"Emotion is Another Kind of Information"
(Re)imagining Care Through Art Explorations

Ingvil Hellstrand ⁣ⓘ, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen ⓘ, Nora Simonhjell ⓘ, Roger Andre Søraa et Hege Tapio

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Résumé de l'article

This review explores entanglements of the theoretical and affective impacts of an art exhibition called Caring Futures which was part of an interdisciplinary research project. The review is a qualitative analysis of the exhibition, and is interspersed with our experiential, affective, and creative reflections and responses to the exhibition. Creative and imaginative approaches inspire us as researchers and supported our interactions with this exhibition in ways that opened new spaces for knowledge production. Our experiences highlight the value of arts-based methodologies for exploring questions of vulnerability and care. Foregrounding subjective and affective responses is risky in scientific work and confronts conventional boundaries for academic knowledge production. Honoring meetings between art and research(ers) can productively challenge taken-for-granted norms involved in undertaking academic research.

"EMOTION IS ANOTHER KIND OF INFORMATION": (RE)IMAGINING CARE THROUGH ART EXPLORATIONS

Ingvil Hellstrand
University of Stavanger
ingvil.f.hellstrand@uis.no

Aino-Kaisa Koistinen
University of the Arts Helsinki
aino-kaisa.koistinen@uniarts.fi

Nora Simonhjell
University of Agder
nora.simonhjell@uia.no

Roger Andre Søraa
NTNU Norwegian University of Science and Technology
roger.soraa@ntnu.no

Hege Tapio
OsloMet
hegetapi@oslomet.no

The authors are an interdisciplinary group of researchers from the fields of literature, feminist and gender studies, science and technology studies, media studies, and the arts. We are one artist/PhD candidate in artistic research, three associate professors, and one full professor, all currently grappling with questions of care, technology, and care ethics in the

Nordic welfare states in our joint research project, *Caring Futures: Developing Care Ethics for Technology-Mediated Care Practices*.

Abstract: This review explores entanglements of the theoretical and affective impacts of an art exhibition called *Caring Futures* which was part of an interdisciplinary research project. The review is a qualitative analysis of the exhibition, and is interspersed with our experiential, affective, and creative reflections and responses to the exhibition. Creative and imaginative approaches inspire us as researchers and supported our interactions with this exhibition in ways that opened new spaces for knowledge production. Our experiences highlight the value of arts-based methodologies for exploring questions of vulnerability and care. Foregrounding subjective and affective responses is risky in scientific work and confronts conventional boundaries for academic knowledge production. Honoring meetings between art and research(ers) can productively challenge taken-for-granted norms involved in undertaking academic research.

Keywords: art; knowledge production; imagining care; futures; healthcare technologies

How do we experience, recognize, and understand care, humanity, and vulnerability under new technological regimes? This was the topic of the *Caring Futures Art Exhibition* on display during autumn 2022. By including an art exhibition in the larger research project, *Caring Futures: Developing Care Ethics for Technology-mediated Care Practices*[1], we as researchers had the opportunity to include creative and exploratory methods from the field of art and culture to critically examine the ongoing, inevitable meeting between technology, care, and welfare services. In this review we explore how this art exhibition impacted us in unexpected ways and challenged us to grapple with questions of care technologies, ethics, and futures through experiential, affective and creative narratives, and arts-based methods.

In spring 2021, the curators (one artist-researcher and one researcher) circulated an open call for art contributions, directed towards artists based in Nordic European countries. Receiving 25 proposals altogether, seven were selected to take part in the exhibition. In addition, one artist was invited to participate by the curators. Through their works, all eight artists asked critical and creative questions related to care and welfare technologies, the increased digitization of welfare services, and the ways in which technology both creates and reshapes relationships between people[2]. In line with contemporary research on visitor participation in public galleries and museums (Clifford, 1997; Lepik & Carpentier, 2013; Ogundipe, 2019; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Runnel, 2014; Simon, 2010), the *Caring Futures Art Exhibition* was part of the dissemination and public engagement strategy for the research project. With the purpose of gathering research data about contemporary cultural imaginaries concerning care technologies, visitors to the gallery were invited to share their reflections, feelings, and impressions on a wall of post-it notes when exiting the exhibit. Posters were used to inform visitors that, by contributing to the wall, they consented to their reflections being used for research purposes.

