, no exceptions, will have to let something go, as this liberation process unfolds,[49] *family abolition* is at it's base a call for a massive extension of care in our life and society. Thus, for Lewis, abolishing the *family* is the opposite of eliminating love or care; it's liberating them and creating a world where care is not bound to private property and restrictive familial structures anymore.[50]

And regarding your question whether overcoming capitalism is a condition for the abolition of the *family*, I want to point out one striking feature of many *family* abolitionist books, which is somewhat symbolic for the difficulty of answering this question: the bulk of the texts, often three-quarters or more, are devoted to diagnosing why the *family* must be abolished. These sections operate on a meta level, unpacking the *family*'s role in capitalism, patriarchy, and social reproduction, which is often very rich and enlightening. But only in the final chapter does the focus typically shift to imagining alternatives, and even then, the visions tend to remain abstract, sketching broad principles for a communist society rather than concrete processes of transformation.

Nevertheless, they do all gesture somewhere and I think it's fair to say that some *family* abolitionist writings can be read as advocating for an expansion of the state and its role in managing care.[51] In these visions, *family abolition* is achieved through, or in collaboration with, the state, making a revolution that seizes state power a necessary condition. I think there is no need to elaborate why, at the moment, this seems like a faraway, if not generally improbable scenario. Even Lewis, who remains rather abstract, acknowledges on the last page of her book, with a quiet realism, that she likely won't live to witness whatever comes next.[52]

Kim: But even aside from it's current unfeasibility, the idea of focusing on the state, hoping for it to be or become this just entity that does not function as an abusive system is a strange desire for me, as our current spiraling into the logic of fascism as well as state socialist history demonstrates.

Lua: Yes, I absolutely agree, and so does O'Brien, who is also very critical of this vision, encouraging the pursuit of a *family abolition* "that refuses the consolidation of authority into the hands of even a benevolent state."[53]

She theorizes this critique through the understanding of the state as an "institu-tion that rules over social life yet is separated from the direct relationships between people,"[54] making family abolition in the hands of the state a threatening top-down project. If family abolition were also meant to bring an end to class relations, the state could not be the answer for her. O'Brien makes this argument by examining current and historic examples of socialist states, which have mostly upheld rather than properly challenged the rule of capital, adding that all revolutionary nationalist efforts to repurpose the state as a tool against its racist and colonial past have consistently resulted in dead ends. Following that line of thought, she consequently argues for the abolition of the state.[55]

And as to your question and our discussion if capitalism would have to be over, before existential care could be liberated and *family abolition* could take place, or if this can be simultaneous movement, I would say it get's a bit more tricky with M. E. O'Brien, as she drafts the transition more carefully and detailed in form of a period and not the one time revolutionary event.

In *Family Abolition*, O'Brien envisions, instead of an expansion of the state, a communization of care through the establishment of a net of communes, which would rise after capitalism and the state are dismantled through revolutionary uprising and/or collapse of the same.[56] In *Everything for Everyone:*

An Oral History of the New York Commune, 2052–2072[57] , this imagined shift towards communizing gets very tangible. In this book, conceptualised as a retrospective, ecological and economic crises triggered a global collapse and the daily life of people became more and more dominated by persistent disruptions and fragility. As markets ceased functioning and the state lost the ability to sustain social reproduction, communities started to organize in order to meet everyone's basic needs. What makes this vision particularly interesting is that insurrection emerges not from workplace seizures or the capture of centralized power, but from the struggle for survival within a collapsing system.

The direction of political thought this stems from, and with which she is aligned here, is called communization theory. Some of the prominent figures and groupsare the Invisible Committee, Tiqqun and the Theorié Communist. Although they represent two divergent positions (simplified as an anarchist and a Marxist situationist), they are unified in parting from traditional Marxism, rejecting both the transitional stages, via state socialism to communism, as well as the dictatorship of the proletariat. Tiqqun and also closely aligned the invisible committee promote the idea of an immediate insurrection and grassroots upsrising. In texts like *The Coming Insurrection* the revolution will not be made "by any existing class, [..] [but] it will be made by *'friendships'*, by 'the formation of sensibility as a force', 'the deployment of an archipelago of worlds', 'an other side of reality', 'the party of insurgents' – but most of all by that ever-present and always amorphous positivity: we."[58]

One criticism I share with others towards these texts is that they often adopt an abstract and, at times, overwrought tone, without offering a clear account of what is actually to be undone through the insurrectional dynamic they propose. The complexity of real social relations, particularly the material and interpersonal dynamics of class relations, is too often sidelined in favor of a kind of insurrectionary romanticism.

What is often present in many insurrectionary texts, such as those by The Invisible Committee, is an undefined 'we' positioned in opposition to a 'they' – serving as a faceless enemy that must be fought. This framing sets the stage for shifting the responsibility for capitalist class relations entirely onto the abstract others. However, what is overlooked is that we have, of course, internalized these relations, and currently find ourselves with no position outside of them. What is crucially missing, for me, is the recognition that it is also we who must cease reproducing these forms of relationality.

Prefigurative practices are shaped by the view that the forms of social life we aspire to must be enacted in the present, not postponed to a distant future. It challenges the separation between means and ends by insisting that the ways we organize, relate, and create today are themselves the seeds of transformative possibility. It draws from anarchism, feminist theory, and other emancipatory movements that prioritize horizontalism, mutual aid, and direct action.

> So what communization theory lacks – which I also see reflected in O'Brien's writing somehow – is to value and reflect the necessity of particular, immediate practices in the here and now, "communization is thus not a form of prefigurative revolutionary practice[59] of the sort that diverse anarchisms aspire to be, since it does nothave any positive existence prior to a revolutionary situation."[60]

Kim: This end of capitalism feels much more in tune with how I experience the world and with what I am able to imagine. A collapse of systems and the emergence of new systems. And communes as a type of possible decentralised system. As you can see, it's the idea of anything centralised and just that will follow the current system that I simply don't see at all.

However, I believe that placing all emphasis on radically different systems risks sidelining the social dimension of collective transformation. What often gets overlooked is the challenging, ongoing work of learning and unlearning the logic deeply embedded in the current system. This is the everyday labor of change, and it cannot be skipped.

Yet there is a huge practical and theoretical gap when it comes to the question of how do we get there collectively. I don't mean the collapse, but the forming of liberated communes. Where will we learn and unlearn? And transform the way we relate to each other? Where is the function and value of our current attempts?

> **Lua:** Yes, true, and that's what I found so strange about the communization theory and O'Brien's arguments here more concretely.
>
> Just to be clear, I totally agree with her when she writes that existing communes, house projects and similar endeavours are facing severe limitations as they can't escape the capitalist conditions.[61] I just have to think back to our time in the collective in Brandenburg,[62] and several fitting examples come to mind. One that stands out is how contradictory it felt that we were happy to redistribute tasks when one of us went on vacation for two weeks, but when someone took a paid job outside for the same amount of time, taking on their share of the work often no longer felt good or fair.

