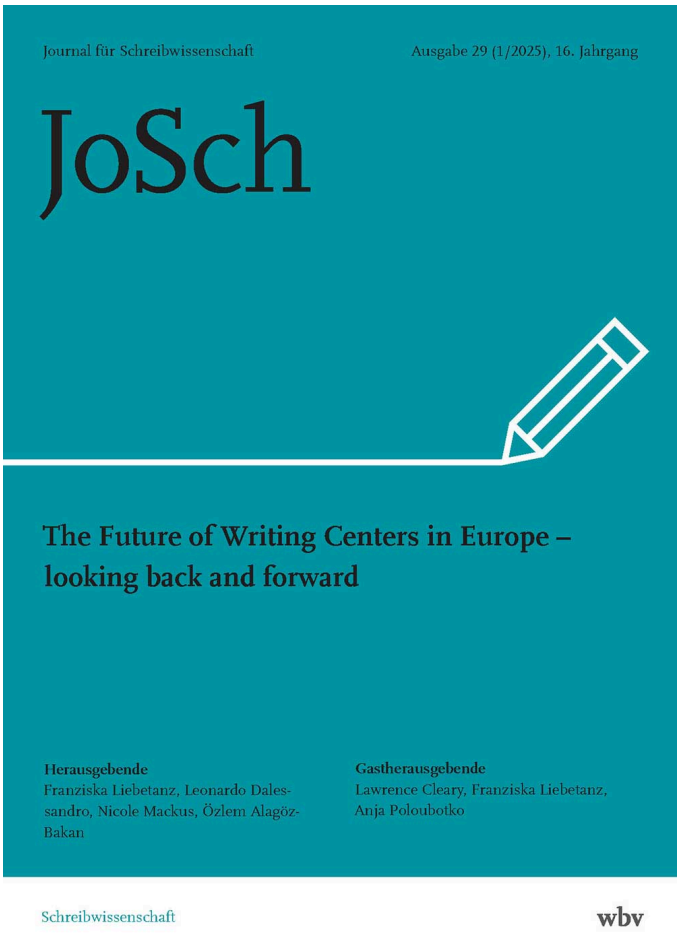

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Schlagworte: Care; writing; feminism; social reproduction
Zitiervorschlag: *Scott, A. (2025). Writing Care Work: Reimagining Academic Writing and Its Support As Care. JoSch 1(25), 86-99. https://doi.org/10.3278/JOS2501W008*

E-Journal Einzelbeitrag
von: Andrea Scott

Writing Care Work

Reimagining Academic Writing and Its Support As Care

aus: Ausgabe 29: The Future of Writing Centers in Europe – looking back and forward (JOS2501W)
Erscheinungsjahr: 2025
Seiten: 86 - 99
DOI: 10.3278/JOS2501W008

Writing Care Work: Reimagining Academic Writing and Its Support As Care

Andrea Scott

Abstract

This article draws on interdisciplinary theories of care to offer writing professionals a new way of theorizing academic writing and its support in German-speaking countries. The concept of care is a powerful lens for reframing writing as a social practice based on relational values like interdependence, connection, and curiosity. At the same time, the concept of care points upward to structures of inequality shaping academic labor in our field. Such a perspective on writing and writing care work invites renewed reflection on questions of growing importance post-pandemic: what structures enable or disable care for academic writers? And how can we build or strengthen infrastructure that helps writers and writing professionals thrive?

Introduction

The call for this special issue of JoSch asks contributors to reflect on "[w]hat [...] we need to rethink, what [...] we need to change" as we reimagine the future of writing centers in Europe. Since any vision of the future depends on what's imaginable in the present, I intentionally look outside writing studies as a field to develop a new lens for our interdisciplinary work. In particular, I draw on the robust and growing scholarly conversation on care to ask what the concept of care can illuminate about writing and what writing and its support can illuminate about care. More specifically, I ask the following speculative question: what if the feminist concept of care occupied a greater place in our thinking about epistemic practices at the university instead of the marketplace logics of individualistic competition and innovation? Drawing on theories of social reproduction, an important dimension of care theory, I also invite us to imagine: what if we understood our centers and writing support as sites of care—an analogy that helps us understand not only the importance of our work in the university's ecology but also its systemic devaluation? Instead of idealizing or moralizing care, I use the concept of care to help us ground our work in materialism so we can better see it as an institutional form of labor that both reproduces and disrupts structures of inequality.

