Affective Architecture: Encountering Care in Built Environments
Linda Kopitz

Abstract

Between urban sprawl and a return to the rural, between technological advancements and historical preservation, built environments become a productive sphere to explore imaginations of a shared future on a changing planet. At the same time, contemporary architectural writing increasingly appears to extend further than considerations of environmental care – particularly in relation to spaces and places frequently criticized for their "uncaring" neoliberal politics. This article will argue that architecture is increasingly infused and saturated with affective connotations of care. Approaching global examples critically allows for a further exploration of the interdependency between spaces, places, and communities that care. In this understanding, care becomes, quite literally, structural.

Licence

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Introduction

Between urban sprawl and a return to the rural (cf. Taylor 2023), between technological advancements and historical preservation, built environments become a productive sphere to explore imaginations of a shared future on a changing planet. At the same time, contemporary architectural design increasingly appears to extend further than considerations of environmental care, particularly in relation to spaces and places frequently criticized for their "uncaring" neoliberal politics. The starting point for this article was precisely a space like this: a photograph[1] of a room with the floor and walls covered in blue fabric, empty except for three white lounge chairs in the shape and (presumed) softness of a pillowy cloud, and two white floor lamps, standing delicately on wooden legs. Eliciting ideas of sleepiness and calmness and serenity, the room appears to keep the bustle of the outside world out with long, white, flowing curtains. Somewhat surprisingly, this room is one of the offices of a German tech start-up specializing in safety and security systems – superimposing the exploitative aspects of a 24/7 start-up-culture with the connotations of serenity of the bedroom as the presumably most private room within the home.[2] Blurring the boundaries between relaxation and efficiency, mindfulness and productivity under a larger schema of caring values, this layering of connotations is neither accidental nor – as I will argue here – unique. If "space and its making are *political*" (Gámez and Rogers 2008, 22, emphasis in original), a deeper engagement with the architectural process, from the initial idea to the built structure, is paramount to understanding the social, political, and cultural connotations of space-making.

As both concept and practice, "care" is as interdisciplinary as it is intangible – traversing practical concerns in healthcare to philosophical approaches and political discussions, from caring for the (human) bodies directly around us to caring about more abstract concepts like the environment or the world at large. Tracing care in architecture allows us to think differently about not just what care means but also where care can be located. Here, I am following an understanding of care as both an imaginary and a practice – or, as the members of the Care Collective phrase it: "Care is our individual and common ability to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive – along with the planet itself" (2020, 6). In the absence of one universal definition of care, approaching care as a constantly shifting and changing imaginary, an "ability", allows for an engagement with possibility and, for the purposes of this article, with architecture as a site of becoming.

If "architecture can creatively and critically invest in the potentiality of spaces yet to come" (Frichot and Loo 2013, 3), paying attention to the concept of care in the process of designing and building also has the potential to ultimately create more caring spaces. Drawing on award-winning examples ranging from the workspace re-imagined as "hub and home" to governmental buildings (re-designed to "radiate transparency"), I argue in this article that architectural design is increasingly infused and saturated with affective connotations of care by: 1) blurring the boundaries between corporate and

the private; 2) emphasizing nature and natural materials in built environments; and 3) highlighting the embodied experience of spaces.[3] At the same time, the potential of architectural writing to both ground the intangibility of care on the one hand, and strategically employ care as a rhetoric – a 'care-washing'– of neoliberal processes on the other, highlights the ambivalences in these processes. As Frichot and Loo suggest: "Architecture invests in words, or all the things that can be said and written about a built (or unbuilt and speculative) form, as much as it engages in its seemingly central task, which is to design, form and construct indisputably material edifices, spaces and objects" (2013, 4). To affirm this understanding of architecture as embedded in practices of not just place-making but simultaneous meaning-making, I draw on examples from across the globe, consciously blending the boundaries between different projects to trace how the notion of care, intermingling with other values like openness, dialogue, and transparency, has been employed in the framing of a Taiwanese meatpacking factory as much as the Swiss headquarters of a luxury brand, in a judicial building in Singapore just as in a German start-up company.