Kim: It's interesting. When things like this don't work out or bring up difficult feelings,we often interpret it as a failure of our solidarity. But maybe the issue was that we needed to apply a logic that went a step further, in order for it to feel truly transformative. For example, it would have been more consistent not only to share the money we

earned together as a group, but also to collectively manage and access the income some members earned outside the collective, especially since others took on additional care and reproductive work in their absence. But even that wouldn't have resolved the inconsistency entirely, because some collective members could expect to receive an inheritance, while others could not. In some respects, trying to do things differently requires a really high level of consistency in order for us to truly feel into it.

Lua: I think it mainly reflects the limits of our willingness at the time to collectivize our financial lives beyond the shared economy within the collective. Still, it might actually be a good illustration of how much space there often is between the actual structural limits and the way we practice things in reality.
But coming back to O'Brien, she sees more or less only protest camps and insurrections as a properly meanigful alternative to a more communist form of social reproduction, as they often do not pretend to really reproduce themselves outside of capitalism, instead they rely on theft or the gift economy of donations and support from outside.

What distinguishes group houses, communes, and alternative living arrangements from protest camps and insurgent social reproduction for her is that they are "legal arrangements within a market society, [...] [which] require the stability of property ownership and income flows similar to private families."[63] Pushed into a shared state of poverty, relying on economic self-sufficiency and isolation or depending heavily on substantial contributions from wage labor or inherited wealth. In that sense there is only a slight difference between group houses and private households for her, depending on the cash flow from outside and the "tangle of dependency and care that holds people together."[64] Although they may be less oppressive than traditional nuclear families, they still face the same pres-sures from capitalist labour markets and the state, leading to many of the same internal contradictions.

But this notion of transformations causes irritation for me, a good example of that is the examples she presents in the following quote: "The pressure of state policies, poverty, class differences among residents, or lack of mental healthcare inevitably exacerbate interpersonal conflict and often lead to the collapse of such deliberate communities."[65] To be precise: it's not that I disagree with this and that these problems are not constantly becoming visible, but what I find quite incomprehensible here is why would post-capitalist communities differ so fundamentally from this?

Sure, the pressure of state policies would be gone if the state collapsed, but wouldn't there be other new threats emerging, putting pressure on people individually and collectively? And is it not likely that most communes would also face a (long) time of poverty until new economies were effectively put in place? The collapse of capitalism will also not end the lack of mental healthcare, nor make the constant appearance of interpersonal conflict disappear, how, if not through developing a group culture which actively addresses these topics, and how, if not through collective learning and unlearning about conflicts, will we be able to deal with them?

Of all the things listed, it's class differences that baffle me the most. How would they evaporate from one day to the next? I deeply share D. Hunter's opinion here and don't believe that:

D. Hunter. Chav Solidarity

> "we'll all step into a cleansing shower of post-capitalism and never be the same again. I believe that this system has become our culture. It has shaped our souls, and it will continue to survive as long as we refuse to challenge the ways in which we emobdy and practice it, as long as we allow our social relationships to be framed through a capitalist lens."[66]

There is a lot of work to be done to reflect and undo our internalized class posi-tionalities and to develop the abilities to really share resources with each other as well as the securities attached to them. We will be heavily challenged in any attempts of collective liberation and commune building if we are not "unpicking the ways in which we are psychologically entwined with the current economic system" and figure out how we can survive also the capitalist present collectively.[67]

There's something unsettling to me about the belief that, once capitalism collapses, most of the challenges we already face in building a more just and communal world would somehow melt away without real struggle or disappear with ease. That kind of thinking feels utopian, not in a hopeful sense, but in a way that overlooks the real complexity of transformation. It seems to suggest a vision of communism capable of overcoming almost all constraints and inconveniences of our lives, an idea that always makes me pause. It reminds me of capitalism whispering, "Technology is going to solve everything," or certain forms of communism and socialism propagating, in different words, the very same thing. Freeing ourselves from all constraints might sound catchy and like a promising vision, but I find it more helpful and more honest to understand liberation, and therefore also

freedom, in a way Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery put it, "not [as] the absence of constraint or a do- what-you-like individualism but [as] an emergent capacity to work on relationships, shift desires, and undo ingrained habits."[68]

What also brings me to something which has been on my mind for quite some time now, and that is the way dependencies are often conceptualized, seen and thought of, and entirely problematised. I share a different conception of dependencies, one that is not inherently negative, as I would say that being dependent on others and each other is in some way a very basic feature of human life and existence, nothing we need to overcome. Dependencies may limit us, but they also enable agency within a frame. They situate us in the world and our surroundings. Independence, on the other hand, if absolute and not in relation to anything, becomes a state of irrelevance, doesn't it?

It seems that what the paradigm of independence actually implies is becoming entirely dependent on money and nothing else, excluding all other forms of relational or material interdependence. This echoes a point Bini makes in *Beziehungsweise Revolution*, where she writes that money, as the general equivalent, has replaced our conscious awareness of what we actually depend on. I find that observation to be deeply accurate.

And I think many people prefer the term *interdependence*, and that's understandable, it captures the reality that we are relational beings, embedded in networks of mutual connection. But it also runs the risk of obscuring the fact that the extent to which we are dependent is not always balanced. That's why I find it more useful right now to speak of dependency. I feel it draws our attention to the possibility of unevenness, to vulnerability, and to the politics embedded in relational structures. Sometimes, the language we chose unintentionally softens or obscures the material realities and power relations surrounding our needs. In other words, I wonder if this reveals a kind of denial. After all, it can be unsettling to be or become more dependent than others, and to generally feel life's constraints.

Being critical of the entanglement of care and dependency is, of course, valid and important, since these relations are very vulnerable to abuse and have too often been sites of violence. That's why I believe it's so crucial to strengthen, nurture and uphold each other's autonomy so that we can freely choose our dependencies, and commit to each other with clear intentions and consent.

It feels important to me to point that out and make myself clear here, because when we talk about wanting more existential care in our close relationships, we also consciously move away from the line of thoughts O'Brien is drawing, condemning the combination of relationships of dependency and care.
But I just can't escape this inner unease anymore, when I see glimpses of postponing almost all ambitions to solve our challenges of how we relate to one another to a post-capitalist future. I'm yearning for more accountability and more concrete visions for collective transformation to play out in practice in the here and now.

And finally I'm also wondering: If states and the current system of capital power would collapse, what would emerge out of what society is right now? Would it not be many different versions of society? And a messy, messy situation?

Kim: All of this is precisely why we have started using the term blurring to give language to something we were practicing and experiencing that didn't quite fit into the frameworks we had.

What we conceptualised as blurring has been very present in the conversation, woven into many of the stories and thoughts we've worked our way through.

I agree with what you said about messiness and would suggest that blurring is definitely a messy approach, as it destabilises the normative frameworks that organise relational roles, questions, and shifts how we impose ourselves on one another, what we dare to expect from each other, and how much accountability and, ultimately, mutual dependency we allow and embrace. It's not about softening interpersonal boundaries, but about blurring the structural lines that uphold relational containment. It aims to make these lines more porous and negotiable, creating space for new forms of relationality that resist, at least to some extent, the transactional logic of capitalist and normative social systems.

It can manifest as a glimpse, a way of sharing and exchanging, as well as something very concrete and committed. It's an experimentation with the fruits of the present.