As researchers in this project, we realized we had neglected to create a way to document our own embodied, emotional, and immediate responses to the art exhibition. Although we had consciously invited artists to grapple with the research questions, we had not fully understood how our participation in the exhibition would extend our thinking about the impact of technology in care, and our capacities to feel and reflect on care in future settings more deeply. Our focus on visitor participation caused us to forget that we were exhibition-goers as well as researchers in the project. We had not considered affect and creative inspiration as being part of our own ongoing knowledge and research production.

Since the early 2000's, there has been increasing attention given to affect as an intrinsic part of experience and knowledge production (Ahmed, 2010; Massumi, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003). In the growing field of medical humanities, journalling, creative writing, and art-based therapies are widely acknowledged methods for mediating experiences of illness (Attard & Larkin, 2016; Romm et al., 2022). It is interesting to note that much of the foundational literature in this field is self-reflective or autobiographical writing by academic

researchers (Frank, 1997; Lorde, 1980; Stacey, 1997). There is also a growing interdisciplinary body of work that grapples with entanglements of how personal experiences and affect have an impact on professional practices in academic work (Gripsrud, 2023; Lykke, 2019). We are inspired both by the turn to participation and the affective turn, particularly as part of academic work practices (Kuppers et al., 2008). In thisreview, we experiment with arts-based methods of writing as part of our academic analysis and documentation of the art exhibition, to (re)connect with affective experiences in questions of care technologies in academic genres of writing.

Research Approach and Methodology

The aim of this review is to document and analyze the *Caring Futures Art Exhibition,* not only as researchers but also as exhibition-goers impacted by the artworks. The review offers a qualitative analysis of the exhibition, perforated by several short reflections; analytical explorations are complemented by our more immediate responses to the exhibition and expressed through investigative, experiential, and creative texts. Through this documentation of the exhibition, we share and discuss the entanglements of knowledge production, research, affect, and art experiences surrounding imaginaries of care in our times.

As researchers, we were already engaged in the overall research question about the kinds of experiences and understandings of care, humanity, and vulnerability that emerged under new technological regimes (Ramvi et al., 2021). As such, our situated reflections potentially differ from those of the general visitor demography. Inspired by the invitation to visitors to share their reflections, feelings, and impressions, we responded to the artworks that touched us the most. These reflections were sensory and spontaneous texts which expressed our exhibition experiences. We each wrote separate reflections which we shared to support collective analysis and reflection on the exhibition.

Our foregrounding of subjective and affective responses is an attempt to explore and challenge conventional boundaries for academic knowledge production in meetings between art and research(ers), and, as such, bears resemblance to creative or expressive writing as research methods and strategies (Frank, 1997). Although these forms of writing are well-known strategies in the health sciences and part of the medical humanities, we want to highlight their use from an interdisciplinary point of view, and as a means for (re)connecting with emotions and modes of writing less bounded by the conventions of academic genres of writing (Lykke, 2014). Individual reflections are *italicized* in the text to highlight the different modes of expression and our connection to our emerging knowledge about imaginaries of care and care technologies in our times. Although we introduce all the artworks in the exhibition, some are given more attention than others due to this methodological approach.

Our discussions about our impressions of the exhibition and the reflective pieces that we wrote form three central themes: a) vulnerabilities, b) patterns of knowledge and c) dreams, memories, and identities.

Vulnerabilities

A recurring theme in the exhibition was vulnerability and uncertainty in the face of healthcare technologies. For example, Cathrine Evelid's video work *Servant Talk* (Figure 1; originally titled *Tjenersnakk* in Norwegian) thematizes technological solutions for home-based services: an old woman struggles with simple everyday tasks such as getting dressed but has a digital and disembodied "voice companion" to encourage and guide her through the day. The old woman depicted in the video work is a hand-held puppet, maneuvered by a young actress.