By intentionally establishing connections between not only different types of buildings and different architectural approaches but also different geographical regions and different requirements, I aim to emphasize the underlying notion of care that has become prevalent in architectural practices over recent years. What might at first glance come across as a random selection of examples actually follows an algorithmic logic that doubles as the methodological process for this article: the diverse projects and contexts cited here are all categorized under "Commercial & Offices" (which quite strikingly also includes institutional buildings) on the curated architecture platform *Architecture Daily*[4]*,* thus collectively reveal the prevalence of care as valorisation in both corporate and public architecture. Approaching these examples from a critical media studies perspective – taking into account the visuals, as well as how they are described and embedded into the website – teases out conceptions and contradictions in the architectural inscription of care. Activating Hays's understanding of architecture as a "specific kind of imagination – an intimate blend of sensing, imaging, and conceptualizing" (2010, 357), the methodological approach to these examples is similarly an exploration of the play between thinking about and sensing through built environments. The repetitive format of these marketing materials – following the same (or at least highly similar) structure and bound by the expectations and affordances of the same website – foregrounds the connections between these seemingly accidental examples.

It is important to note that, while the examples discussed here might qualify as responses to Gámez and Rogers's "call for an architecture of change" (2008), they neither necessarily or intentionally, nor actively or convincingly, offer alternative approaches to contemporary questions. While acknowledging that "architecture as product and process is always embedded in social dynamics" (2010, xi), Till similarly points out that the engagement of (most) architects with these dynamics remains somewhat lacking. Authorship also plays a relevant role in this context: as marketing materials, these texts and images are carefully selected, curated and structured to tell a specific story about the concept-becoming-concrete. The disclaimer "text description provided by the architects", prominently positioned at the top of each page, further underlines this

conscious interpretation of design by the architects who quite literally construct these meanings. Prompted through the restrictive and recurring, established and expected format of *Architecture Daily* to put the "unspoken" conditions of architectural design into actual words, the complex positions of practitioners that are "clearly complicated by [architecture's] dual role as art *and* industry" (Jobst 2013, 73, emphasis in original) become tangible. Tronto famously argues that "using care as a critical concept will require a fundamental reorientation of the disciplines of architecture and urban planning" (2019, 26). How, then, can we move from an "Architecture of Change" to an "Architecture of Care" – and more specifically one encompassing the political, social, material, and emotional conditions of care as mentioned above? Tronto's answer to this question is the call for an architecture willing and able to share the "responsibilities of caring for our world" (2019, 28). In this article, I elaborate on this answer by suggesting that shifting the emphasis from *caring for* to *caring through* and *caring in* can expand the direction and scope of care as both a concept and a practice.

Despite the architectural projects discussed here being framed in *Architecture Daily* through their outstanding excellence, there is an undeniable similarity in these (re)designs: there is an undercurrent of genericness that resembles what Koolhaas (1998) has described as the "generic city", albeit on a smaller scale. Yet, it is precisely the common prevalence of an explicit and implicit discourse of care that makes these examples a productive starting point to demonstrate how architecture not only shapes the conditions of a space spatially, but also our understanding of that space figuratively. Moving from the physical setting – and the absence of physical boundaries therein – of a *caring space* in the first section "Hub/Home", via the *caring materiality* of natural building materials in the second section "Material/Intangible", to the negotiation of embodied *caring connections* in the third section "Emptiness/Encounter", this article aims to challenge our understanding of the capacity of buildings.

1.   Hub/Home: Traversing Boundaries between the Corporate and the Private

While situating the animating concern for their book "The Room of One's Own", Aureli and Tattara argue that "the separation between house and workspace is in decline as production unfolds everywhere" (2016). At the same time, it should be noted that this unfolding of production *everywhere* is not a unidirectional move: while we mostly talk about the blurring of clear boundaries between work/life as it comes to work entering the private sphere, the opposite also appears to be true. With the affectively charged imaginary of the "home" – in the sense of the private, but also the safe and the serene – infusing the workplace in the examples discussed here, the unique affordances of the "home" simultaneously become embedded in the neoliberal logic of productivity. If "architecture, as both process and form, can be understood as the result of a multiplicity of desires – for shelter, security, privacy and boundary control; for status, identity and reputation; for profit, authority and political power; for change or stability; for order or chaos" (Dovey 2013, 134) – the negotiation of these desires in the design of corporate buildings becomes particularly interesting. Positioning the neoliberal workplace as a caring space through the affective connotations of the home, as I argue in this section, underlines an understanding of architectural writing as embedded in processes of meaning-making.