To do this, this article orients readers to aspects of the scholarly discourse about care that have been under-examined in the transnational writing studies community. Since the concept of care addresses feelings, actions, and ethical obligations that are structural in nature, it is a particularly rich framework for exploring writing and its support as social

practices in higher education. This theoretical overview can also help JoSch readers better contextualize the emerging conversation about writing and care in writing studies communities on both sides of the Atlantic, a conversation that is likely to grow in the coming years since it is intertwined with larger questions about the future of work and gender equality.

Writing Center and Support Research About Care

A cluster of new works in the field of writing studies have taken up the theme of care in the aftermath of the pandemic. A sign of just how recent this trend is that most of the writing studies on the topic were published while this article was being drafted and revised. I began teaching writing seminars on care during the height of the pandemic in fall 2020, before COVID-19 vaccines were distributed. Since then, care has become an increasingly important concept for thinking structurally about the future of writing center work and consultations. Up until now, these works have mostly connected the concept of care to the themes of mothering, self-care, wellness, and affective labor, as I will discuss below. And the majority of these works privilege practice, which limits our ability to step back and come to terms theoretically with a concept of consequence to our field.

The most recent, and a particularly noteworthy, work on care to appear in writing studies as a field is the monograph Schreiben trotz Care-Arbeit: Strategien für Mütter* in der Wissenschaft [Writing Despite Care Work: Strategies for Mothers in the Academy]. It was published in fall 2024 by Vogelaar, a freelance coach specializing in writing support for caregivers and a co-founder of the online support community in German, The Writing Academic, which is arguably a close writing equivalent in Germany to the U. S.-based National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity. Building on the momentum of networks like Netzwerk Mutterschaft und Wissenschaft [Network Motherhood and the Academy] and edited collections on the structural burdens faced by mothers in the academy in Germany (e. g., Czerney/Eckert/Martin 2020; Haupt et. al 2020; Haupt et. al 2022), Vogelaar published the first handbook in the region directed at caregivers and their needs. Those who mother in the academy face a particular set of structural challenges and transformations, she argues, namely other-directed heteronomy, mental load, matrescence, guilt, and exhaustion, which make them cognizant of the seemingly irreconcilable conflict between mothering and academic labor (Vogelaar 2024: 22 ff.). Drawing on interdisciplinary research, Vogelaar walks her reader through the challenges facing new caregivers, including, the physical and psychological changes accompanying motherhood (Vogelaar 2024: 62 ff.) and the Gender Care Gap in Germany, whereby women assume on average 43 % more caregiving responsibilities than fathers (Vogelaar 2024: 51 ff.). Even as she critiques the academy's callous privileging of productivity at all costs and argues for equal care, the second half of Vogelaar's book offers a clear-eyed view of the concrete strategies that those who mother can use to sustain their academic careers and contribute their much needed (and underrepresented) perspectives to

the scholarly conversation (Vogelaar 2024: 78 ff.). A book of this quality and range in both theoretical orientation and practical advice does not exist in the U. S.

What does exist in the U. S. to a larger extent than in Germany is a growing conversation on the way that care(-work) shapes academic labor in writing centers. In their edited volume Storying Writing Center Labor for Anti-Capitalist Futures (2024), Giaimo and Lawson position writing centers as spaces engaging with six themes in labor activism, the last of which is "care work and sustainability." In this final section, the edited monograph contains seven short chapters on how, as the co-editors describe it, "mutual support, care work, solidarity, weirdness, and joy in communal practices can give rise to enjoyable and positive work experiences" in writing centers (Giaimo and Lawson 2024: 34). In the chapter most explicitly focused on care, Morris uses her personal experience with her mother's death during the pandemic to reflect on "the challenges that come with being a caretaker at home and a student/worker" in a writing center (Morris 2024: 179). The experience of life's precariousness during the pandemic led her, like many others, to "pause and re-think [her] relationship with work," a central theme in the edited volume (Morris 2024: 177). The article ends with a call for self-care, reflective of a growing focus in the field of writing center studies on wellness and work-life boundaries, themes that seem to be increasingly present in writing studies conversations in Germany as well (e. g., Homann 2024).