This also means that blurring does not need any specific conditions to manifest itself. This however does not make it random or dislocated, what we are conceptualising here is deeply rooted in an anarchist and anti-capitalist understanding of our "[...] relationships as a front line, a first place we can practice justice, liberation, and

alignment with each other [...]."[69]

It just means that it does not need a specific starting point to come into existance.

You see, for me any effort to rewire our care relations in the present always serves three purposes, especially when the future feels so uncertain.

1) as a way to improve our lives in the present.

2) as preparation for more difficult times, when we might need to rely on them and our ability to live and sustain them,

3) as groundwork for better times, so that when they arrive, these care relations can support us in resisting the pull of old patterns.

Bayo Akomolafe's concept of \cracks\ invites us to re-think our responses to crisis, rupture and transformation. \Cracks\, unlike doors or windows which are anticipated, appear when the building itself begins to split. They offer opportunities to investigate failure, imagination, to play in the spaces where we don't quite measure up, and to stay with grief. In response to the unfolding miseries of our time, he encourages us to step away from solutionism and instead "share the bounty of not figuring out what to do next." Even if he sometimes slips away from me philosophically, I remain deeply moved by his thoughts.

Blurring is an absolute imperfect practice, imperfect insofar as it happens under conditions that aren't ideal without necessarily solving them. It might interfere with them, find \cracks\[70] in them, but this only works without the desire for perfection. It's a practice that constantly grinds against limits or even crashes into them as it tries to bypass, undermine, and broaden systems of accountability in the present. This is where blurring, as well as other approaches with a similar dedication to the now, have such a different notion than *family* abolition, although they don't contradict each other.

Even in its most fleeting expressions, blurring functions as a form of relational speculation. It asks: What if this relationship could hold more than we were taught it could?

On a more general note, though, I believe it's important to ask questions like *How can this or that theory serve me?* And to engage with the different frameworks accordingly. This little question can make the encounter with radical proposals significantly more fruitful, but in my experience, it has so often not been asked or answered, especially in academic contexts. There are, of course, many possible answers to such a question, and all are valid. However, the question I'm pointing to here lies in whether a theory offers you something to confront current struggles, or if its function lies more in the expansion of one's horizon. Of course, that is not mutually exclusive; that would be simplistic. Nevertheless, these notions do carry different qualities. *Family abolition*, for example, serves the latter function for me in powerful ways, for which I'm deeply grateful. It exposes the limits of reformist solutions and feel-good fixes by gesturing far beyondthem, something I find incredibly valuable and expansive. At the same time, I find myself wondering what it means to continually situate transformation in a "not-yet" future. Where does that leave us in the present?

Lua: *Blurring* also poses interesting questions about radicality, something that I used to think of as exclusively uncompromising and now have a much broader understanding of. This shift has largely come through learning from practices of mutual aid and forms of community organizing that are rooted in anarchist, queer-feminist and anti-capitalist traditions. *Blurring* as a relational stance has a different perspective in terms of where it is looking and what questions it poses, but it joins them down the river.

This "communist-future-postponing" reminds me of those ever-present Adorno posters hanging in the kitchen of my and many other shared flats in Berlin in my early twenties. The slogan "There is no right life in the wrong one,"[71] seemed to suggest that living a politically consistent or ethical life was impossible within a fundamentally flowed and unjust world. Which I and I think those around me translated to: Nothing is right until the revolution. This idea of the right life in a right society that resonates in many revolutionary ideas feels more and more like a political dead end to me. What if we can not and will never escape some of the contradictions and moral messiness we are confronted with now, or will discover many new ones, when capitalism collapses and we see a revolution unfold?

And I also can't help but wonder how many of these Adorno posters now hang in the toilets of self-owned apartments in Kreuzberg or Neukölln.

Kim: I actually think they might have taken them down by now, but I completely get your point.
Let's shift our attention a bit, because although the *family* is really relevant for the discussion about existential care, if we neglect the norms and scripts that also inform our close relationships outside of the *family*, we're missing a crucial dimension.

Or in other words, I'm wondering specifically: Aren't there hegemonic norms around *friendship* that inform our relationships outside of the *family* and hinder existential care for each other, that we should tend to?

Because it was through the framework of *friendship* that I was taught how to build relationships with the people around me who were not part of my *family*. *Friendship* is, just like the *family*, considered crucial for a vital and fulfilled life, and seems to function in a sort of symbiosis with it. They often come as a pair, I have the almost rhythmic sound in my ear "Family and Friends," "Friends and Family."

So even today, when the way I build and nurture some of my relationships has changed a lot, and in many ways tries to resist the normative ideas tied to it, I am very aware of how deeply this ideological framework shapes the way I relate to others.

Obviously, *friendship* is a very broad and fluid concept that represents less a specific type of relationship than a relationship field. The attempt here can't be to narrow it down; that would be nothing but a harmful reduction. But as a significant part of our social order, it is deeply embedded in the social structures and norms that shape society. So despite its multiformity, there is an ideological framework around it.

This might initially trigger resistance in us, because we like to think of our self-chosen relationships as liberated, I do. And of course, *friendship* takes on endless shapes, this initially made me overlook its potential for the discussion we're having, to be honest. *Friendship* seemed vague and therefore very complicated to handle analytically, I wasintimidated by all the "buts" this would evoke: "But that's not how my *friendships* look like!" "But we do it entirely different!" I kept coming back to it, though, and I think that makes sense.

When I began reading into the genealogy of the normative *friendship* ideal present in European and settler-colonial societies, what stood out most was the persistent depiction of the highest form of *friendship* as one free from self-interest and detached from material concerns, a continuity that stretches from ancient Greece to the present. And while at first glance this might sound appealing and pure, it is no coincidence that this ideal of *friendship* emerged exclusively out of the desires and realities of wealthy, white and male elites, such as philosophers, soldiers, and statesmen, that have throughout time determined and romanticized a privileged form of *friendship*.[72]

In no way does that mean this was the only *friendship* of course, countless people and relationship forms were simply excluded from the production of the hegemonic idea of *friendship*. This pattern of exclusion is not unique to the history of *friendship*, but because *friendship* is non-institutional, informal, and doesn't have a legal or bureaucratic framework that archives it, I feel like this makes it even more vulnerable to erasure.

> **Lua:** It's so interesting, because the social system of the *family* feels so rigid and clear, this open field of *friendship* around it seems so undefined and through that also unmarked at first sight. This deceiving feeling of meeting on neutral ground again.
>
> And it is reinforced by the actual multitude and diversity of connections that people call *friendship* or that are informed by a *culture of friendship*.

Kim: Culture of friendship?

Lua: I say *culture of friendship* in order to widen the framework. You said al-ready that it is a field, rather than a specific type of relationship. But I can feel that for me, I tend to think about very specific relationships and instant-ly lose sight of the diversity of the connections affected by it. But when I try to look at it as the dominant framework of fostering and being in connec-tion with others, it helps me to think of it as a less clearly outlined field, al-most like making it a verb instead of a noun, friendly rather than friend. This of course sounds insignificant and arbitrary in our ears that love exclusivity, but I like what the adjective changes. Because it is true, it is an ideological framework that lingers over the way we foster connection with others, no matter if we call them friend, bestie, if it is a person we like a lot, we like a bit, or we're just getting to know.