With a "spatial organization where limits between workspaces and common areas are diffused", the offices of the informatics company iGarpe-GPISoft in San Javier, Spain[5] are exemplary of this understanding. Structurally, the building organizes both open spaces, partially separated seating areas and closed office – with "closed" meaning separated by wood-framed glass here – around an open atrium to establish "direct relationships between the team". A collaborative, balanced work life becomes not an attitude or approach achieved through and embedded in corporate culture, but rather an architectural challenge to be achieved with open floor plans rather than through managerial decisions. Going even further, the common areas of the Spanish informatics office are specifically "conceptually considered as domestic spaces", enveloping moments of relaxation within structures of productivity, private conversations within the corporate context. The new building of the T-HAM PABP meat processing factory, located in Southern Taiwan,[6] the largest one in the country, similarly states an intention to "upgrade the working environment of their factory workers and their daily working experience" as one of the main animating concerns in the architectural process – albeit in fourth place, preceded by priorities to increase productivity, expand production capacities, and maintain corporate standards. In what might be one of the least-caring industries imaginable – both in environmental impact and labor conditions – the reconceptualization of the factory to be "neither a shed, nor a fridge-like box" highlights an attention to the well-being of employees inside as much as to the (public) perception from the outside. The light-filled spaces for social interaction in the front of the building in addition to access to the rooftop has not only "made the factory workers' daily experience much more pleasant".

Here, again, the link between design and desire becomes imminent. As Ballantyne argues, "most buildings most of the time are commissioned with the expectation that one's current needs will be better accommodated than they were before the move into the new building" (2013, 194). While there certainly is an expanding dialogue between design as a practice and as a form of resistance to social, political, and environmental issues,[7] the emphasis on care as governing principle and guiding value becomes undermined by a near constant linking between "better motivation and improved product quality" here. In neoliberal logic, "happy" workers will be willing to stay longer in these enhanced working environments – both in terms of working hours as in professional career duration – and channel the architecturally augmented "motivation" into their labor. Following Tronto's suggestion that "even if caring needs are recognized, they are often in conflict with each other" (2019, 30), the negotiation of the dimensions and hierarchies of care through architectural writing become particularly interesting. If "neoliberalism is uncaring by design" (The Care Collective 2020, 10), it is interesting to see how design itself attempts to re-inscribe caring values into clearly neoliberalist processes. Notably, this also extends from a spatial organization to other, seemingly purely aesthetic choices.

Writing about Luis Barragán's emotional approach to architecture, Van den Bergh points out an "architectural mise en scène of space and light, material and color, of smell and sound, movement and time" (2006, 1). Strategically using the same strategies that are also used in more private contexts – warm lighting to create an atmosphere

of calmness, for instance – blurs the lines between the private and the corporate even further. Using their own architectural and design practice as a case study in humanistic architecture, Richard Mazuch and Rona Stephen conclude that "visual monotony can contribute to physiological and emotional stress" (2005, 50). Interestingly, the color palettes in the examples here consciously break this visual monotony, effectively shifting the attention from a potentially monotonous work to a visually stimulating environment. These aesthetic choices, meant to "regulate privacy and assure comfort" (as in the iGarpe-GPISoft offices) and raise "the morale and pride in the workforce" (as in the T-HAM PABP factory) are also strategic choices embedded in existing power dynamics. While undoubtedly adding another layer to the problematic absence of recognition of domestic work, the blurring between these spheres within both the home and the workplace also blends the ideologies connected to these spaces under a neoliberal umbrella. If the "domestic space as a space of retreat and intimacy unburdened by working relationships" (Dogma 2016) is (re)situated in the sphere of productivity, the separation between work/life becomes even more challenging than already assumed. This emphasis on care could also be understood as a dual defense against critical concerns raised about "social exclusivity in the design and production of the built environment" (Jenkins 2010, 19) on the one hand, and about exploitative work practices on the other. This ambivalence further points to a necessary carefulness when reading care in built environments, highlighting the importance of the context and contextualization of these examples.