If Vogelaar's handbook develops practical strategies for writing amidst the structural obstacles of mothering, Giaimo and Lawson's edited volume suggests that personal narratives about lived experiences can help writing center studies as a field redefine work and its purpose in the wake of the pandemic. The latter book builds on Giaimo's monograph Unwell Writing Centers: Searching for Wellness in Neoliberal Educational Institutions and Beyond, the recent recipient of a 2024 IWCA Outstanding Book Award. Wellness, she argues, is a topic of interest to writing center professionals because it is intimately connected to questions of "labor, quality of life, and issues of access and inclusion" at the university (Giaimo 2023: 4). Giaimo recounts in her book how unprepared she was as a director to navigate unwellness in the workplace—from intoxicated students to a particularly traumatic experience with gun violence on her campus. The book attempts to remedy this, contributing to a growing body of research on wellness and writing center work, designed to address the increase in student mental health challenges and faculty, staff, and student burnout that writing professionals have been seeing in their centers and among themselves (Giaimo 2023: 5 ff.). Giaimo, like many of us, had come to see "stories about wellness as stories [....] also about labor rights" (Giaimo 2023: 9), inviting us to question the culture of "overwork" and precarious staffing in writing centers (Giaimo 2023: 10). Her book offers wellness interventions as part of its vision of the future of writing center work, including sample exercises for mindfulness (Giaimo 2023: 73 ff.), emergency planning, and risk assessment (Giaimo 2023: 84 ff).

Care enters the vocabulary of the book indirectly. She theorizes writing center work as a helping profession built on affective labor, which in turn invites writing professionals to develop an intersectional approach to combatting burnout (Giaimo 2023: 115). Affective

labor, a concept derived from the influential U. S.-based sociologist Hochschild (1983), is also cited as important to Vogelaar's thinking in her monograph, but in the latter's case the concept is invoked to illuminate societal expectations surrounding mothering (Vogelaar 2024: 53 ff.). Care is discussed in Unwell Writing Centers most explicitly (and surprisingly late) at the very end, when Giamo situates wellness in radical Black feminist traditions as important community strategies for mitigating racism, sexism, and poverty (Giaimo 2023: 119 ff.). Whereas wellness in Germany and elsewhere in Europe may conjure images of products and health resorts, in the U. S. wellness in scholarly discourse is synonymous with healing and self-care in Black activist circles, where it is defined as a liberatory practice and survival strategy under racial capitalism (see Rosenbaum and Talmor 2024). This idea is formulated most famously by activist and poet Audre Lorde in the Cancer Journals, in which she states: "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde 1988: 131). Giaimo expands on this idea to foreground methodologies for engaging in wellness research in writing centers in her WLN Digital Edited Collection titled Wellness and Care in Writing Center Work, which she compiled while writing her monograph (Giaimo 2021).

A recently published, smaller scale study on care has used collaborative autoethnography as a method for exploring writing center work as a form of care. Lane at al. draw on sociologists Hobart and Kneese's concept of "radical care" (Hobart and Kneese 2020) to question the way that writing centers have traditionally been conceptualized in U. S.-based literature as "cozy" homes of comforting care (Lane et al. 2022). As an alternative framework, they invoke Hobart and Kneese's definition of radical care as a "set of vital but underappreciated strategies for enduring precarious worlds" and a "feeling with, rather than feeling for, others" (Hobart and Kneese 2020: 1 f) to re-interpret their diverse experiences with care in writing center spaces during the pandemic. Consultations created space for tutors and tutees to bridge the intimacies between their home life and the university, they argue; and writing centers provided a critical buffer against academic precarity through forms of caring with students that helped the latter deal with expectations and structures perceived as uncaring, including unrealistic linguistic expectations surrounding the academic writing of multilingual international students (Lane et al. 2022: n. p.).