Figure 1
Image from Servant Talk (Catherine Evelid)

For one of us, this artwork raised questions of the entanglements of care and technologies as a kind of cyborg-body embodiment of care:

The video features a puppet that personifies ageing and our dependency on technology; a young human actress is attached to an older, ragged puppet, which is climbing out of a bathtub and trying to get ready for a conference. The attachment creates a powerful story of symbiosis between polarities, young and old, healthy and sick, helping and needing help, structured and confused. In the video-work, the older

figure is struggling with the challenges of ageing, with physical and cognitive decline. The video shows the ageing puppet being dependent on technology, while the younger actor, an almost robotic care assistant/servant, represents technology. The assistant's voice has a chilling resemblance to contemporary voice assistants such as Siri or Alexa. The servant helps with daily tasks and activities, such as getting dressed.

The older woman is depicted as isolated and lonely. The only interaction she has is with this technological 'servant system', which we come to learn could be a voice-replica of her younger self. The video-work raises important ethical questions about the use of technology in care for the elderly. As our population ages, and the number of elderly people requiring care increases, technology is becoming increasingly important in providing care. The video highlights the potential risks of relying too heavily on technology for care—such as the loss of human interaction and connection —and serves as a reminder of the ethical implications of technology-mediated care practices. The film forces the viewer to reflect on and carefully consider the implications of technology-mediated care practices, and to strive for a balance between the use of technology and the preservation of human connections and relationships. The symbiosis between the older adult in need of care and the assisting servant creates a cyborg-body embodiment of care. The Caring Futures project is a way of developing care ethics for technology-mediated care practices and helps us consider what care for the future might entail[3].

A different exploration of vulnerability is represented in the collaborative project *Pneumatic Kitchen* by artists Kaisu Koski and Roland van Dierendonck. Instead of being at the mercy of a ready-made technological solution, Koski and Dierendonck experiment with low-tech do-it-yourself solutions and advanced new technology in soft robotics. Their work addresses vulnerability quite literally, bringing forth discussions about design and user-friendliness, and pointing to human engineering and creativity in terms of trial and error. The DIY aspect of the artwork engages questions about presence and embodiment in care, initiates a dialogue with materials, technology, and modes of contact, and highlights issues of co-dependency or entanglement.

Human contact is often presented as an undivided good in matters of care, as a contrast to technology's alienating potential (The Care Collective, 2020). Åsa Båve's work *Caring with Force* (Figure 2), however, directs attention to the use of coercion and force as part of established care practices (Foucault, 1963/2003). Båve's work consists of two parts: A video-work showing a choreography about the restraining and controlling of patients who are acting out, and an audio-work of stories from people who have experienced coercion or force from health and care personnel. The carefully constructed choreography (performed by professional actors and dancers) shows three people forcefully holding and restraining one

individual. Watching this while listening to former patients describing their experiences of being forcibly restrained is compelling.

Figure 2
Caring with Force (Åsa Båve)

One of us describes how this artwork moved them:

In the end, I couldn't listen to all the voices telling stories of how they had been manhandled, carried, held down, or lifted into cells and police cars. Their voices were so small, somehow, and so sad as they remembered their surprise at being met by a score of police officers, or that their emotional reaction to the situation was interpreted as violent. It seems inconceivable that people in such vulnerable life situations could be met with violence. The explanation from the health care system is that this is for the good of the patient, but Åsa Båve's work shows that it might be for the protection of the healthcare workers, police, and social workers. While this is understandable, the question remains: who is the care and welfare system supposed to protect? With

the current focus on implementing care and welfare technologies, further thought needs to be given to the care logic informing technology-mediated care practices.

By putting two different experiences of violent care in dialogue, Båve engages exhibition participants in a long-standing debate about the necessity of force in care work (Foucault, 1963/2003; Held, 1995; O'Brien, 2023). Questions of vulnerability connect to questions of power and governance.

Patterns of Knowledge

In the pop song and music video-work *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* by Jacob Remin, a human robed in a white dress walks around in nature, singing. He's wearing what looks like a vision device that flashes bright lights into his eyes and he carries a robot toad in his arms. The catchy chorus of the song, which also gives our review its title, declares "emotion is another kind of information", i.e., a kind of dataset, structure, or pattern that we can—and perhaps should—tap into and discover. This seemingly simple idea challenges established knowledge regimes and scientific traditions that privilege rationality over emotion (Foucault, 1966/2001; Haraway, 1988). In his artwork, Remin points out that it is not just machines and technology that create structures and systems for understanding and knowledge, but humans, too. We are invited into a dreamlike universe of coexistence between the human and the technological.

