

Is Care Compatible with The Tyranny of Immediacy? on substituting rhythm for cadence

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ABSTRACT

The article specifies the human being based on the respiratory cycle, referring to the etymology of the word “spirit”. This word shares its root with the French word *respiration* (“breathing”) as well as the verb “to inspire,” suggesting breath and animation. Human temporality is made up of organic rhythmicity, from a weighing body that experiences itself as inscribed in time – this is the authentic meaning of the word “to exist”: to come from nowhere, without time, to somewhere, at some time. This article questions the compatibility between the demand for temporal efficiency, characteristic of the modern industrial age and the technophile ideology of communication, and the “service society” which purports to be more “caring” than the industrial one. Highlighting the suppression of the passage of time characteristic of the ideology of communication, where “time” is frozen in a self-reproducing present with no past or future, the author asserts that humane care is radically incompatible with a society that subsumes humanity, inscribed in time and in need of breath, under the ideology of a perpetual present. It is precisely on the basis of what specifies the human, namely breathing and desire, that the author proposes to consider how care might be possible in an ultra-technologized world. Drawing on an imaginary of movement and inspiration/aspiration/breathing deployed in choreographic performances and practices, the author invites the reader, as Simone Weil did, to substitute rhythm for cadence, to insert slowness into speed, and to favor the flow of time in a human reality that has become unbearable by dint of “modernization”. In so doing, we must reconsider head-on the fate that binds us, namely death, which no stasis in a perpetual present can eliminate, and which the metaphor of a risk of social necrosis invites us to reconsider. Accepting the passage of time, giving death back its face, is costly; but it's at this price that time can regain its humanizing value, as a *sine qua non* component of care.

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Introduction

In today's political and public health discourse, "care" has seemingly taken on an important role, as if society as a whole were indeed concerned with the "public good", and everyone's health. This consideration varies from one country to another, and in France, it seems all the more important as we have inherited a political model of the welfare state, which created, for example, the "Sécurité Sociale" and set up a number of systems designed to support vulnerable people, since the workers' trade union movement of 1936 called the "Front Populaire."

In reality, however, France, like most Western countries, has succumbed to the tyranny of immediacy. The ideal of "everything, right now" was prefigured by the Taylorist fanaticism of efficiency in the early 20th century, then carried forward by the technophile ideology of immediate communication – let's recall that "im-mediate" means without mediation, nor any relationship. This ideology aims at relationships without intermediaries; it is an ideology of the moment. The "pleasure principle," which according to Freud, governs infants and causes them to react capriciously, now takes precedence over the "reality principle," *i.e.* the ability to desire and to experience pleasure in waiting for its satisfaction, whereas it should normally evolve into it. And it is in the name of this marketing principle of immediacy that advertisers promote machines that increasingly suppress the passage of time, up to and including an "artificial intelligence" that results from no reflection whatsoever.

Logically, we might think that the ideology of immediacy is driven by the aim to maximize everyone's happiness: no need to be realistic anymore, we just have to experience an immediate pleasure, which is offered to everyone. Because that's what new technologies offer us: immediate answers, and immediacy is the new pleasure. But is this social and discursive ideology, to the apparent benefit of all, in line with the good of each individual? I question the compatibility between the technophile ideology of "everything, right now," which drives, for instance, some demands from hospital managers, but also some aggressive patients towards doctors or nurses, as well as parents demanding immediate answers to their emails from teachers – an ideology of caprice –, and the demand for a more "caring society", where hospital managers ask doctors to be more careful, school principals or ministers of education putting pressure on teachers ask them to be more careful and to work much more than in the past, condemning them for not being careful enough, and so on.

This proposal is based on the observation that human beings are characterized by a form of organic rhythmicity, by a breathing that underpins their vitality and inscribes them in time. Although we usually say that "time" passes, we should more adequately say, based on this observation, that instead of time, it is the human being that passes. The experience of this "passage" takes the name of "duration" under the pen of Henri Bergson (1859-1941). But human temporality is not the same as machine temporality, as Simone Weil points out: we are rhythmic, that is to say, we experience different kinds of temporalities, accelerations and

decelerations, moments of suspense and slowness in speed, whereas the machine follows a cadence radically inadequate to the human. The ideology of a present that does not pass but is superimposed on other presents denies the passage of time, to promote a speed that chases after itself; this ideology qualifies modern society. I highlight to what extent this is in radical contradiction with the attention to the human and the good, both common and individual, to which it claims to contribute. Drawing on the theses of Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin and Lucien Sfez, I show that, far from warding off the spectre of death, the monetization of time at work in the management of the care professions is instead fostering a form of “social necrosis”, which manifests as the disease of the century: *burnout*. My proposal consists of going back to the breath characteristic of the human being. It refers to choreographic practice and the suspension of time at play on stage, to suggest breathing life back into care and restore to time a value that only the spectre of death, faced and accepted, can authentically measure.