And finally, the most richly theoretical piece on care and writing centers was authored very recently by peer tutors at a small liberal arts college in the U. S. in the WLN Digital Edited Collection titled The Post-Pandemic Writing Center (Rice et al. 2024). Abraham et al. describe writing centers as a gendered "care system" because of the care they provide to writers who may have felt particularly uncared for as writers during the pandemic (Abraham et al. 2024: n. p.). This experience prompted their center to develop a holistic approach to tutoring that they call "care-based inquiry" and define as an approach that "empowers [tutors] to expand what writers understand to be possible in the center, set boundaries that protect their own well-being, and more effectively serve writers by scaffolding for an individualized and fulfilling session" (Abraham et al. 2024: n. p.). Part of the scaffolding recommended involves ensuring that consultations uphold the principle of reciprocity, or not becom-

ing over-caring (e. g., "How do you feel about this") nor overly invested in a productivity mindset (e. g., "I need to get this done as fast as possible"); instead they recommend intervening with questions like "how can we work together to address your needs" (Abraham et al. 2024: n. p.). The peer tutors conclude that conceptualizing writing centers as "trauma informed, gender-responsive" care systems invites us to "take a step toward effectively thinking about productivity and de-gendering care models in the writing center so that efficiency and emotional vulnerability do not harm the well-being of the tutor or writer" (Abraham et al. 2024: n. p.).

This article builds on these contributions by focusing our attention on some of the most widely cited theories of care that have not yet been considered (or, in the case of "radical care," robustly considered) in studies of academic writing and its support at universities. Theories of care—and social reproduction—are powerful lenses for addressing the desire of writers (and writing professionals) to develop a language for describing academic writing outside of the more neoliberal rhetoric of productivity, innovation, and individual achievement. In what follows I explore the relevance of these theories, particularly those developed by influential feminist philosophers Tronto, Puig de la Bellacasa, and Haraway, for writing professionals in Germany, the geographical home of JoSch, and a vital region for transnational writing studies in Europe.

Writing as Care

Care is the focus of a large and transnational scholarly conversation in many humanities and social science fields, with some its most prominent theorists situated in the fields of political theory, anthropology, sociology, and feminist theory (e. g., Hobart/Kneese 2020; Malatino 2020; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Segal 2024; Tronto 2016). Care as a concept is notoriously difficult to pin down precisely because it encapsulates many of the core political crises of our time: the lack of resources to attend to activities of real value and the increasingly market-driven orientation of institutions charged with meeting basic needs like education, health, and safety. In the most widely cited definition, care is described by feminist political theorists Fisher and Tronto (1990) as a "species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we may live in it as well as possible" (cited in Tronto 2015: 3; emphasis added). In short, care mends and tends to the social fabric of experience. It is, as writer and artist Costella puts it, a "fundamental action and tool for our immediate and generational subsistence and well-being"; it is a "shared, but not equalizing or consistent, need" (Costello 2020: 27).

Because it is so integral to everyday experience, care "shows up everywhere in our lives" as a set of practices that are relational and ongoing (Tronto 2015: 3). In Tronto's definition, care is enormously consequential because it "shapes what we pay attention to, how we think about responsibility, what we do, how responsive we are to the world around us, and what we think of as important in life" (Tronto 2015: 8). These questions call attention as well to

the unequal giving and receiving of care along the axes of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and ability.

In this way, care has fundamental connections to academic writing and its ecologies at the university. The lens of care invites academic writers to reflect on what they are paying attention to in their research and teaching, how they define their responsibilities, and how responsive their research and teaching are to others and the world around them. Such questions can also be held up as a mirror to the field of writing studies in Europe and elsewhere. What are we attending to in our research and practice? Who and what are at the center of our conversations and actions? Who and what are at the margins and why? How do we define what we do and its importance? And what assumptions underwrite these responses?

Such a care-based framing also calls on us to ask who is this we and whom does it serve. As Murphy has argued, it is important not to conflate care with positive emotions, since thinking with the concept of care demands an attending to "who is uncared for, who receives care and who does not, and who is expected to perform care work, with or without pay" (cited in Hobart/Kneese 2020: 8). Such questions can be applied to our research and the care work provided to academic writers at the university, as I will later explore.