While Remin speculates on how we, as a society, can draw on the logics of technology to understand ourselves in new ways, artist Ruth Gilmour's delicate work *Split Observations* (Figure 3) problematizes narrow ways of seeing. She shows how medical science and the methods used to obtain information and look for signs of illness often zoom in on individual parts of the body without taking the whole person into account. The body, its functions, and a person's identity are fragmented into smaller segments, which, in turn, are analyzed and measured against established parameters. Through her close-ups of body parts printed on silk, where the silk threads are separated to enhance the effect of whole and parts, Gilmour invites consideration on how we might use more holistic approaches in increasingly systematized (and eventually algorithm-based) structures. The silk threads are set in motion by the audience's presence in the gallery; in this way the work emphasizes how little is needed for things to mutually influence each other.

Figure 3
Split Observations (Ruth Gilmour)
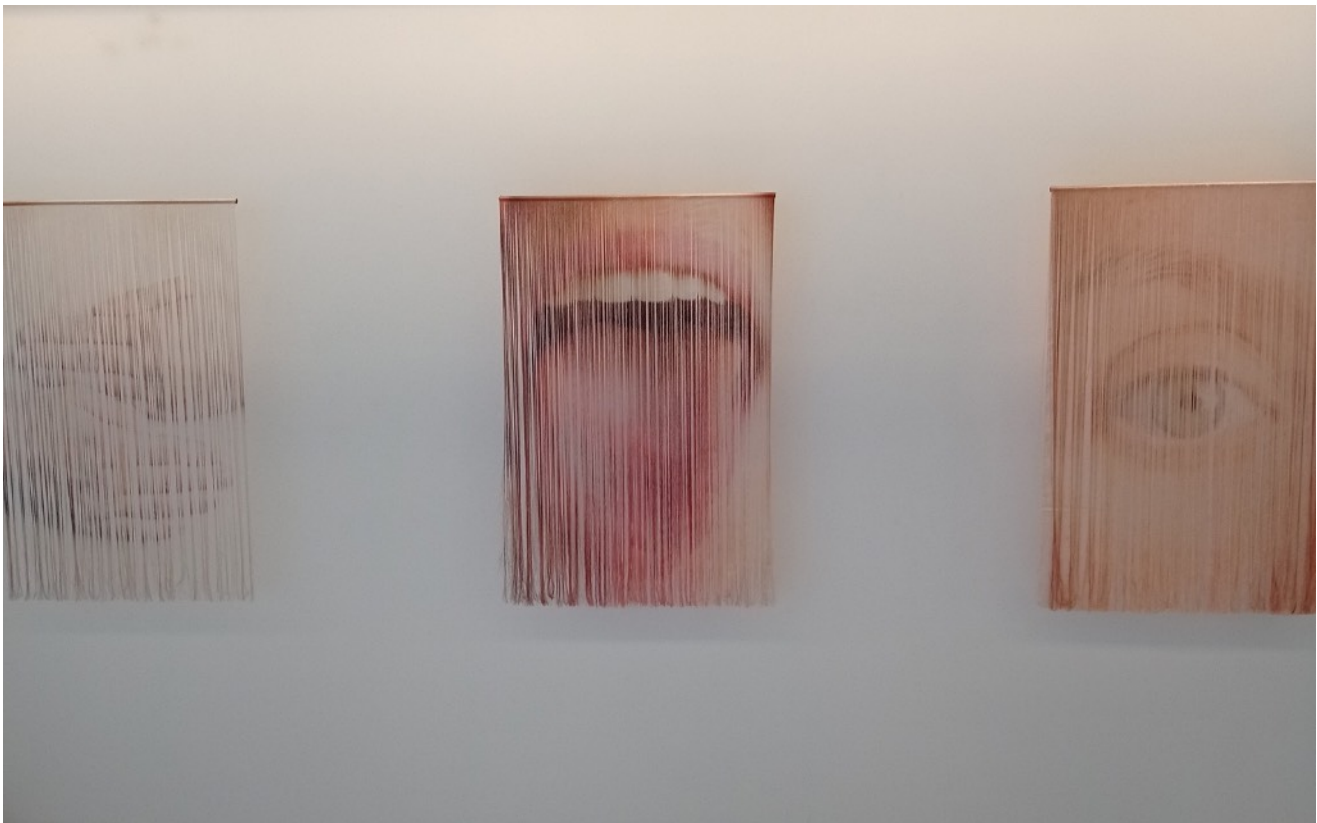
This artwork inspired one of us to write this meditation:
falling threads
weaving moments
fragile life
weaving memory
faithful air
weaving history
fearless hope
weaving silence
falling content
weaving future