1. What makes us “human?”

In most mythologies, humans are not at the origin of life: they are *made* of matter, be it earth, clay, etc. This physicality is not enough: in the Bible, for example, but also in the Islamic tradition, human beings are not reducible to their bodies. What makes them human is the breath by which God animates them. Once animated by breath, body matter becomes “flesh,” *i.e.* a specifically human body, a body more than matter. In impulsing life through breath, God also gives death which will consist of a “last breath.”

Although the theological account may not be realistic, like other mythologies, it does express something about how humans have conceived of the origins of their existence: from the founding myths, the humans are characterized by a breath that animates them but also frames their temporality. So, it is not primarily by thought, reason, cognitive capacity, or *logos* that human beings define themselves: it is by their animating breath, in Latin *spiritus*. In French, the word *esprit* means “mind,” and thus, perhaps better than the English “spirit,” it describes the junction between the animating breath and human thought. In French, the word “spirit” is better translated as *âme* (“soul”), which comes from the Latin *anima*, meaning a driving and animating principle. So, in French, the words *esprit* (“mind”) and *âme* (“soul”) both refer to animation by a vital breath, even if the word *âme* has taken on a religious connotation like the English word *spirit*. What is essential for me to emphasize is that, in early Western theologies, humans were defined by a breath that set them in motion, whereas in such theologies as well as mythologies, other animals¹, while endowed with movement by definition, aren’t said to be

¹ This is the reason why no “spirit” has been ascribed to animals other than humans in Western civilization [outside of indigenous nations living in America, New Zealand, Australia or the overseas territories]. We now know that some animals are not aerobic, but obviously mammals are; the Ancients must have observed this as well, but the idea of a breath understandable as a spirit animating a non-human animal is absent, at least in the monotheistic traditions. However, the lack of a soul doesn’t mean that non-human animals don’t have feelings. Even in Descartes’s theory of the “animal machine,” animals that don’t have souls experience feelings.

moved by this kind of breath – which, for the Hebrews, is the equivalent of *the Word*, *i.e.*, the Greek *logos*, the English “mind.” I’d like to make it clear at this point that I’m not in any way doing any theology, but that I see in the great myths and the ancient religious writings a precious testimony to early human wisdom, which was above all concerned with the meaning of human existence; whether or not they provide knowledge of a potential “God,” they certainly provide a great deal of knowledge about the history of humanity, and the history of how humans have given meaning to their existence. So, I see these narratives as valuable documentation of how humans have observed themselves and tried to make sense of life.¹

If we look at the history of the genesis of humanity, we then observe a paradox: it is not *logos* that specifies the human being, but the animating breath, *i.e.*, breathing; that is, also, the passage of time, marked by the rhythm of breathing, and the possibility of exhaling a last breath, *i.e.*, death. At the same time, the breath that animates the human being is actualized by a Word, a *logos*. I want to emphasize that, by animating the body and making it properly human flesh, the Word *performs* the *logos*, which cannot be conceived independently, on the one hand, of its embodiment and, on the other, of its temporal dimension (or duration). A final etymological remark: The Indo-European root of the word *spiritus*/mind indicates a common root with the Latin *spes*, meaning “hope.”

In other words, the breath/*logos* that animates human flesh is so temporal that it includes the possibility of thinking what is not yet there, *i.e.*, the future. This, too, is a mark of the temporal dimension of *logos*, which I posit, is the result of animation by breath – *logos* is not a motor; it is the result of animation, of the inscription of the human in a temporal reality. In the same way, I distinguish “the body” from “the flesh” (the Greek *sarx*, the French *chair*) even if it is trickier in English than in French because of moral and sexual connotations that need to be eliminated: “flesh,” including in religious texts, is the animated body, endowed with moral and human virtues, unlike the body, which is thought of as pure matter. In this sense, contrary to popular belief, theology elevates the flesh to an entity morally superior to the body, for it is a body through which breath becomes *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*. In other words, because we inscribe ourselves in time and space, we simultaneously give rise to thought, speech, feelings and morality. My position concerning the place taken in contemporary society by *logos*/reason is critical: far from criticizing the emphasis on the *logos*, I consider that misunderstanding how embodied a true and real *logo* is, and nothing else exists than what is true and real, leads, on term, to the crash of human intelligence. So do I wish to warn against the decorrelation of *logos* and flesh, *i.e.* a human body, caught up in time and matter. If this decorrelation exists, in the form of artificial intelligence for example, there is nothing to guarantee that it will not be also

¹ On this subject and a comparative care ethics, see Vrinda Dalmiya, *Caring to Know: Comparative Care Ethics, Feminist Epistemology, and the Mahābhārata*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016.

decorrelated to *pathos* and *ethos*, and in this sense, sterile since reduced to a present without fertility, without a future.