When we then look at who shaped the normative understanding of *friend-ship* and it's embedded expectations, the question "Who does this actually serve" becomes very relevant.

Kim: Yes, this brings me to the connectedness of relational systems such as *family* and *friendship*. I think it's interesting to view them as not only contrasting each other, but rather as complementing and reinforcing each other. Because I feel like it's pre-cisely through their differences, they nestle into one another. So rather than treating them as two fully coherent systems, we should consider how their meanings and func-tions are mutually shaped and how, through that, their logics align.

And even if there is an undeniable power imbalance between the systems, not least because of the legal legitimacy of one, it changes how I look at the dispersion of agency. First, in terms of questions around existential care, when we look at it as not simply "locked in" the *family*, but also "locked out" of *friendship*. Secondly, though, if I acknowledge their normative harmony I have to understand the *culture of friendship* as inherently entangled with the production and stabilisation of class, property, and the state as well.

Lua: It's activating to think about them as co-producing one another. So what would a *culture of friendship* look like that feels disruptive towards these logics? Or perhaps better, "What would a *culture of friendship* look like that is accountable towards its role in upholding class relations?"

Kim: I'm really curious to explore and discover that collectively! Because, in relation to the question of what gets locked out, I've had moments where I felt bluntly confronted with the supposed limits that these *friendship* norms imposed on my relationships.

I remember a conversation I've had in slightly different forms many times in the past, usually after mentioning that I'd sent money to friends in West Africa. Growing up mixed, with part of my *family* in Burkina Faso and Mali and the other in Austria, navigating stark differences in financial resources between those contexts has always been part of my life. And in that reality, sending money, sometimes small amounts, sometimes more, is normal. Some periods it's occasional, other times, the requests are more regular if specific circumstances require it. But when I spoke about it here, especially if the person receiving the money was a friend rather than a blood relative, I often received a worried look. The kind of look reserved for those considered naive. People would ask if I was cautious about not creating dependency or being taken advantage of. I could feel that, in their minds, my relationship with this person was being questioned, as if it no longer qualified as a real *friendship*.

The assumption seemed clear: dependency is the opposite of true *friendship*. You can want each other, but you must never really need each other.[73]

What's interesting is, research shows that expectations of help from friends are likely to have reached an all-time low. The higher the economic and institutional status of the respective society, the less its members believe that *friendship* choices should be based on considerations of utility. And I think that there is much to unwrap.[74]

But above all, it confirms once more how much this hegemonic idea of *friendship* is tied to the logics of a society of wealth and a manifestation of privilege in the colonial matrix. But it also reveals a curious dichotomy, where anything material or existential is framed as utilitarian, and placed in contrast to the affective motives that are meant to guide our relationships. But who has the authority to interpret the meaning of utility?

> **Lua:** That recollection is such a striking example. It's as if the presence of unequal needs somehow disqualifies the relationship, rather than revealing something about the conditions under which care must take place within it. I think this is embedded in and fuelled by the very extensive ideal of independence that is inscribed in the *culture of friendship*, as well as being a significant part of the overall capitalist ideology and modernity itself. This dogma of independence is evident in the neoliberal ideal that individuals are solely responsible for their own success, health, and well-being.

It also appears in ableist views of worth tied to productivity, the devaluation of femmeness and traits like care and relationality, and the colonial and white supremacist frameworks that define some as dependent and inferior, and others as independent and superior.

Reading The Care Manifesto in 2020 is what first sparked these thoughts.

One thing that this prevailing paradigm of individual independence does is that it leads to a culture where dependence is stigmatised and people in need of care are marginalised. I've started to think of the whole thing as a damaging fiction, actually, one that undermines collective life, weakens social bonds, and contributes to a collective withdrawal from asking for as well as providing proper collective care for each other.[75]

It's no surprise, then, that under these forces, the idealised and hegemonic form of *friendship* has taken shape around the notion of persistent equivalence and symmetry. Within this framework, we often lack the language or social scripts to acknowledge and navigate financial and especially class differences. The dominant paradigms of equivalence, independence, and individual responsibility make it difficult to openly address inequality within our relationships. As a result, we struggle to integrate our asymmetries and talk honestly about the ways class shapes our relational lives.

Kim: There is one specific practice that comes to mind, which is symptomatic for this, and that's lending and borrowing money in daily life.

I'm bringing this up because it's something that is really present, especially in the city where we move around and navigate space so much through money. It determines access to all kinds of relaxing, exciting, or delicious things. So people constantly lend money, in order to be able to experience something collectively or to enable someone to do something. We say, „don't worry, you can just transfer this to me at a later time", or „just get the next drink." sometimes of course we say "don't worry I've got this", but overall I feel like going through life together, but as separate economic entities is what a lot of people feel very comfortable with. I also think that being financially disciplined is considered very much a virtue, and those who can't make ends meet are often considered poor housekeepers. Needless to say, how classist, harmful, and simply wrong that is.

Instead:

> "The emphasis [...] should not solely be placed upon the individuals who have not saved, who have debt, who struggle to balance their books, and pay their rent. There must also be a discussion regarding why those who have saved and avoided debt are deemed to have a more socially acceptable relationship with money. They are the opposite of the same coin. They both reflect the ways in which our behaviours, values, and attitudes are shaped by a capitalist economic system."[76]

And just to be clear, I don't want to judge lending and borrowing per se, someone lending you money can be a true game changer in a dire situation. Also, only being able to do without whatever amount of money for a certain period of time is fully justified. I've lent and borrowed money, and that reflected the possibilities of that moment, that's not what I'm getting at.

It's more that it sometimes seems like our relationships are so shaped by the transactional logics around us, that we almost lack the imagination of becoming anything other than a bank to a friend, do you know what I mean? As if it were a logical thing.

> **Lua:** I like your bank-friend analogy. It takes me to another fairly automated exchange that I've experienced already more than once, and I'm quite sure also other people can relate to this.
> I remember moments when I shared with a friend that I was short, in the minus, or properly broke, those who could, would sometimes reply something along the lines of "You can always let me know if you need money", which was something I used to reply to with a thank you. Most of the time, I would not come back to this, though, and found another solution instead. It's the vagueness of this statement and its lack of transperency, that makes it so difficult to handle for me. Transparency about the offer itself, the other person's financial situation, and any possible conditions. I usually just assume the offer meant borrowing money, because asking whether it was existential support or an invitation to take on debt, often felt like a step I couldn't bring myself to take.
>
> Part of it is my avoidance, not wanting to explain that if you lend me money, I still feel in the minus and still stressed about how to make more in order to pay it back. And in my experience it's often the ones with middle or upper class backgrounds or with a good income who, probably in an attempt to take the stress off you, add things like „no worries at all though with paying it back, you can take your time, I don't need it at the moment".

These are moments that make me even more aware of how different our positions are, and yet how hard it seems to break out of the scripts.