Gilmour's artwork invites interaction and bodily closeness to the artwork, and we are touched by the fragility of the art. When visitors to the exhibition move around, the threads in the images shift and differ. What is seen at a distance is not necessarily the same as what is seen up close. The threads become concrete manifestations of how things—be they

materials, bodies, or structures—impact each other and produce meaning and systems of knowledge and power (Foucault,1966/2001).

Dreams, Memories and Identities

Questions of technology in care work are inevitably about the future. In Emilia Tikka's speculative photo work "*ÆON*", we meet a married couple, one of whom has chosen to use rejuvenation technology, while the other ages as usual. Here, it is not only the technological possibilities for gene editing, improvement, and life extension that are problematized. What constitutes quality of life, and the impact of technology use on our lives and identities are topics of concern. The work highlights tensions between the structuring power of technology, and the dream of the perfect human being, wherein questions of choice and consequences are clear. In this way, Tikka's work highlights human agency in the face of new technologies.

The artist's second artwork, "*EUDAIMONIA*", explores possible implications of genetic manipulation. This video-work introduces three personal stories of individuals struggling to fit in and subsequently adjusting their personality traits so that they can. The protagonists make use of gene-modifying technology to fix what they see as unbearable situations in their everyday lives and professions. Through storytelling and speculative use of advanced genetic editing, Tikka's artworks present philosophical and ethical questions about what a human is or could be. Where *ÆON* can be said to explore anti-ageing techniques such as generative cell-growth explored through the so-called Yamanaka Factors, *EUDAIMONIA* engages with gene-editing technology, such as the Crispr/Cas9 gene editing method, in which cells can be removed or added.

Artist Kari Telstad Sundet's audiovisual installation *Memory Space Traveler* (Figure 4) troubles the dream of the perfect human by making this a machine's dilemma: What is the experience of a machine when it tries to dream like a human? Through constructed memories and small bits of available information, the technological "mind" reaches towards a goal of being something else, something more than itself.

Figure 4

Memory Space Traveler (Kari Telstad Sundet)

One of us reflected:

I was moved and mesmerized with this piece that (according to the exhibition catalogue) 'tries to look at mechanomorphism and anthropomorphism from a different angle—literally through the dreams of a semi-sentient machine'. I spent hours by the piece, viewing it over and over again, capturing streams of consciousness in a notebook:

> *waves*
> *data*
> *touch*
> *memory*
> *spindle*
> *ripple*

ripples
of time
shaped like
a butterfly

Just as in Philip K. Dick's classic science fiction novel, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (originally published in 1968), these dreams invite the viewer to consider what and why a machine might dream, and to ponder the differences and similarities between humans and machines. The machine's fragmented dreams and memories strike me as an analogy of the human capacity to remember, and the ways in which memories affect—or haunt—human lives and futures.

In the installation, the machine is said to remember 'hands and not eyes.' For me, the hands function as a symbol of care (work) and connection; in all the fragmented memories, care and physical touch therefore become important. Continuing the analogy between machines and human beings, the machine's memories highlight what is important and worth remembering in a human life: embodied knowledges (symbolized by hands) instead of supposedly discorporeal 'objectivity' (see Haraway 1988) (symbolized by eyes). Perhaps the machine, given it remembers hands and not eyes, is in a sense more 'human' than human beings, who seemingly place little value on care, touch, and connection— or are humans becoming machines, forgetting the importance of hands?

As Sundet's work and this reflection demonstrate, dreams and memories are ways of re-producing experiences, feelings, and thoughts, all of which impact and structure our sense of identity and belonging. Marie Lynn Speckert's work *Scalptomorpha* explores the limits of belonging and coexistence. Drawing inspiration from biological phenomena such as parasitism and parabiosis, she envisions wearable technology that can function as medical-technological tools for biometric readings. But unlike extractivist and isolating technologies, Speckert's speculative tools are both organically formed, and designed to create a two-way exchange with the host body. The parasitic takes on new meanings here by virtue of being presented as a symbiosis, rather than an unwanted hitchhiker in the human body.