I aim to underline the ethical importance of time, experienced as slowness¹. In particular, I am concerned with what separates a subject from the object of their desire, in a world governed by the ideology of immediate satisfaction. Moreover, these technologies *appear* to think, because they respond with quick and quality answers that are often preferred to slow humans who contemplate the psychological consequences of what they say. For example, artificial “intelligence” is now used as a substitute for psychologists because it is very inexpensive for everyone. This technological approach doesn’t consider that being in front of a person, receiving a look, and taking the time to create a healing atmosphere is part of the healing, even as a placebo effect. Conversely, one could wonder if a world in which I can immediately reach a non-human machine, not even a non-human animal, is not a world that causes mental illness instead of providing any care.² My goal is to highlight that if calls for a more caring world fail, it is by virtue of a general refusal to “waste time,” and that to “take time” may be sufficient for the idea of a more caring world to become a reality. Conversely, the call for a more caring world will remain ineffective if we continue to rationalize the time spent on care.

2. The human condition: enslaved to machines

In *La Condition ouvrière* (*The Condition Labor*), and more specifically her “Journal d’usine” (a factory diary), Simone Weil (1909-1943) distinguishes between rhythm, which is specific to the living beings, and cadence, which is specific to machines. She contests the inhuman working conditions of the factory workers, precisely because time no longer flows for them: they are caught in the permanent presence of a cadence, *i.e.*, of repetition emptied of all purpose, and lose their dignity in the Kantian sense, *i.e.*, the worker becomes the tool of a machine that prevents them from living and immobilizes them in a present mechanically reproduced *ad libitum*:

Things play the role of men; men play the role of things; this is the root of evil. There are many different situations in a factory; the fitter who, in a tool shop, makes, for example, press dies, marvels of ingenuity, time-consuming to shape, always different, loses nothing by entering the factory; but this case is rare. On the contrary, there are many men and women in large factories, and even in many small ones, who carry out five or six simple gestures at breakneck speed, one per second or so, with no respite other than a few anxious runs in search of a crate, a setter or other parts, until the precise second when a foreman comes to take them away like objects to put them in front of another machine, where they

¹ On slowness, see Leah Piepzna Samarasins, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018.

² And it is now recognized that non-human animals can participate in caring, without speaking, but with warmth and attunement.

will remain until they are put elsewhere. They are things as much as a human being can be, but things that have no license to lose consciousness, since they must always be able to cope with the unexpected. The succession of their gestures is not referred to, in the language of the factory, by the word rhythm, but by cadence, and that's right, because this succession is the opposite of a rhythm. (Weil, 1951)

Rhythmicity is manifest in all living things; it can be observed in the rhythm of the heart, in the alternation of the tides, in the cycles of the stars and so on. It contributes to harmony, thought of by the Greeks as the *cosmos* and equated with its beauty:

All sequences of movements that contribute to beauty and are accomplished without degradation contain moments of pause, as brief as lightning, that constitute the secret of rhythm and give the spectator, even through extreme speed, the impression of slowness. The runner, as he surpasses a world record, seems to glide along slowly, while mediocre runners are seen hurrying along far behind him; the faster and better a peasant mows, the more those watching him feel that, as the saying goes, he's taking his time. On the contrary, the spectacle of machine maneuvers is almost always one of miserable haste from which all grace and dignity are absent. (Weil, 1951)

In contrast to machine time, human temporality is rhythmic, involving the kind of detachments and alternations that make the individual as well as their spectator experience a feeling of grace. For instance, Rudolf Nureyev's momentum and speed increase in the perspective of a *grand jeté*, during which the dancer is seen to float in the air for a few moments; the spectator feels themselves in suspension, due to a phenomenon called in German *Einfühlung*, and understandable today as "kinaesthetic empathy" (Foster, 2010, Lanzoni, 2018, Leroy, 2025, Martin, 1939). A little before Simone Weil, Henri Bergson had already pointed out the unfortunate eviction of "duration" from all physical considerations of the physicists and biologists of his time, *i.e.* temporality as we experience it in the form of flow of consciousness, and through which we experience ourselves as alive. We could say, with Bergson, that there can be no consciousness without flux, *i.e.*, without duration:

Pure duration is the one thing which is directly given in consciousness. It is the form of succession which corresponds to the succession of our states of consciousness when our ego lets itself live, without making any separation between the present state and the states which preceded it. (Bergson, 1910).