If socio-cultural concerns – from politics and economics to desire – indeed constitute architecture's "perennial sites of negotiation" (Grosz 2001, xvi), an exploration of the implicit and explicit emphasis placed on care within presumably "uncaring" spheres becomes paramount for a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between the built environment and the bodies moving in and through it. Clearly, the shift of the connotations of "home" from the private to the private *sector* is cause for concern. At the same time, there is a recursive element within the discourses presented here: these examples partially reverberate the modernist architectural conviction that fundamental social and political change can be implemented (solely) by design. The contradiction that Gámez and Rogers see "between the goal of social change and those of market capitalism and institutionalized power" (2008, 20) could arguably be transferred from modernist architecture to the present, from urban architecture to corporate architecture. With a quite optimistic tone, Bell suggests that for communities and individuals, the process of designing the built environment has the potential to "solve their struggles by reshaping their existence" (2008, 14). This approach to understanding architecture as a proactive strategy in tackling social, cultural, political, and environmental issues resonates with a framing of architectural choices as "creating a kind work environment"[8] or embodying "autonomy, freedom, solidarity".[9] Traversing the boundaries between the corporate and the private, then, also traverses the complicated line separating a re-imagination of the workplace from a mere "care-washing". Caught between the promise of care and the premise of capitalism, contemporary architectural writing appears to perform a bridging between these contradictory demands by inscribing values into structures – and, quite notably, the materials used to build them.

2. Material/Intangible: Tracing Care in Built Environments

Existing research on the connection between architecture and wellbeing frequently focuses on the architectural and interior design of (mental) health facilities.[10] Consequently, the role of architecture in these spaces is reduced to a supporting one for clinical practitioners in a top-down hierarchy that re-inscribes existing power discrepancies between patients and healthcare professionals. Instead, this article consciously stays away from both private residences and healthcare facilities to trace the affective potential of care in buildings where care is not conventionally a primary consideration. Conceptualized as "the feel and emotional resonance of place" (Duff 2013, 217), this approach also connects and intersects with Birdsall et al.'s exploration of how "values" are mediated and experienced through the senses in urban, public spaces (2021). Speaking about the shifting paradigms in architecture from the 1980s to now, Hayes argues for an "ontology of the atmospheric—of the only vaguely defined, articulated, and indeed perceptible, which is nevertheless everywhere present in its effects" (2010, 358). The "atmospheric", then, closely relates to the ideas of affective dimensions of care as an architectural value proposed here. This section proposes that materiality plays a decisive role in conjuring these caring, atmospheric spaces – particularly through the emphasis on natural building materials.

A case in point: the *Swatch and Omega Campus* in Biel, Switzerland,[11] encompassing the headquarters, factory, and museum of the renowned watch manufacturer, is one of the largest hybrid mass timber structures worldwide. The choice of timber as the main building material is contextualized by the architects as simultaneously caring for the environment – as the material "holds much promise for the future" – and for the well-being of employees – as "wood environments are known to contribute to greater occupant happiness". Underneath this reasoning, however, there appears to be yet another logic: while the use of wood is framed as a vehicle for care on the one hand, they are framed as an incentive for productivity on the other. What architect Luis Barragán poignantly referred to as "emotional architecture" (see Bergh 2006) strives for deeper sensory resonance, which could also be understood as a step away from a more technology-driven approach to both the design process and its results. Interestingly, technology also moves into the background in most of the descriptions – almost as if highlighting smart technologies and smart materials is diametrically opposed to the emphasis on the natural, the pure, the caring. The previously mentioned Taiwanese meat processing factory, for instance, is covered in textured tiles made from clay mimicking "the fertile agricultural lands of this southern county" – a typical Taiwanese cladding material evoking a sense of heritage and continuation of tradition, a sense of the "known" in an accelerated, globalized industry. Not coincidentally, the natural material also helps to maintain the building's internal temperature, which is of the highest importance to ensure an adherence to the strict quality standards of producing exportable meat products. This dual function of natural materials in providing comfort while at the same time enhancing productivity can also be traced in other examples. Instead of an intangible and immaterial atmosphere, then, the focus is squarely placed on organic material as embodiment of care. Common to these examples is their introduction of natural elements, both in building materials and interior design, while at the same time

opposing the growth and uncontrollability of nature with clearly designated "natural" areas. In doing so, the design draws on the calming effects of nature experiences (as for instance Franco et al. 2017 have discussed), while at the same time entrapping these experiences within the spatially planned structure of the built environment.