I had to ask around for money this year, though, as I couldn't pay my training fees and rent anymore. In one-on-one talks with friends I initiated, we always spoke about both our financial situations. And I specifically asked for support, not for a loan. I appreciated the talks I had as we took time to understand each other's situation. Even though I often have a rough idea of my friends' finances, I rarely know how much they actually have in their bank accounts or saved up somewhere else and what role these potential resources play for them in terms of obligations, commitments, and dreams.

And of course, I sometimes operate on false assumptions and probably still do with some of the ones I haven't talked to. I mostly asked friends for help with more or less steady, well-paid jobs, access to middle-class family resources and/ or those who already inherited something; others I didn't talk to, because I assumed they are just making ends meet.

Such conversations feel deeply important to me when they break away from the scripts of privacy or vagueness and create space for openness and connection. I try my best to live up to that as well, both when I'm asked for money or support and when I'm in a position to offer it. Being accountable for my access to money in relation to others, however, is something I also need to practice when I'm broke.

Kim: I have to think of the interview in the Sinister Wisdom where Felicitas, a member of the *Prolo-Lesben*[77], says:

> "[…] it's easy to be oblivious to classism because we all look alike and have similar lifestyles. But if you look closer there are major differences in how we manage to survive. For us, it was hard to learn that there were *women* who could get resources from their families but would feel bad about using them. It was too much! We'd say, if they have money and they don't know what to do with it, they can give it to us."[78]

And I think this points to some really important things: first, that we need to have these conversations, and second, that we need to engage in practices of redistribution. Because we go through life with people, seemingly occupied with the same struggles, butunderneath a layer of aesthetics and lifestyle, we often stand on fundamentally different grounds. I guess there is the worry that naming it could create

The Prollo-Lesben (short for 'Proletarische Lesben' / 'Proletarian Lesbians') formed in the 1980s within the radical lesbian-feminist movement in West Berlin. They united lesbians from lower, working-, and poverty-class backgrounds, pushing for greater visibility of class struggles and challenging the dominant influence of educated middle-class culture and norms within the movement. In 1987, they established an anonymous money redistribution account, through which more resourced lesbians – typically from middle- and

upper-class backgrounds – redistributed money to those in existential need. Whether it was to cover a broken washing machine or overdue rent, the fund aimed to provide immediate, practical support rooted in solidarity rather than charity.

distance, and if there is a lack of accountability, I think that feeling is justified, but it also has the potential to build and strengthen emotional and political ties.

Lua: We brought the acknowledgment of the different grounds to Michas funeral; it took the form of an attempt at a collective inheritance for me. We had the idea together, but you wrote the text with the support of Max and Theresa. Max read it out loud to everyone when we gathered after the funeral. I dug it out, and I still find it very powerful, both for the words and the effect it had on me.

The Attempt Of A Collective Inheritance

We are writing here as friends of Lua. We grew up together, lived together and still do now. Since Micha's death, we have accompanied the process, been there for each other and helped shape the various phases of the farewell.

It has become increasingly clear to us that we have a responsibility not to de-politicize death and life and to deal transparently with the circumstances. Micha died in poverty and without health insurance. This is not arbitrary, but painfully interwoven. Showing solidarity and showing support for one another, all of this seems enormously important to us. For Lua, "inheritance" would above all mean taking on debts, and in order to avoid this, it is rejected. Rejecting the inheritance means giving up the claim to everything material. The only exceptions are photos and personal writings, the taking of which must be strictly documented.

By attempting to think of heritage collectively, we want to address the different material levels of this situation. They concern the moment and, like everything structural, go far beyond it. Above all, we are aiming for the privilege of a little lightness in the time to come.

By attempting to think of heritage collectively, we want to address the different material levels of this situation. They concern the moment and, like everything structural, go far beyond it. Above all, we are aiming for the privilege of a little lightness in the time to come.

This means, for example, using the inheritance to compensate for the loss of work in recent weeks and having to work less in the coming months in order to be able to devote more time to the upcoming emotional process. It is also about being able to cover the unfinanced costs of the funeral arrangements and burial. In other words, to take care of what needs to be done with the help of a collective cushion.

Poverty is a reality that is quietly perpetuated. How close we are to it in different ways is often hidden. This is an attempt to bring this structural precarity out of silence. We want to think of heritage as fluid, as not accumulating, as a collective resource that moves to where it is needed, that lets you breathe a sigh of relief for a moment instead of reinforcing inequality.

In this spirit, we invite you to contribute to a collective inheritance for Lua, should your situation allow it. If you would like to transfer something, please transfer it to the account of XXXXX:

Name: XXXXXXXX

IBAN: XXXXXXXXXXXX

BIC: XXXXX

Zweck: "für Lua"

On June 1st, the collected amount will be transferred from XXXXX to Lua. Through XXXXX as an intermediary, Lua will receive a collective amount X, without details of individual amounts. Because, regardless of the amount or whether a contribution has been made at all, we want to see it as a collective effort of which those who can and those who cannot are equally a part.

Through it, I received around 8,000 euros, which served as the cushion it was intended to be for almost a year.

Kim: I haven't read this in a really long time, but I can also still resonate. When we read this out at the funeral, we posed the question of your existential needs to everyone present and actively invited them into a form of shared accountability.
But we had started actively talking about money a few years before this, and those conversations were really helpful for me in getting this writing and the whole process in motion.

We talked about the economic discrepancy between my Austrian *family* background and yours. Particularly the fact that I'll inherit my grandmother's share in the housing project in a little village in Lower Austria, where I grew up with her and my mother alongside six other households, and where the two of them still live today. We explore what that safety net meant or could mean for our relationship, both emotionally and in practical terms. It was, and continues to be, a transformative experience.

We also started talking to people in a more organised setting and hosted a Talking About Money Round Table, which quickly latched onto the topic of inheritance as the biggest destingushing factor in terms of economic position. We met on a regular basis and navigated the discomfort of our different material resources and speculated about strategies of redistribution.

I also began having more intentional conversations about money with others. I noticed myself making a conscious effort to name the things I often used to leave unspoken, such as sharing my own economic background and expressing genuine interest in others. More and more, I find myself choosing to leave fewer gaps around money. Instead of this vagueness, I try to speak plainly, to name what is present. It can be a simple yet powerful counter-experience and a refusal of normative scripts.

Because sometimes people would share their financial worries or say things like "I will be an old broke artist," and it's only after explicitly asking that people tell you that they, in fact, will inherit enough to not make them very vulnerable to poverty.

Lua: I've had many of these kinds of conversations already, where other people's (class) unawareness hit me quite hard. Its in casual moments where some-one says "I can't afford it," when it's actually there choice, not the reality. Or saying "me too" without reflection when someone shared that they, in fact, are broke – ignoring the fact that having no money on your bank card but still savings elsewhere doesn't actually mean you're broke. But it also happens around me when someone is asked about specific inheritance or property and they answer: "Phew.. I don't know how much it is, it's all so complicated and to be honest I think there are debts on it." And some even implicitly suggest that the burden of managing an asset somehow outweighs the privilege of owning it.