Since caring about writing and writers is arguably at the core of our profession's ethos, it's worth remembering that care is inherently contradictory with its own risks and rewards. Puig de la Bellacasa calls the words "[c]are, caring, carer [...] [b]urdened words, contested words" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 1):

> *To care can feel good; it can also feel awful. It can do good; it can oppress. Its essential character to humans and countless living beings makes it all the more susceptible to convey control. (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 1)*

As Bondi (2008) puts it, care is "double-edged and paradoxical" depending on the social context of its use, "inspiring a vast range of strong feelings in both care-givers and care-recipients" (cited in Baker/Burke 2023: 22). "Care can turn into forms of control, abuse, even cruelty, from care giver or receiver," Segal reminds us, "if there is no mutual recognition or the potential for compassionate empathy within the relationship" (Segal, 2023: 8). Such a framework reminds us that caring can be paternalistic; it can upend the reciprocity that writing consultants and directors seek to achieve. In this way, care as a theoretical lens makes visible what Segal calls an "affirmation of relationality and fragility" (over "autonomy and power") (Segel, 2023: 4–5), an understanding of what feminist philosopher Butler refers to as the difficult and necessary "struggle for social and political forms that are committed to fostering a sustainable interdependency on egalitarian terms" (Butler 2012: 149).

Such theoretical framing invites us to see writing—and writing pedagogies—through a lens amendable to some of the field's most privileged values, while also inviting reflection about the ways we might not be living up to those values. Writing professionals aspire to create spaces at universities for "sustainable interdependency on egalitarian terms." They do this by seeking to build community around the writing process and offering writing consulta-

tions auf Augenhöhe [eye to eye] with writers. Writers in these sessions are often navigating relationships with advisors that are unequal and careers that may be uncertain. What they care about in their writing will inevitably at times be at odds with their mentors' interests, which can make academic relationships feel "burdened" and "contested." But at the same time, reframing writing as an act of care gives writers—and writing professionals—a new language for describing scholarly conversation. Instead of focusing on the individual choices of the writer in developing a research project, a care lens allows us to step back and create space for writers (and ourselves) to reflect on other values and needs, including our own positionality in structures of power. As Khúc put it recently in her account of what she calls the pedagogy of unwellness, or the foundational principle from disability studies that we are all differentially unwell due to societal structures that enable or disable access to care, we might ask newly political versions of familiar, old questions: since writing must be systemically enabled, what structures do academic writers need to be built in order to flourish? What needs can the writer ask to be met? (Khúc 2023: 27) And what can we advocate for as a field?

Cultural theorist hooks (2018) views such structural understandings of care as fundamental to human thriving. Indeed, she describes care as a "dimension of love," even as she acknowledges that it can be present in the absence of love (hooks 2018: 8). This liberatory love, according to hooks, is described in its most capacious formulation as "the will to nurture our own and one another's spiritual growth" (hooks 2018: 6).

Since writing centers and support structures aspire to nurture another person's deeply meaningful growth, such an orientation has rich pedagogical potential for conceptualizing writing as a means of social responsibility and engagement. As writing professionals, we could contextualize and adapt, for example, the community wellness planning tool from The Audre Lorde Project on how to break isolation. The website offers a tool popular in activist spaces, which in the U. S. are arguably seen as less divided from scholarly spaces than in academic communities in Germany. The heuristic asks participants to reflect on an "Event/Critical Moment/Conversation/Ask/Etc.." In the case of writing, this could be anything from a project deadline to an upcoming mentoring conversation. Participants are asked to answer the following questions for each care need. I have added the text "as a writer" to signify how this template is generative for thinking about the care-based needs of writers:

- What are the needs you anticipate during this event [as a writer?]
- Is it a heart, mind, body or community need?
- Who can help support these needs and how?
- Is there anything you'd like us to know? (Audre Lorde Project n. d.; brackets added)

In the U. S., I used this tool in a collaboration between my writing seminar Radical Care and an advanced art course on Sustainable Sculpture during an online pandemic semester in 2020. Students practiced articulating their needs and supporting each other as a community in meeting them. In collaboration with art Professor Sarah Gilbert, the Sculpture class developed a survey based on these questions to make works of art specifically for the first-

year students in my seminar. My writing students in the semesters since then have used versions of these questions to help them frame what they needed to complete our class's writing assignments with care. The value of such a framework is that it builds community based on interdependence, situating academic writing as more than the assertion of self-efficacy or the construction of rational discourse divorced from the bodymind and communities. Indeed, as Vogelaar's Schreiben trotz Care-Arbeit (2024) makes clear in the context of those who mother, writing needs are intimately connected with bodily, social, and material desires.

