

# Editorial: Towards an Ecology of Care

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## Overview

The Ecology of Care (EoC) as a field of research and practice originated in the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Southern Denmark. It was designed to research and promote the concept of Care (the prioritising of Human needs). Care is essentially about tackling societal challenges from a human and ecological point of view, something of a reversed perspective on the current paradigm driven by liberal Capital. We see this as an extraordinary opportunity for real and useful innovation on a global scale. An Ecology of Care examines the fundamental reasons why and how we do what we used to do naturally in an increasingly unnatural world. In this artificial condition the Ecology of Care provides many new opportunities before the future is foreclosed.

We have structured the project *An Ecology of Care* as a lens through which to investigate the way in which Care occurs in relationship to everyone and everything (not just health care). We have taken this perspective on the basis that Care describes and shapes relationships because we know we all Care and we do that through shared gestures of care and caring. We asked the people we invited to speak at the Congress to look closely at the gesture (or expression of intention) called Care.

We are also aware that delving into Care might point to core problems in our relationships because it is quite obvious we seem incapable of devoting adequate resources to care about the project for a better world, our one world. Which is baffling because we have no choice but to Care for it and to Care for ourselves and each other in the oikos of ecology ... our home on the one planet we share.

The belief that our shared future is getting better and is being made better by good people who are doing good things is now very tenuous. Regardless of our intentions or gestures, in an increasingly artificial world it is now very difficult to imagine applying Care on the scale of the better world. Therefore, we tend to think that an Ecology of Care is really about fostering a different relationship with the artificial world. It is about taking a special interest in the role of ideas in the production of this artificiality. Or just as people doing good things seem to be motivated by taking Care of what-might-become, an Ecology of Care entails that we take Care of what-might-not-become.

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## Background to an Ecology of Care

In 2012, a small research group within the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Southern Denmark was involved in Denmark's largest Health Research project called Patient@Home; the application of new technological solutions to healthcare. Opportunities were rife for product developers but the project had skewed towards "welfare of technology" rather than "technologies of welfare". In 2013 it was noticed that Care was missing and the group went looking for it. With enough evidence the newly formed research group held their first international Ecology of Care event in February 2015 to explore the formulations of Care that were emerging. Twenty people from 7 nations and 14 disciplines came to Copenhagen to discuss various proposals.

This gathering determined that first, the Model of Care developed so far, was useful as a way of explaining the concept to others. Second, that an Ecology of Care could be considered a new field of study and practice. And third, that an Ecology of Care was worthy of further development in two directions: as a theoretical framework and in terms of instrumental application (forms of practice).

## The Ecology of Care project today

After the 2015 symposium the Danish research group immediately started work on an international congress called *(In)forming an Ecology of Care*. They realised very quickly that they were hampered by two misunderstood notions of the two key concepts: that ecology was a "green thing" (when in fact it is derived from the Greek *oikos* for home), and that Care is more or less owned by the health industry. It can easily be seen from what has been accomplished so far that Care is a concept with a very sound philosophical basis but without a clear and strong communicable form. Thus, the Congress, *(In)forming an Ecology of Care*, was largely about giving Care a more substantial form. To be clear: what an Ecology of Care is therefore about is finding practical, applicable and humanly meaningful ways to explore and understand how we give and receive care; and to interpret this into and merge it with an increasingly artificial world, and by doing so establish patterns of behaviour that give agency to the role of stewardship for future generations.

In September 2017 the Copenhagen Congress was followed by a series of workshops at Lancaster University that set out to explore Care from the point of view of design. Titled *Does Design Care...?* participants explored 10 problems with the gesture of care. Their findings will take the form of the Lancaster Care Charter that will be published in 2018.

## In this issue

This special issue stems from the Ecology of Care Congress in 2016 where very different professional fields were brought together to share how they see care operating within their disciplines (or how in their fields care is disciplined). This issue of *fusion* presents five very diverse ways of observing care. Other presentations at the EoC Congress probed care (and carelessness) from diverse positions and many of these will be

followed up in subsequent disseminations; they include perspectives from health, peace and conflict studies, global sustainability, social economics and design. In this issue we are very happy to be hosting contributions from a broad spectrum of presenters from the Congress, that offer unique perspectives on Care.

- Ian Coxon's paper sets up a backstory to the Field of Care. He explains the origins of the concept of Care and the origins of the project, An Ecology of Care. Weaving together the philosophical background to Care and the many theoretical perspectives that have been proposed about Care, he describes a model of Care and a set of criteria for what an Ecology of Care is all about.
- Anders Sørensen's paper takes the idea of Care and applies it to emerging technologies in the field of robotics. Through a series of short case studies he exposes some of the flaws in the logic of these robot development projects and argues that 'self-reliance' is a core component that is missing in many developments.
- Harriett Balkind writes about the paradoxical world of advertising, political manipulation of trust, and a form of Care that lies within truth, asking why not just lie?
- Ian Hargraves considers the *doing* of modern healthcare through the lens of the Myth of Care showcasing its relevance to designing new and more enabling ways to *Do design* within the many fields of health.
- And Allan Barton presents his personal pathway to care as a "Journey of Discovery". Using his own experiences as a case study for how care and caring shape behaviour he discusses the role that Care (self-others-world) takes in shaping the paths we choose and the decisions we make in our work life and home life.

We hope you enjoy reading these diverse perspectives on Care and we welcome your feedback, suggestions and comments.