Kim: I have the feeling that the idea that speaking about future inheritance is somewhat morally condemnable also lingers over these talks. This evasiveness and vagueness almost feels like an attempt to stifle the accusation of waiting for someone to die right from the start. I understand that, and of course there is an element of unpredictability that can be taken into account. But rather than making this the focus, we should commit to acknowledging familial resources and the emotional security they create. So what I reckon makes this particular subject additionally tricky is that two taboos are meeting, that of death and that of money.

I think all those examples in the end take us to the avoidance of discomfort. Because having these conversations can feel uncomfortable, it reveals things that aren't right and we feel it. I once read the quote "feeling is a legitimate way of knowing" and it stuck with me. There are ways that we can let these feelings of discomfort be our guides, rather than something we duck away from.

> **Lua:** Feelings can be a legitimate way of knowing, but they're also shaped by what we've learned, what we engage with, and what we allow in. I would say they don't necessarily reveal some ultimate truth, but they point us toward what needs care and attention.

Kim: Yes, absolutely. For me, some of the most instructive moments arise when I sit and engage with the feelings that surface when I, often with others, attempt to translate theoretical propositions or critique into lived practice. I used to call this the interplay of theory and practice, now I prefer guidance and experimentation and try to embrace that, but in the end it's similar.

What I love about guidance, concretly about being guided though is that it centres not the knowledge, but my relationship with it. And this little shift continuously helps me to narrow a gap, that often left me feeling unsatisfied or simply lost.
When I'm guided I intentionally let myself be guided though my daily life and decision making. I consciously enter into a relationship with a theory, a position or a practice and in doing so, I feel a sense of responsibility toward it growing. It becomes a form of co-creation.

To me this whole process often feels quite unsetteling. Bayo Akomolafe reminds us over and over to slow down when times are urgent, slowing down as a shift in awareness.[79] I feel the truth of that, as I try to embody rather than accumulate knowledge.

And while it's hard work, it's also where things become real and interesting to me.

The commitment to experimentation helps me colaborate with the imperfect, the messy and even the playful. invites presence and curiosity, it's where we feel contradiction emerge and meaning deepen. When held with care and intention, experimentation can become a way of honouring both complexity and failure. For me experimentation and guidance translates to embracing the consequences of what we know, and exploring ways of collectively translating it into something that feels aligned with our existential needs and desires.

And sometimes there can be an almost scary simplicity in things as well.

Lua: I feel both – guidance and experimentation – add a form of agency to my life in times where sometimes numbness and overwhelm makes me lose sight of possible ways.

Something that I've let me guide is the reminder to „move at the speed of trust. "[80] It aligns well with the slowing down Bayo speaks of and I'm convinced, that it does not mean, that the steps we take can't be profound or disruptive anymore. In my experience the opposite is the case, slowness can give spaciousness for depth and care. I feel like it's in that space that I can meet others and experiment.

This is Mervyn Marcano's remix of Stephen Covey's "speed of trust" concept, and one of the principles of emergent strategy; adrienne maree brown

And it's the aspect of trust that brings me to the believe, that in all the blurriness we intentionally create, we mustn't become elusive to each other. Rather, it is sometimes important to make new promises, to experiment with new certainties we can hold on to if we want deep, ongoing care for each other – against all the odds and limitations the present holds for us.

Class Accountability is to recognize that true accountability demands not only awareness but also practice, especially in how we deal with money, material resources, and existential needs among us: as friends and comrades, lovers and kith, in our communities and way beyond.

Class Accountability is the act of taking responsibility for your class position. It's a call for creating practices and engaging in action.

Class Accountability is relational. It's not just the responsibility of some; it can apply to all of us in relation to others. It means to look around you and to put yourself in relation – again and again. It means not to simplify your own, nor others positionality in the class matrix. Class – in our eyes – is one lens of observation, one tool to see social relations, and not a clear and unambiguous category or identity.

Class Accountability is inviting us to mindfully confront discomfort, shame and social taboos around money and class differences and to learn collectively how to navigate them, in a way that fosters trust and solidarity rather than performative positioning, polarization or division.

Class Accountability is moving toward openness and transparency about your financial status, access, and needs.

Class Accountability is to initiate conversations about money and existential needs, so that economic inequalities within your relationships are not ignored but addressed.

Class Accountability is to bring up class dynamics and power relations when no one else does, especially when silence would benefit you.

Class Accountability is to take responsibility for struggles of others and to make them a shared matter.

Class Accountability is to cover or subsidize costs for people with less money to pay their bills, access mental or physical health care, or participate in events, vacations, or political work.

Class Accountability is to regularly give away part of your income or savings – either directly to individuals or through mutual aid and reparations funds.

Class Accountability is to think and reflect about future Inheritance, the safety they give, and how you can expand that safety to others.

Class Accountability is to collectivize the decision-making power over your funds and properties.

Class Accountability is to redistribute (parts or all of your) money, assets, and properties, and through that, the emotional-existential securities which come along with them.

Class Accountability is to organize your will so that your inheritance is redistributed along political lines, not just family lines.

Class Accountability is to follow the call to join classes.

Collectivization Contract

Declaration of future co-heirs.

1. Preamble

We recognize the systemic injustice of wealth accumulation and distribution, and that inheritance is a key mechanism through which inequality and class relations are reproduced.

With this agreement, we commit to collectivise our (future) inheritances.

We take this step to interrupt the transmission and concentration of wealth through family lines. By shifting the control over inherited assets from the individual to the collective, we aim to challenge structures that uphold class power among us and within society.

It is a commitment to share resources in ways that foster individual and collective well-being, being accountable for imperial and colonial power structures and in order to fight for more equitable futures. We want to support those of us without access to such resources and those way beyond our own circles. By sharing the power over these funds and properties, we want to come to good decision collectively, strengthen our capacity for mutual support, enable everyone of us to rest as well as to fight back more vigorously.

2. Scope of the Commitment

Upon receiving an inheritance (financial, property, or material), we hereby declare,

- ☐ that we will from now on inherit everything together. Be it money, properties, debts, or material resources.
- ☐ that we will from now on inherit everything together, despite the following:

_____

3. Obligations

We hereby declare to also collectivise the obligations and responsibilities coming with the inheritances, be it assets, properties, or other things, and to handle them responsibly and with class accountability.

4. Collectivization & Redistribution Method

☐ The inheritance(s) will be equally split among the persons signing here (7.).

☐ The inheritance(s) will be split among the persons signing here (7.), the following way:

_____

☐ We agree to collectively decide on the use and distribution of these funds.

☐ Other:

_____

☐ We will consult the following individuals or group(s) as advisors before taking a decision:

_____

5. Further

☐ We will practice financial transparency with those around us, sharing updates and inviting feedback.

☐ We agree to hold at least one collective conversation (before or after an inheritance is received) about how the funds might be used to support our shared needs, security, and futures.

☐ We will practice transparency with those we name in this agreement as witnesses or advisors, including sharing financial updates when requested or something has changed.

☐ _____

6. Signatures of Co-heirs

Date:

Names: _____

Signatures: _____

7. Accountability and Witnesses

We name the following people or group(s) as witnesses of this agreement who will hold us accounble for what we declare here:

Names: _____

Signatures: _____

We want to wholeheartedly thank:

Simon, for being with us through this process, for the generous and kind criticism, the insightful questions, and for the considerable amount of time devoted to us and this work.