Such framing also invites us to see academic writing as a social practice dependent on an ethics and labor of care. Indeed, care may be the starting place for all consequential research in the social sciences and humanities. The prominent feminist philosopher Haraway argues that caring is at the very heart of moral intellectual inquiry: "caring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning" (Haraway 2016: 36). Curiosity, in this definition, is an act of subjugation to this "unsettling obligation" to know more in our "mixed up times"—times characterized by "unjust patterns of pain and joy, with unnecessary killing on ongoingness but also with necessary resurgence" (Haraway 2016: 1). Asking questions—striving to understand—is an act of accepting and inhabiting this difficulty and writing our way towards a better future. Framing research as the difficult and "unsettling obligation" to know more may help sustain a writer's motivation by calling attention to the larger purpose of the work.

In addition, by defining care as a moral imperative, Haraway evokes a longstanding philosophical tradition, one that dates to at least the 17th century, in which curiosity (like care) is defined as a Janus-faced. The curious person is one "who treats something with particular care and diligence," according to Covarrubias' Spanish dictionary in 1611 (Manguel 2015: 13). The curious person "labors to scrutinize things that are most hidden and reserved, and do not matter" (cited in Manguel 2015: 13). For Haraway, however, all of this scrutiny matters and is essential. As Manguel argues in Curiosity, "What we want to know and what we can imagine are the two sides of the same magical page" (5). Writers—and writing tutors—attend to this very possibility, seeking to understand and actualize what is beyond the horizon of what has been already imagined. In this way, they engage in speculative thinking, in world-making care.

Thinking about writing through the lens of care also allows us to reframe academic writing as relationally agentive and transgressive. For Haraway (2016), staying with the trouble means staying present with the challenges of our times and not succumbing to "sublime despair and its politics of sublime indifference" (Haraway 2016: 4). Caring enables writers to move past paralysis to give shape and purpose to words and worlds. The influential feminist philosopher Puig de la Bellacasa builds on this definition to define care as a "vital affective state, an ethical obligation, and a practical labor" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012: 197). She calls for a "speculative exploration of the significance of care for thinking and living in more-than-human worlds" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 1). In feminist academic writing, she sees this care

manifest itself on the page through affect, responsibility, and action, which show up as a series of rhetorical moves that can be transformed, I'd like to suggest, into a set of caring methods for writers who are situated in uncaring worlds. In the aftermath of Trump's re-election and rise of the AfD party in Germany (and other nationalist movements in Europe), these ideas, I believe, have taken on a renewed urgency, as scholars on both sides of the Atlantic reflect on their social role in times of political crisis where the very notion of democratic discourse and citizenship are under seige.

Toward a Rhetoric of Care Moves in Academic Writing

Puig de la Bellacasa's set of three rhetorical moves offer writing professionals a generative framework for helping academic writers stay with the trouble. Her precise terms, informed by Haraway's feminist philosophy, are thinking-with, dissenting-within, and thinking-for (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012). Thinking-with, she argues, "creates new patterns out of previous multiplicities, intervening by adding layers of meaning rather than questioning or confirming to ready-made categories" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012: 200). In other words, thinking-with involves bringing sources together to repattern our understanding of a phenomenon. It centers thick descriptions over tight definitions, privileging the messiness of what's hard to pin down, much as I am attempting to do in this article by thinking-with the concept of care. Thinking-with seeks out "transformative connections" that can help forge new collectives of readers (Puig de la Bellacasa: 201). Dissenting-within involves reflecting critically on one's positionality as a member within a community with shared responsibilities for the impact of one's arguments (Puig de la Bellacasa: 207). Informed by hooks, dissenting-within also involves disagreement, recognizing that "knowledge-making based on care, love and attachment is not incompatible with conflict" (Puig de la Bellacasa: 204). And finally, thinking-for involves valuing the "knowledge conceived in the process of dealing with situations that marginalize and oppress particular ways of living and knowing" (Puig de la Bellacasa: 208). It involves reflecting critically on the dangers of thinking for a person or a group, including appointing the self or others as spokespersons for marginalized groups or unreflexively appropriating others' experiences. Much like community-based forms of research, it involves building on the knowledge of those impacted by a problem or phenomenon and adopting a responsible approach to one's research. It also involves remaining attentive to the unknown and keeping in check the impulse to control writing in the face of complexity or uncertainty (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012 199 ff.).

