

WHO CARES?

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In a nutshell

“Who Cares?” started as a research proposal under the title “Institutional Responsibility: Protocols of Care” (IRPC) submitted for funding to the international office at our university -ZHdK (as well as to forming diversity-ZHdK, agents of transformation -ELIA & UdK, equal opportunities commission-ZHdK, etc). This project came about after living a traumatic experience of sexual violence during an exchange program, and the re/un/actions which followed. It was an attempt to figure out what was not working as per protocols, and what was (and should be) understood as institutional responsibility, “integrity” protection, and what changes could and should see the day so no one else had to overcome such situations alone. Very quickly, the response for funding was negative except for the support of the Diversity Office who offered to fund a small paper which could have an outcome. A series of conversations, expositions, continuous talks followed in order to explain over and over the importance of the project. It became slowly a research within the institutional body, getting to feel and understand all the layers which compose them, the politics behind them, the emotions and frustrations behind them, and also the forces behind them who try to change realities or when not at least not with the institution but within.

“Who Cares?” started as a research and became an institutional critique, a processual-methodology to create space; aerate, spatialise, vocalise. Making visible that what’s invisible; the emotions, the traumas, the words, the embodied, what’s recorded and taught in our bodies, the intersections of injustice that one can experience through in an institution like ZHdK. Through non-performative actions (Sarah Ahmed), or plain silences. It became a way of re-connecting thought and emotion, understanding individuals as rather complex ecosystems.

Just as the classic image of the Leviathan (Hobbes), this figure appears here as an (im)possible “interlocutor”. Who is the institution? Who is the leviathan? What seems a Master project extends beyond and before, encapsulating the creative and activist processes in the autobiography of someone encountering the borders of institutional responsibility. This is not a singular experience, rather, one that repeats itself at different levels; whether a university or state.

How to talk with an institution who has no ears but layers?
Can we speak inside, can we speak to, can we speak with an institution about injustice? About trauma?

Who is listened to? How does it feel to be unheard? To be listened to?

The research was a parallel process while away in my home city (Cali, Colombia) after the incident. This project became then a social reparation exercise. It led me to dig deeper inside myself as I dug inside the mechanics of the institution. It allowed me to connect with others which were or living similar situations, or doing (fighting) in order to change the status quo. Others in other places, Others in other situations, Others embodying other experiences. Plurals coming together.

It was clear that the expansion of the topic was not “just” about gender-based violence and protocols, it became an inside look into equality, inclusion, diversity and their antonyms. About generational gaps, about frustrations, anger and injustice. It became a transformative dive into the world of words. What these words are, what they create. What a language who says “we know what you need” does as a violent action, what silences and non-performative actions do as a violent action.

Throughout a formal academic research counting over twenty interviews, field sentipensares, multiple readings, events, videos and films, three small diplomas in Colombia (mental health, environmental democracy and constitutional justice), countless mentors, peers and fellows, and finally thought the own organisation of collective writing workshops, “Who Cares?” believes in the power in listening, of the collective activism, of the ways feminist and queer methodologies help us materialise forms of injustice, through words, aesthetics, to coming with others as an attempt to counter the bureaucracy of who and how can speak in and for an institution.

“Who cares?” encapsulates a connection with my own biography, with home country and continent (claiming Abya Yala). Between graphic arts and politics, between mental health and sustainability, between gender-based violence and resilient bodies, between thinking, feeling and doing, between the personal and the political. It does so via the writing, and the use of zines as a platform, at the image of the underground politicised scene used to not being able to use “official channels” to communicate, it allowed me to come back to my own roots. A personal archeology in time, in diaries, in zine-making, also a personal history on being a queer woman, white, Latina, positioned in an in-between. The allowing emotions, feelings into what’s political, opposed to the critiques heard -be careful, it’s too intimate, too radical, too personal, you can’t say this, it’s not our responsibility... - claims the rupture of a separation between rational and emotional. This intimate and political work weaves concepts such as sentipensar (colombian oral traditions from the coasts), intra-action (Barad) and complaining as queer method (Ahmed) blending with vulnerability, exercises of listening and caring, questioning accountability and the borders of responsibility while discussing questions and processes rather than answers. Affects and effects in what’s political.

Through this exercise, “Who Cares?” reaffirms the findings of Art.School. Differences and other important projects which prove that art and design institutions are not bubbles exempt of an outside, rather immersed systems in the logic of a world where structures of classicism, sexism, racism, ableism, ageism, homo and transphobia persist (a thesis that is not new). It takes constant deconstruction, unlearning, and owning up to those gaps in order to insist on change.

Between zine, assemblage, journal, research, archive in progress, activism, collective, this project questions rather than answers, refusing the free emotional labour while offering a chance to come together in the DIY. Barking back becomes the way of assuming together the role of our* words when the question repeats itself “Can we speak?” (Spivak). Barking back becomes the way of affirming we* are ecosystems. We* don’t need to be cared for we need our rights to be respected. Barking back is embodying what Ahmed calls “complaining”.

Barking back, should be at anyone’s reach.

On the zines and the writing

The zines have a history as means of protest, of recollection, of vehiculating information, and both individual and collective expression. The graphic link from posters to zines, the analog formats (then often digitalised) allow this escaping the official channels of communication to voice out. Some examples are the zines of Quinta ____ made by the students of the Cali’s Bellas Artes school to denounce sexual harassment and abuse by some teachers, as well as general political messages on the context of the city/country. In parallel, the zine format allowed my own research to come together as an assemblage, playing both on content, aesthetics, being easy to access and reproduce, and playful political format for workshops and personal content. As a diary which can be collective or personal and shared as spaces with others (online and in Helsinki so far) to come together.

The zines produced for the master project are four chapters mixing academic research, diaries, illustrations, anonymous quotes from interviews and institutional language. The first zine approaches the question “What to do with what’s embodied?”

The second zine approaches the question “Can we* speak?”

The third zine approaches Institutional Language and (im)possible communication exchanges after a “no” for answer to the last question

The last zine approaches complaining as a queer method, barking back as its embodiment outside institutional formulars, feminist collective action and poetry.

Each zine is 8-folded-page and has a related poster on the B Side.

They are closely related to the writing booklet produced, both echoing and amplifying each other.