Transferring ideas about the rural idyll to the urban sphere, the integration of plants within these corporate architectures resembles what Boer has called "scripted environments" (2018). A similar aesthetic – a ground floor quite literally grounding plants, which extend into a vertically open floor plan – can be found across the examples categorized in *Architecture Daily*, from the offices of the Spanish electronic and informatics company discussed earlier to the administrative spheres of the Chinese Guangming Public Service Platform. Harting et al.'s terminology of "urban nature" "admits the presence of nature even in those human environments that some consider the antithesis of the natural" (2014, 208). In what is – somewhat optimistically – called a "garden" in these architectural instances, the plants are not potted but still spatially distanced from the rest of the space: placed in strategically located cutouts of the floor paneling, centering the looming and lush palm trees as the middle point of an open atrium or dividing paths with a succulent-laden barrier, this "natural" presence within the "urban" remains nonetheless somewhat separate. Franco et al. (2017) emphasize the multi-sensory aspect of nature experiences, which in turn links the well-being of nature with the importance of not just vision, but all senses. If "perhaps touch is not just skin contact with things, but the very life of things in the mind" (McLuhan 1994, 108), the haptic could be assumed to play an integral role in creating the experience of (the benefits of) nature within the built environment. In the examples discussed here, the integration of natural materials as well as organic bodies nevertheless remains restricted to the visual: out of (physical) reach, the natural needs to be "felt" rather than "touched", it appears. Through the shifting and changing charge of both materials and spaces created with and by these materials, the "feel" of nature can interestingly also be found outside of notably green and/or natural buildings.

With its imposing walls of curved aluminum panels and glass, the Guangming Public Service Platform,[12] a dual office and administration building in Shenzhen, China, does not immediately evoke connotations of nature and the natural from the outside. Nonetheless, framed quite poetically as resembling a "vessel floating on the mountain", the perforated material not only lets fresh air into atrium spaces, but also creates intricate, flower-like patterns from the inside. DeLanda proposes thinking about form and structure not as something imposed from the outside, but rather "as something that comes from within the materials, a form that we tease out of those materials as we allow them to have their say in the structure we create" (2004, 21). Despite the material hardness of both glass and aluminum plates in this example, the built structure teases a softness out of them, allowing the building to become a flowing, breathing counterpoint to the stillness of the skyscrapers around it. This understanding requires an openness to both the affordance of the materials in themselves and their connectivity or, in the words of Hale, "connecting, not cutting off; cultivating and following the flows of force rather than imposing upon space the sentence of a closed or even 'finished' object for static contemplation or inhabitation" (2013, 127).

This is precisely what I mean by *tracing* care in built environments: with an emphasis on natural materials, particularly wood and stone, and flowing forms, particularly circles and waves, the examples discussed here insist on care as something that leaves traces, which in turn accumulate to affectively charge the spaces created with and through these materials. In "The Cultural Politics of Emotion", Ahmed begins with the suggestion that "bodies take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others" (2004, 1). Following this understanding, charging the built environment with "care" has the potential to envelop the bodies within these spheres and spaces with(in) care. This also underlines how the caring connotations of the home, as discussed in the previous section, can become entangled with the affective materiality of nature through the (re)imagination of conventionally non-caring spaces. As an intangible, almost infectious, force, care appears to move from the building materials to the built structure, infusing the open space between these materials and structures as well as affecting the bodies moving around and within them. Shifting our attention from what is there to what is *not* there – the human body – the following section further complicates an understanding of care as simultaneously grounded yet intangible.