Discussion: Art Meets Research(ers)

Questions about technology and care are often discussed as a contrast between the mechanical and instrumental on the one hand, and humanness and relationality on the other. As several artworks in this exhibition show us, however, these boundaries are neither simple nor desirable. Our thematization of vulnerability shows how care technologies confront these boundaries and, potentially, open up conventional dichotomies. As our

reflections establish, artistic expression can be a way to (re)imagine both vulnerability and care technologies. Technologists' and engineers' visions of smart solutions for home-based assistance are tested in the work *Servant Talk*, as we recognize the despair, confusion, and loneliness experienced by Evelid's ageing and struggling character.

As our researcher reflections also show, this artwork is entangled with the push toward the technological and digital (re)structuring of our society, as seen in the creation of smart cities and technology assisted home-based care. The artwork demonstrates the inevitability of both ageing and digitalization, as well as the frailty of these processes, particularly when operating together. As such, the work explores societal and emotional challenges, the human need to be understood and taken care of, and the agency and quality of care that digital solutions can and cannot offer. With both puppet and puppeteer present in the work, the vulnerable entanglements between dependence and autonomy are illuminated.

The theme of vulnerability is further emphasized by Åsa Båve's artwork focused on the machinations of care work—being cared for and taking care of. By showing the use of physical force and coercion as methods for dealing with unpredictable people, while at the same time allowing the voices of those subjected to these methods to be heard, Båve demonstrates care practices as tools of governance (Foucault, 1963/2003; 1970). In contrast to Evelid's work (where it is the technological distance that disturbs our understanding of care), Båve shows how human knowledges and practices can be instrumental and not necessarily attuned to a person's needs, and that there is a struggle around what counts as need or necessity.

A struggle or discrepancy between different kinds of structural frameworks for understanding is central also in Ruth Gilmour's artwork *Split Observations*, in which she plays with perceptions of the fragmented and the holistic. The fragility of the silkworks draws our attention to touch and the way bodies move in a room, as well as the ways in which these bodily movements can create changes in both materialities and perception. According to Erin Manning (2007), the moving body reflects an understanding of touch, however subtle it might be, as something that can create change. These micro-experiences, such as those that both Gilmour' and Båve's artworks invite, can be enlarged to a structural and political statement grounded in Manning's (2007) philosophical reflection:

> A politics of touch is one of the mediums through which the body resists the state. Touch as reaching-towards foregrounds the unknowability of the heart of all bodies of knowledge, reminding us that we cannot know the body as the state claims we do, for no body is ever thoroughly articulated. Every body moves differently, in-different to the state. (p. 63)

Interestingly, both Gilmour and Båve's work imply that ethical boundaries, norms, and practices are, in fact, elastic and changeable parameters. As both Foucault (1966/2001) and

Haraway (1988) tell us, these structures of knowledge have been cemented over time, but it is possible to change them as new knowledge and insight emerge. Here, there is also a relevant parallel to contemporary debates about the use of artificial intelligence in care practices: before we accept analyses and choices based on algorithms, perhaps we should ask ourselves what kind of practices, norms, and mindsets form the basis of what we understand today as standard or normalized practice.

From our perspective, situational awareness and attention to lived embodiment and emotion is also the core of all caring relations. According to ethical care theorist Joan Tronto (1993), care is:

> a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (p. 80)

An important point for Tronto is that care is a fundamentally social and collective activity: we all need it, and we are all involved in providing it, even if this happens on different premises, at different stages of life, and with different commitment and training. Where Emilia Tikka's art invites us to envision the more disturbing consequences of allowing technologically advanced gene editing, the artworks made by Remin, Speckert, Koski, and van Dierendonck remain hopeful that technology is something that we can influence, create, or design with the help of familiar tools, or with inspiration from nature and the organic.

The themes in the artworks thus help to unravel the various forms of relationships, implications, and coexistences that can arise in the meeting between technology and humanity. In this way, the art exhibition contributes to uncovering and concretizing various issues that affect the established understanding of care. It provides a deeper insight into the consequences of technology-driven solutions and problematizes the shallow premise that technology should always solve or fix something. The artworks invite speculative approaches and open up spaces for reflection, offering opportunities to consider how we can establish the best possible care practices for the future.