Translating the concept of care into a pedagogy of writing with care could include integrating the following reflexive questions into our teaching and consultations:

- What does your writing attempt to maintain, continue, or repair?
- Where does it resist being innovative, disruptive, or instrumental?
- To whom or to what do you feel an "unsettling obligation" when you write? Why?
- What are you (not) paying attention to when you write? Why?

- To what extent does care show up in your writing as a feeling, a labor, or an obligation?
- How might you begin to care more, care less, or care differently about your writing?

If we pause on Puig de la Bellacasa's heuristic for care writing, we can ask other nuanced questions as well, which keep in play the paradoxes and competing allegiances in academic conversation.

- Thinking with: What new patterns does your writing help your readers see? Who are you "thinking with" in your writing? Why this group? Why now? How is your research topic multilayered? What thread connects these layers? Where must it resist neat categories and opt instead for thick description? How is your writing creating new communities of readers?
- Dissenting-Within: How does your positionality affect your writing/research? How did you come to care about this research problem or question? How do you build caring relationships (e. g., with your sources, your research subjects), while recognizing difference in views? How do those you study perceive the way you think about their practices? How open are you to dissenting perspectives from within your field?
- Thinking-For: How do you demonstrate awareness of the pitfalls of thinking for (e. g., appointing spokespersons, fetishizing the experience of others)? How do you build upon the knowledge of others impacted by this problem or question? How do you adopt an approach responsibly? How do you manage the impulse for control in your writing or research? How do you remain attentive to the unknown?

The purpose of this rather long list of questions is to model what the framework of care can surface in the representation, teaching, and tutoring of academic writing. It models a means of representing academic writing that is informed by an intersectional understanding of its contingencies. Such questions might also help us as a field uncover and scrutinize values and approaches that have traditionally been invisible or represented as ideologically neutral in the study and practice of writing. It can enable more speculative forms of thinking about our field's and writing's future(s) in troubled and troubling times.

Writing Centers as Institutional Sites of Social Reproduction

If writing can be theorized as a feeling, an obligation, and an act of care, to what extent do writing centers (and other structures of writing support) institutionalize that care? I am calling this labor writing care work to be inclusive of the many forms of freelance and salaried labor that happen in and around writing support in German-speaking countries—within and outside writing centers. Writing care work, I argue, is a form of labor that political theorists call social reproduction.

Broadly defined, social reproduction is the unpaid—or underpaid—labor required to make the political economy go round. My focus here is on the political economy of knowl-

edge production. Frasier (2016) describes social reproduction as the "activities of provisioning, care-giving and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds," including (but not limited to) "caring for the old, maintaining households, building communities and sustaining the shared meanings, affective dispositions and horizons of value that underpin social cooperation." Capitalism depends on these acts, even as it "free rides on them"—or undercompensates them. She goes on to say:

> *In capitalist societies much, though not all, of this activity goes on outside the market—in homes, neighbourhoods, civil-society associations, informal networks and public institutions, such as schools; and relatively little of it takes the form of wage labour. Non-waged social-reproductive activity is necessary to the existence of waged work, the accumulation of surplus value and the functioning of capitalism as such. None of those things could exist in the absence of housework, child-rearing, schooling, affective care and a host of other activities which serve to produce new generations of workers and replenish existing ones, as well as to maintain social bonds and shared understandings.*

Of course, writing care work is waged in our field—in the form of writing centers, writing consultations, writing workshops, and writing retreats, for example, but it often serves to "maintain social bonds" by building community and developing "shared understandings" of academic discourse and labor within what are overwhelmingly public institutions in Germany. Yet it is also a form of care work that invisibly supports the more valued and visible labor of knowledge production in the form of writing that leads to publications, degrees, and academic careers. Our work as writing professionals in supporting and mentoring writers helps produce generations of academic workers and replenish existing ones, not only by supporting writers in the completion of their projects but also by assuming the labor of care that professors or research associates do not always want to—or have time to—assume: the close one-on-one work with writers needed to build the caring discursive communities that help bring projects to fruition.