3.   Emptiness/Encounters: On the Absence of the Body

"Architecture and urbanism are always concerned with the future" (2019, 12), Fitz and Krasny write in the introduction to *Critical Care*. Fundamental in (literally) building the future, architecture is at the same time also concerned with the imagination of more livable futures – for our environments, but also our own bodies, our own selves. Whereas the discursive negotiation of natural building materials and their relation to both sustainable and affective experience, as discussed above, is more concerned with the former, the positioning and movement of the human body within such charged spaces should not be overlooked. Between a striking emptiness and the promise of more meaningful encounters, this section explores how the absence of the body adds a further political dimension to the architectural imagination of caring spaces. Replacing the clear lines of the "cubicle office" or the "assembly line", the design of the examples discussed in this article quite literally opens up new conceptions of how public and private infrastructures "work". At the same time, the emphasis on transparency and visibility could also be understood as a perversion of the panopticon as a "socio-spatial diagram of one-way visibility wherein practices and subjectivities are produced to meet the anonymous gaze of authority" (Dovey 2013,137), particularly in the corporate/ public settings discussed here. Rather than an unidirectional visibility, the control through an invisible authority becomes dispersed to everyone in the room as well as to the room itself – again juxtaposing previously discussed senses of privacy and serenity.

Framed in clear contrast to historical perceptions of the juridical complex and its architectural embodiment, the Singapore State Courts,[13] which comprise district and magistrate courts in fifty-three vertically stacked courtrooms and fifty-four hearing chambers, extend this idea of openness: the design eschews a reflecting facade in favor of a series of open terraces, naturally completed with lush planted gardens, and "the court tower as a result appears light, open, and welcoming". Yet, precisely by performing an architectural openness, these spaces remain highly structured and streamlined,

especially with regards to the implicit potential for interaction. The spatial division of the Singapore State Courts into two separate towers – the one in the front accommodating the courtrooms and the one in the back the juridical offices – is specifically designed to "not only bring light deep into the building but help keep the circulation of the judges, persons-in-custody, and the public separate". Following the understanding that "architecture is always and everywhere implicated in practices of power" (Dovey 2013, 133), the structural inscription of different spheres underneath a layer of welcoming openness keeps the existing practices of power in place.

The Huis van Albrandswaard,[14] the office building of the Dutch municipality of Albrandswaard, similarly plays with the idea of interaction through spatial connectivity: "The cafeteria for the civil servants is merged with the sports cafeteria of the connecting gym. This encourages more interaction between council members and citizens". However, this architectural choice ultimately does not encourage dialogue, but rather a sense of mirroring by portraying civil servants as "just like us" while not actually providing meaningful access to mutual civic exchange. Interestingly, the municipal building is one of the rare examples of a featured project depicting people within the photographs, and yet only underlines this point: the only (human) body featured in the selection of thirteen photographs is a municipality employee. Framed and half concealed by the walls of a towering wooden cubicle, the employee, already small within the vast openness of the room itself, is looking down at a laptop screen opposite an empty chair, evoking connotations of an inaccessible, impersonal bureaucratic apparatus more than an interactive sphere. Although open spaces can be a potential critique on the crowdedness and business of modern life – recalling "silence as an architectural form all its own" (Hays 1984, 22) – the silence in this image rather detaches the building from the life both inside and outside its walls. Assuming that creating caring spaces for communities is only possible through discourse, the absence of an engagement with the existing dynamics, particularly within governmental buildings, is striking.

Writing on the urban as increasingly post-political sphere, Boer argues that "inhabitants are treated as consumers rather than citizens, who also need to work increasingly efficiently, which fuels the demand for smooth, friction-free urban spaces" (2018). This notion of a friction-free sphere can also be applied to the examples discussed here: in the absence of interaction, of encounters, of engagement, the productive and potentially disruptive possibility of friction is also undermined in favor of a smooth, continuous progression of existing processes. Provocatively, one might even ask whether this quietness might allude to the "ideal" of a society that does not disagree with existing power structures and dynamics. Expanding on Dovey's proposition of understanding buildings as an "assemblage of socio-spatial flows and intersections" (2013, 131), the architectural choices discussed here can be read as conscious attempts to direct these flows and shape these intersections towards continuation rather than interaction, towards docility rather than possibility. While there are certainly aesthetic reasons for purely architecturally focused photography, the tension between the visuals of empty spaces and the discourses of a public sphere for encounter and interaction is palpable.