Anisa, for having our back at such short notice, proofreading it all and encouraging us when we needed it most.

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Maria for the aesthetics <3

All those who were part of the support circle and the funeral.

And so much gratitude goes out to all our friends and comrades – without your existential care, we couldn't have written any of this – as well as to the many beyond that, who's practices and thoughts informed us, in short, the countless people from whom we learn and on whom we rely.

“Die Zukunft wird anarchistisch virulent.” Micha (2023)

Endnotes

1 When we speak, think and write about our struggles, it is important for us to recognise, that if put in relation, they are what the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective (GTDFC) identifies as low intensity struggles. This is the place we're writing from and also the place we're writing to. Struggles have inherently different qualities: this is important to name, as people are facing genocides, displacement, deadly border regimes or the destruction of the land and ecosystems they inhabit and depend on. They describe "high-intensity" struggles as urgent efforts to defend land, life, and livelihoods against active threats, while "low-intensity" struggles aim to gain better access to resources, representation, or security within – or through partial exits from – the modern/colonial system. Though both forms of resistance are seen as essential, they emphasise a key difference: low-intensity struggles may help sustain or reform the system, while high-intensity struggles are about survival in the face of the violence that sustains that very system. Drawing on this distinction, they understand the current global order as a "modern/colonial system", one in which modern ideals like political stability, economic security, and autonomy are underwritten by ongoing colonial violence. Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures (GTDF) is an arts/research collective that aims to identify and de-activate colonial habits of being, and to gesture towards the possibility of decolonial futures though artistic, pedagogical, cartographic, and relational experiments. Sharon Stein et. al., "Methodologies for Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures," in Weaving an Otherwise: In-Relations Methodological Practice, ed. Amanda R. Tachine and Z Nicolazzo (Routledge, 2022), 143-144.

2 Malkia Devich-Cyril, Grief belongs in social movements. Can we embrace it? (In These Times, 2021). https://inthesetimes.com/article/freedom-grief-healing-death-liberation-movements. Accessed October 3, 2025.

3 Camille Sapara Barton, Tending Grief: Embodied Rituals for Holding Our Sorrow and Growing Cultures of Care in Community (North Atlantic Books, 2024), 14.

4 Bayo Akomolafe, Looking For The Cracks with Dr Bayo Akomolafe (Video on Youtube, 2024). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=So8eViEvcio&t=1249s. Accessed October 3, 2025.

5 Camille Sapara Barton. Tending Grief, 36.

6 Sobonfu Somé, Embracing Grief: Surrendering to your sorrow has the power to heal the deepest of wounds. https:// www.sobonfu.com/articles/writings-by-sobonfu-2/embracing-grief/. Accessed September 21, 2025.

7 Pierre Bourdieu, Die feinen Unterschiede: Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft (Suhrkamp, 1982).

8 It feels important to say that he also was kind of impossible. Almost incapable of asking for or accepting help, self-determination was incredibly important to him. Which was both a source of frustration and a profound lesson on support work, boundaries and autonomy.

9 We write family and other social constructs such as friendship in italics to make the constructed nature visible.

10 M.E. O'Brien, Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care (Pluto Press., 2023), 190.

11 BAföG stands for Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz, and is Germany's Federal Training Assistance Act for students who attend secondary schools and universities. The amount is calculated based on the parents' income. In 2024, 11,5% of all students received financial support under the 'BaföG'- Act. "BAföG Statistik 2024", bafög-rechner.de. Studies Online. 2025. "Weniger BAföG-Geförderte, weniger Förderung." Bafoeg-rechner.de, August 1, 2025. https://www.bafoeg-rechner.de/Hintergrund/art-3087-bafoeg-statistik-2024.php. Accessed October 10, 2025.

12 Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, Soziale Ungleichheit in Deutschland, 2024. https://www.boeckler.de/de/auf-einen-blick-17945-20845.htm#A1. Accessed October 10, 2025.

13 Despite employment, a significant number of individuals in Germany remain at risk of poverty. In 2019, approximately 3.1 million employed individuals (8% of the workforce) were living on less than 60% of the median income, a threshold commonly used to define poverty. Federal Statistical Office of Germany, 2021.

14 Wall Street Observer, 2024.

15 Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, 2025. "Was kostet der Alltag? Preisbarometer Berlin und Brandenburg: Lebenshaltungskosten Entwicklung 2020 bis 2024." Pressemitteilung Nr. 23, February 19, 2025. https://www.statistik-berlin-brandenburg.de/023-2025. Accessed September 19, 2025.

16 "ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030" – All in all an investment of 800.000.000.000€. European Parliament, 2025. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/769566/ EPRS_BRI(2025)769566_EN.pdf. Accessed September 20, 2025.

17 Report on the costs of climate change in Germany. "The study concludes that the expected annual costs for the period from 2022 to 2050 will rise steadily over time, ultimately totaling between €280 billion and €900 billion." Deutscher Bundestag, 2024. "Bericht zu Kosten des Klimawandels in Deutschland." Heute im Bundestag (hib/MIS), June 12, 2024. https://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/kurzmeldungen-1007974. Accessed September 21, 2025.

18 Pressemitteilung Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025. Pressemitteilung Nr. 030, January 23, 2025. https://www.destatis.de/ DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2025/01/PD25_030_124.html. Accessed September 20, 2025.

19 Silvia Federici. Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle (PM Press, 2012)., 290.

20 Janosch Schobin et al., Freundschaft heute: Eine Einführung in die Freundschaftssoziologie (Transcript Verlag, 2016), 143.

21 Gisela Notz. Kritik des Familiarismus: Theorie und soziale Realität eines ideologischen Gemäldes (Schmetterling Verlag, 2015), 14.

22 Ibid., 14 & 34–36.

23 Throughout this text, we use categories such as women and men in the context of historically gendered divisions of labor, particularly around care and reproduction. We do so with an awareness that these binary categories are socially constructed and that they have failed and continue to fail to do justice to the complexities of people's lives, identities, and experiences. We italicize these terms to signal that they are not fixed or natural identities, but political and relational positions: ones that may be claimed, imposed, or refused.

24 Ibid., 14 & 38–40.

25 Ibid., 15.

26 Ibid., 42–45.

27 Federal Republic of Germany, Article 6 para. 1 of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (Deutscher Bundestag, 1949). Translation by the German Bundestag. https://www.bundestag.de/en/basiclaw. Accessed September 20, 2025.

28 Gisela Notz, Kritik des Familiarismus, 16.

29 Sophie Lewis, Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation (Verso, 2022), 15.

30 "Sexualisierte Gewalt: Weit verbreitet, kaum geahndet." Deutschlandfunk, 2025. https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/sexualisierte-gewalt-kinder-jugendliche-100.html#Was-laesst-sich-ueber-die-Taeter-sagen. Accessed September 20, 2025.