The literature on social reproduction is rife with accounts of how this care work is difficult, if impossible, to scale. It is labor-intensive precisely because—like domestic care work, like teaching built on an ethics of care, where feelings, emotions, and relatedness matter (e. g., Seidl 2023), it happens on a human scale, one-on-one or in small groups. Aspirationally collaborative and supportive, it is also largely gendered as female. According to a recent survey, 83.3 % of writing professionals in Austria, for example, identify as women and 2.7 % identify as non-binary (Dengscherz/Mertlitsch/Wetschanow 2021: 311). It would not surprise me if statistics are similar in other German-speaking countries.

This gendered dynamic helps illuminate the structural devaluation of writing care work at universities. "While capitalism as a system only cares about profit, profit being capital's life blood and motor," Bhattacharya (2020) argues, "the system has a relation of reluctant dependence on processes and institutions of life-making" (n. p.). Support structures like

writing centers and consultations are arguably enlisted for their "life-making" work in sustaining academic (re)production. Even if capitalism is dependent on these cooperative activities to replenish and support the labor pool, "capital is reluctant to spend any portion of its profits on processes that sustain and maintain life," Bhattacharya concludes: "This is why all care work is devalued or unpaid under capitalism while institutions of life making [...] are either constantly privatized or underfunded" (n. p.).

This reluctance to spend funds on writing care work may also help explain why so many writing centers are still without permanent public funding in Germany (see Hoffmann/Freise/Tilmans 2023) and those with permanent funding still often report structural challenges ranging from high teaching loads to the undesired exclusion of teaching or research from their contracts that inhibit their integration into the university as equal partners. It also explains why a number of popular academic writing retreats in Germany and Austria—like the writer's studio, the Schreibashram, and schreibfertig retreats for academic writers who identify as women--are organized outside of the university as an institution, functioning as privatized spaces that offer intensive forms of support and care unavailable to the same degree at public institutions. At these retreats writers are cared for in meaningful ways: they have a schedule, individual writing consultations with experienced writing professionals, and built-in community with other writers; they are also given healthy meals and instruction in bodymind practices. The robust network of freelance writing consultants in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and beyond who partner with academics outside of the waged labor contract of the university is further evidence of the privatization of life-making labor around writing in the academy. These colleagues fill a critical gap in university services and needs, indeed a crisis of care in the mentoring of M. A. and Ph.D. students. They are the invisible network of support that makes academic labor within the university—publications, theses, career advancement—possible within an increasingly competitive and precarious labor market (see Bahr et al. 2022).

Given these trends, what might it mean for the future of writing centers if we were to see ourselves not as innovators in our field but as maintenance workers in the ecology of knowledge production? We are part of the infrastructure—at times neglected, but undoubtedly necessary—that makes academic writing possible (and pleasurable) for many writers. What are we in these roles helping to maintain? What are we helping to repair? And just how much does the political economy of the university depend on the largely invisible social reproduction labor of writing professionals? We might be, as uncomfortable as it may sound, rather closely related to the growing number of unnamed and uncited ghost writers that help keep whole bureaucratic enterprises afloat (see Brandt 2015). How can we, as a field, advocate for more equitable labor conditions for ourselves and the writers we support?

Conclusion

Thinking about academic writing through the lens of care invites us to see ourselves and writers differently and to ask new questions. Who benefits from our work as writing care workers? How might caring relationships at universities be made more equal? And how might we disrupt pressures to make our labor "scalable," "efficient," or "valuable"?

This article is a call for more research on the material conditions of our labor—both its problems and its possibilities—in Germany and beyond. It's also a call for a clear-eyed view of the care work that we do perform—as writers and as writing professionals. Sometimes a great deal of self-preservation can inhere in considering how we might care less or care differently about our jobs. A care framework invites us to reconsider our relationships to and within political economies that don't serve our flourishing. Only when we are unsentimental in our thinking about care can we get out from under the grip of paternalistic imperatives to care ("the caring teacher," the "labors of love") and reclaim care on our own terms—as a cooperative and potentially transgressive act that can nourish our mutual thriving.

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