In this context, it is relevant to place these architectural photographs at a specific phase of the architectural process. Instead of "render ghosts" (Bridle 2014), virtual

inhabitants of rendered and (yet) unbuilt spaces, the examples discussed here leave us with just the architecture, just the building, just the physical specifications of an unoccupied space. As Palacios puts it: "Render ghosts will not survive and will disappear without leaving traces. An empty space is waiting for us to occupy it. We will take their place" (2013). The architectural photographs discussed here, then, appear to capture the in-between of virtual renderings – filled with rendered ghosts – and the actual "life" in and of these buildings. In this sense, these projects have moved beyond the imaginary space between existence and non-existence, assuring us that these spaces do not need to be filled with the eerie humanity of render ghosts to manifest their potential as a caring space. In the absence of either virtualized or real interactions, the emphasis on care as an intangible yet ever-present affective force within these spaces becomes particularly remarkable. Detached from the speed of construction and capitalism, these architectural photos present a specific moment in time in which the aesthetic represents the utopian ideal of the architects *writing* these designs. Expanding on Ahmed's exploration of "how emotions circulate between bodies, examining how they 'stick' as well as move" (2004, 4), we might understand buildings as a type of body as well – a material and ideological body, holding the potential to (quite directly) influence the positioning, the stillness, and the movement of other bodies. If emotions can "stick" to this architectural body as well, then grounding the intangible idea of care in specific materials and design elements through a language of transparency and dialogue can infuse the space as a whole with its affective force even in the absence of (human) bodies. Just like the presence of render ghosts in virtual renderings, their absence in the photography of completed buildings, the very emptiness of these built structures, holds potential – a potential to re-imagine social, urban, political spheres in a different way.

4. Conclusion

In the afterword to their overview of architectural theory, Hays and Sykes propose a similarly atmospheric thinking about architectural thought and practice as involving not just (techno)logical decision-making, but affective dimensions as well: "Writing the new architecture means writing with the body as much as the mind, apprehending the atmospheric and the ecological as feeling and affect as well as thought – folding and refolding the situation, thickening and articulating it into narrative structures, squeezing it to yield its social precipitate" (2010, 359). "Writing" architecture, here, should be understood as the writing both *of* and *about* the design, as in the examples raised in this article. The blurring of boundaries between the corporate and the private – work and life – through both aesthetics and argumentation is exemplary of this duality. On the one hand, the idea of a private sphere distanced from the expectations and pressure of work is enveloped within the corporate setting through spatial (for instance the integration of secluded-yet-visible areas) and material choices (with a particular emphasis on softness). Focused on materiality, the architectural writing of the sensory resonance of care – in wood and in plants, through organic materials and flowing structures – opens our minds to how an abstract concept such as care can be grounded. On the other hand, the affective potential of these choices appears not to be self-evident, as the architectural descriptions still need to explicitly point out the atmospheric

experience of a kind, caring sphere. Although not explicitly referenced by Sykes and Hays, the link to the Deleuzian fold situates this dual process of "writing architecture" as a multi-sensorial dialogue between the building and the body. Similarly, Grosz urges us – again at the intersection between architecture and philosophy – to "explore the possibilities of becoming, the virtualities latent in building, the capacity of buildings to link with and make other series deflect and transform while being transformed in the process" (2001, 73). This attention to possibility also draws a connection between the blurred boundaries of *caring space* discussed in the first section "Hub/Home", the *caring materiality* of natural materials as both sustainable and affective choices in the second section "Material/Intangible", and the negotiation of embodied *caring connections* in the third section "Emptiness/Encounter" of this article.