31 "Half of LGBT+ young adults in UK are estranged from a relative, survey finds." The Guardian, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/30/half-of-lgbt-young-adults-in-uk-are-estranged-from-a-relative-survey-finds. Accessed September 20, 2025.

32 Examples range from the Trump administration's proposed "baby bonus" to efforts by European states like Greece, currently investing billions in cash benefits and tax incentives to boost birth rates. "Greece to Spend 20 bln Euros on Lifting Low Birth Rate," Reuters, 2024. & Demissie and Faulders, "Trump Administration Looking at $5,000 'Baby Bonus' to Incentivize Public to Have More Children," ABC News, 2025. https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-administration-5000-baby-bonus-incentivize-public-children/story?id=121094707. Accessed September 20, 2025. & Reuters. 2024. "Greece to Spend 20 bln Euros on Lifting Low Birth Rate." Reuters, October 2, 2024. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greece-spend-20-bln-euros-lifting-low-birth-rate-2024-10-02/. Accessed October 10, 2025.

33 DIW [German Institute for Economic Research], 2017.

34 Ibid., 2021.

35 Ibid., 2017.

36 Ibid., 2021.

37 Bona Hyun, "Wie Frauen bei Erbschaften und Schenkungen benachteiligt werden," Frankfurter Rundschau, 2023. https://www.fr.de/wirtschaft/erbe-erbschaftssteuer-frauen-maenner-unterschied-benachteiligung-schenkung-gender-pay-gap-zr-92668807.html. Accessed September 20, 2025.

38 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology, 1845–46. https://libcom.org/library/german-ideology. Accessed September 21, 2025.

39 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/ works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm. Accessed September 21, 2025.

40 Sophie Lewis. Abolish the Family, 46.

41 Bini Adamczak. Beziehungsweise Revolution: 1917, 1968 und kommende (Suhrkamp Verlag, 2017).

42 M.E. O'Brien. Family Abolition, 7.

43 Ibid., 194.

44 What role the language of the family plays in naming and marking these formations is a question that often comes to mind for me by the way and one I don't think we can adequatly explore here. I do feel like this question is a contradictory terrain, as it operates somewhere between healing appropriation, decunstruction and reproduction.

45 M.E. O'Brien. Family Abolition, 173-174.

46 Ibid., 175.

47 Ibid., 177.

48 Ibid., 178.

49 Sophie Lewis. Abolish the Family, 10.

50 Ibid., 9-42.

51 M.E. O'Brien. Family Abolition, 190. Sophie Lewis. Abolish the Family, 88.

52 M.E. O'Brien. Family Abolition, 191.

53 Ibid., 192.

54 Ibid., 193.

55 Ibid., 219-233.

56 M. E. O'Brien and Eman Abdelhadi. Everything for Everyone: An Oral History of the New York Commune, 2052-2072 (Common Notions, 2022).

57 Endnotes, What are we to do?, 2012. https://libcom.org/library/what-are-we-do-endnotes. Accessed September 21, 2025.

58 Prefigurative practices are shaped by the view that the forms of social life we aspire to must be enacted in the present, not postponed to a distant future. It challenges the separation between means and ends by insisting that the ways we organize, relate, and create today are themselves the seeds of transformative possibility. It draws from anarchism, feminist theory, and other emancipatory movements that prioritize horizontalism, mutual aid, and direct action.

59 Endnotes, What are we to do?, 2012.

60 M.E. O'Brien. Family Abolition, 209.

61 The two of us lived and worked in a collective in Brandenburg for 3 years between 2018 and 2021. Constantly questioning and figuring out how we wanted to work and organize our lives together was, far from perfect, but very important and formative. That is why we often come back to it.

62 M.E. O'Brien. Family Abolition, 2023, 209.

63 Ibid., 209.

65 M.E. O'Brien. Family Abolition, 2023, 209.

66 D. Hunter. Chav Solidarity (Lumpen, 2022), 278.

67 Ibid., 283.

68 Carla Bergmann & Nick Montgomery. Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times (AK Press, 2017).

69 adrienne maree brown, Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds (AK Press, 2017), 35.

70 Bayo Akomolafe's concept of \cracks\ invites us to rethink our responses to crisis, rupture and transformation. \Cracks\, unlike doors or windows which are anticipated, appear when the building itself begins to split. They offer opportunities to investigate failure, imagination, to play in the spaces where we don't quite measure up, and to stay with grief. In response to the unfolding miseries of our time, he encourages us to step away from solutionism and instead "share the bounty of not figuring out what to do next." Even if he sometimes slips away from me philosophically, I remain deeply moved by his thoughts. Bayo Akomolafe, Looking For The Cracks with Dr Bayo Akomolafe (Video on Youtube, 2024), min 19:49. & Bayo Akomolafe. On doors and cracks, 2024. https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/on-doors-and-cracks. Accessed October 3, 2025.

71 Theodor W. Adorno. Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life (Verso, 1951) & Martin Mittelmeier. Es gibt kein richtiges Sich-Ausstrecken in der falschen Badewanne. http://felsenwahn.de/?page_id=18.html. Accessed October 11, 2025.

72 Grätz et al. 2003; Hermand 2006; Schinkel 2003, quoted in Janosch Schobin et al., Freundschaft heute, 81-93.

73 Most of these conversations happened some time ago, at a time when there was some political awareness of colonial foundations and material realities among the people around me, but redistribution wasn't part of their practice. That feels different today, at least in the broader communities I'm connected to, where collective solidarity and accountability in times of crisis has a longer history and is increasingly possible through digital networks.

74 There is a certain resistance in me to invite knowledge in that stems from the evaluation and classification of societies, often reducing the complexity to standardized indicators that reproduce colonial narratives though rankings. I do think it is telling though and decided to include it. Janosch Schobin et al., Freundschaft heute, 145.

75 Reading The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence (Verso, 2020) is what first sparked these thoughts. The Care Collective, The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence (Verso, 2020).

76 D. Hunter, Chav Solidarity (Lumpen, 2022), 276.

77 The Prollo-Lesben (short for 'Proletarische Lesben' / 'Proletarian Lesbians') formed in the 1980s within the radical lesbian-feminist movement in West Berlin. They united lesbians from lower, working-, and poverty-class backgrounds, pushing for greater visibility of class struggles and challenging the dominant influence of educated middle-class culture and norms within the movement. In 1987, they established an anonymous money redistribution account, through which more resourced lesbians – typically from middle- and upper-class backgrounds – redistributed money to those in existential need. Whether it was to cover a broken washing machine or overdue rent, the fund aimed to provide immediate, practical support rooted in solidarity rather than charity.

78 "Anonymous Money Redistribution: Prolo Dykes Making Real Change In West Berlin." Sinister Wisdom, 1991.

79 Akomolafe, Bayo. "Dr. Bayo Akomolafe on Slowing Down in Urgent Times." Atmos, Interviewed by Ayana Young, 2023. https://atmos.earth/ecological-wisdom/dr-bayo-akomolafe-on-slowing-down-in-urgent-times/. Accessed October 11, 2025.

80 This is Mervyn Marcano's remix of Stephen Covey's "speed of trust" concept, and one of the principles of emergent strategy; adrienne maree brown, Emergent Strategy, 42.