The speculative is a well-known entrance to explore and challenge the limits and possibilities of what we consider to be established reality (Hellstrand, Koistinen & Orning, 2019). In Sundet's work, for example, it may seem like science fiction that a machine might be able to dream, but the imaginary machine is not so different from the computers of our time—constructed by artificial intelligence according to biological neuron models that blur lines between human and machine. As such, Sundet speculates on the possible side effects of our penchant for anthropomorphizing technology—what if the machines themselves take this seriously? The installation intertextually resonates not only with Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel but with many narratives of the science fiction genre, where machines are humanized

through skin and touch—often becoming more human than humans themselves. In this fictional genre, machines become human-like and can even pass for/as human when they acquire a sensing, vulnerable human-like body, and act in a loving and caring manner (Hellstrand, 2016; Koistinen, 2015). These narratives speak of the importance of touch, of the senses, of being human. This must be remembered when developing future care technologies.

Incorporating an art exhibition into the *Caring Futures* research project was an interdisciplinary approach that invited speculative and sensory dimensions to understanding issues around care practices and technology development. Art can create discomfort, spur emotional reactions that set the mind in motion, and assist the contemplation of complex cultural and societal questions. As we saw in *Servant Talk*, art can highlight the need for balance between the use of technology and the preservation of human connections and relationships. It showcases the importance of considering the perspectives and needs of the elderly in the development of technology-mediated care practices—especially issues of growing old alone, and the related decline in social interactions and autonomy that can occur (Søraa et al., 2021).

Grappling with questions of future care, the artworks helped us (and other exhibition-goers) to envision different futures, and provided a way to "(re)create it [the future] again and again" (Horst, 2021, p. 35). The art exhibition created spaces for negotiating, (re)envisioning, and questioning what is potentially at stake.

Conclusions

"Emotions are another form of information," sings Jacob Remin in his work. Tapping into our own emotions as we responded to the exhibition opened our thinking and our questions in fruitful and eye-opening ways. Our own reflections extended our research perspectives on issues of technology and care, and connected us emotionally to the tangled landscapes of care technologies. Our individual reflections over the life of the exhibition caused us to pay greater attention to affective, embodied, and sensory ways of knowing as part of knowledge production.

Our review has explored how art meets researchers on the topic of technology and care. The exhibition *Caring Futures* invited interdisciplinary discussions about one of the biggest societal challenges of our time—technological mediated care. The artworks illuminated the purpose of the wider research project: the need to understand how technology might become a responsive part of care and its underpinning logic. The creative and imaginative approaches made available by the arts influenced and inspired us as researchers, and this interaction opened new spaces for knowledge production.

The artworks ensured that the entanglements of traditional dichotomies—such as the structural and the relational, programming and instinct, alienation and intimacy—were brought to the fore in the overall research project. In turn, this challenges us to keep thinking differently about the relationships between people and technology, and to extend our initial research question to topics such as the emotional recognition and adjustment of our ethical compass. Art has the capacity to highlight human experiences and deepen empathic and relational understanding. It has the power to illuminate technology-oriented, practical, socio-economic, and academic discourses, and supports contemplation about ongoing shifts in health and care work and proposed future solutions.

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Appendix A:
Caring Futures Art Exhibition: List of Accepted Artworks

Emilia Tikka: AEON & EUDAIMONIA (installations with photography, film, and objects)

Ruth Gilmore: Split Observations (textile artwork)

Cathrine Evelid: Tjenersnakk [Servant Talk] (video work)

Åsa Båve: Caring with Force (video installation)

Kaisu Koski and Roland van Dierendonck: Pneumatic Kitchen (video work and installation)

Jacob Remin: All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace (music video based on a visual matrix, and installation)

Kari Telstad Sundet: Memory Space Traveller (audiovisual installation)

Marie Lynn Speckert: Scalptomorpha (installation)

ENDNOTES

[1]. The project is funded by Research Council Norway (RCN), project ID: 301827

[2]. A list of all exhibits can be found in Appendix A.

[3]. This reflection was also presented at the conference *Health and Happiness in Literature and Cultures*, August 2023.