Expanding the directionality of care from a *caring for* to a *caring through* materiality, the idea of embedding *caring in* built environments becomes a possibility here, thus transforming our understanding of the capacity of buildings. At the same time, the immediate linking between dimensions of care and themes of productivity and performance, efficiency and docility, complicates this potential for an "architecture of change" (Gámez and Rogers 2008, 22). As "valuation can be seen as both production and performance of values" (Birdsall et al. 2021, 351), exploring how the idea of "care" is employed in the framing of architectural design projects also broadens existing discussions of urban (re)development. If "value assessments are often articulated through performative means", as Birdsall et al. (2021, 351) propose, the performance of care becomes at the same time value-driven and value-driving. In this regard, both the framing of architecture and the architecture itself can be understood as modes of expression to ascertain *care as a value* embedded in the architectural process and its result. Ballantyne states – almost matter-of-factly – that "it is inevitable that there are interactions between buildings and people. It is the point of building" (2013, 183). Yet, the interaction between corporate buildings and the people moving in and through them remains somewhat vague or absent in architectural writing, therefore reinserting "the point of building" towards neoliberal logics in what could be seen as a corporate "carewashing" (The Care Collective 2020) of sorts.

As "segmented assemblages resonate with other assemblages at similar and different scales" (Dovey 2013, 135), the examples discussed here should nonetheless be understood as situated within their respective urban environments and their practices of power. Following an understanding of the city itself as "a (collective) body-prosthesis or boundary that enframes, protects, and houses while at the same time taking its own forms and functions from the (imaginary) bodies it constitutes" (Grosz 2001, 49), the interrelation of the body, the building, and the city in a complex entanglement of affordances and limitations becomes even more notable. Frichot and Loo suggest that "architecture has renewed its investment in social concerns and a politics of space, becoming increasingly open to new and vibrant material understandings of a fragile world that is intricately and globally interconnected" (2013, 5). However, it remains to be seen whether this "renewed investment" becomes more than lip service instigated by the aforementioned difficult positioning of architecture between art and industry, between calls for community practices and commercial interests. At the same time, the

potential of architecture as both theory and practice to create a more caring, more transparent, more connected world in and through the built environment should not be underestimated. Approaching existing and emerging architectural projects critically allows for further exploration of the interdependency between spaces, places, and "communities that care" (The Care Collective 2020, 50). In this understanding, care becomes, quite literally, structural.

Notes

1   More images of the office (re)design – created by CSMM for Bosch Security and Safety Things GmbH – are available here: https://www.cs-mm.com/en/projects/bosch-sast

2   Less optimistically, one might also draw a connection between this fabric-covered room and the inescapability of a padded cell.

3   As an important disclaimer: I do not mean to suggest that architecture has not "cared" in the past, but rather aim to highlight the crucial distinction between caring as an architectural practice (by architects) and the inscription of caring values into built environments (through architectural writing).

4   See https://www.archdaily.com/search/projects/categories/commercial-and-offices?ad_medium=filters

5   See https://www.archdaily.com/910454/igarpe-gpisoft-offices-martin-lejarraga-architecture-office

6   See https://www.archdaily.com/921310/t-ham-pabp-factory-wzwx-architecture-group

7   For a further discussion of this, see for instance Bell (2008) and Fitz et al. (2019).

8   …as the combination of materials, textures and interior aims to achieve in the iGarpe-GPISoft offices.

9   … as the reinterpretation of the brutalist architecture of the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux in Toronto, Canada, promises. See https://www.archdaily.com/912327/expansion-of-the-headquarters-of-the-csn-bgla-plus-neuf-consortium

10   See for instance Connellan et al. (2013).

11   See https://www.archdaily.com/926166/swatch-and-omega-campus-shigeru-ban-architects

12   See https://www.archdaily.com/956371/guangming-public-service-platform-zhubo-design

13   See https://www.archdaily.com/964357/singapore-state-courts-serie-architects-plus-multiply-architects

14   See https://www.archdaily.com/965978/huis-van-albrandswaard-gortemaker-algra-feenstra

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Biography

Linda Kopitz (MA) has studied at the University of Leipzig, Germany, and the University of Miami, USA, and holds a Research Master in Media Studies from the University of Amsterdam. Connecting her professional experience as a Creative Director with her research, she is currently working as a Lecturer in Cross-Media Culture at the University of Amsterdam, where her main research interests are architectural media, gender and the intersection between technology and imaginations of the everyday.