Such a "durative" temporality is rhythmic in the sense that it fluctuates and allows for variations characteristic of the living, as opposed to the machine, which reproduces the same gesture identically and is stuck in a self-reproducing present: the machine does not "last," in Bergson's sense of the word "duration." This supplanting of the human gesture by the machine in the modern age, governed by the profitability of time, was the subject of Walter Benjamin's

(1892-1940) critical reflections on modernity, particularly in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (first version published in 1935) and within the Frankfurt School: by replacing the human hand with machines, the modern and industrial age has substituted reproduction for creation, production for art – in the sense of know-how – so that, while we “produce” a great deal, we rather *reproduce* the same in the form of a self-sterilizing present, a *reproduction* which, in the modern age, entails social necrosis. I borrow this metaphor from medicine: to stop the natural loss of cells when people age, doctors can artificially reduce growth and thus the aging process, *i.e.*, cell renewal. Cells that aren’t replaced rot away, leading to the progressive death of part of the body, which is called “necrosis.” Administering bisphosphonates, for example, prevents bone degeneration but causes necrosis that may be more serious than the osteoporosis they palliate. Thus, far from preventing death, we only hasten it when we contribute to the necrosis of the organism. Socially speaking, a permanent present is the equivalent of death. Natural life is always felt as a present, but a fluid present, not a static one. In a world dominated by re-production instead of creation, work is dehumanized, and workers are condemned to a permanent reproduction of the same present, which is the opposite of their nature as living beings. This results in the symptom of necrosis, be it called burn out, surmenage or depression, as well as many other kinds of illness – the body is still creative!

3. Service society or servile society? Time profitability applied to healthcare

We now live in a post-industrial age that tends to cloak its Taylorist underpinnings in promises of happiness. I might decide to order a book from Amazon, to save *myself* the time it would take to go to a bookstore, the time it would take to browse the store, the time it would take to queue up at the checkout and perhaps even the time it would take to talk to the bookseller. The time saved could then be invested in my work at home and perhaps in reading other books that are waiting for me to give them a little attention. To save consumers precious time, Amazon employees work in factories on assembly lines, but most people don’t want to know they are doing it because contributing to human exploitation is generally appalling to us. So, I could just order Simone Weil’s *La Condition ouvrière* on Amazon, thinking with a smile that maybe some Amazon employees will take the opportunity to look at the book, be interested in it, and read it too, and then, why not, make a revolution against capitalism. And so, I could tell myself stories to think that by ordering from Amazon I’m helping to change the world. In reality, this is not a time saving that allows for more care, but a restructuring of time that devalues care.¹

¹ This is discourse, and easy-beliefs: no one really saves time unless it is at the expense of someone else’s time. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore points out in *Change Everything: Racial Capitalism and the Case for Abolition*, Haymarket Books, 2024, saving time is costly, not only in terms of money, but also in terms of time, because I need technologies; but when it comes to Amazon workers, for example, they seem to be predominantly racialized people, people whose time is supposed to be cheap.

We ourselves are caught up in a structure that goes far beyond the working-class condition of Simone Weil's time, governed by an ideology of time-saving that masks that of unbridled capitalism. Indeed, when consumers shop on Amazon, they play not only their role as consumers but also that of cashiers. In other words, by "saving themselves precious time," consumers are actually working. In France, self-checkout is not as common as in Anglo-Saxon countries: self-checkout saves time for consumers. How do they save time? By letting consumers work instead of cashiers.

The purpose of these concrete remarks is to underline the fact that, even if we no longer belong to an out-of-date industrial society, due to the evolution of the world of work towards a "service society," it is service itself that has been reinvested with the deleterious and inhuman Taylorist principles, principles whose core is time-saving and efficiency. The Covid pandemic has justified entrusting to individuals most of the administrative tasks in the workplace that were previously carried out by people whose profession was dedicated to such tasks. In France, it is no longer uncommon to see University Professors in charge of hospital departments spending whole days completing files that employees could just as easily complete with no qualifications, or with administrative qualifications even superior to those of great surgeons for instance. This is one of the reasons why they sometimes publicly resign from their positions as heads of health departments in large hospitals to denounce the dehumanization of health services in France due to the rationalization of time spent on care.¹ These Professors of medicine and Doctors find themselves caught up in a cadence in the exercise of their profession, which is even more the case in health professions requiring less qualifications. Care services have been rationalized, if not rationed, and caregivers sometimes no longer provide any true care, caught up as they are in the need to keep up a pace that is incompatible with care. This is what I'd like to emphasize: when it comes to care, strictly speaking, the paradigm of a society that "functions" mechanically to the cadence of work, the paradigm of a society that has imported the blue-collar model into the world of care services, shatters.

4. Radical incompatibility between care and time rationalization

Like Walter Benjamin, [Hannah Arendt \(1906-1975\)](#), notably in *The Human Condition* (1958), emphasizes the extent to which "modernity" as an ideology has replaced the passage of time with a succession of presents, in the fantasy of a time that no longer passes and an eternal present. These presents supplant the past instead of being part of its continuity: the new iPhone renders the previous one obsolete as soon as it appears.

New versions of Apple's software condemn their predecessors to obsolescence. The process is discursive ("always be new, stay young forever!"), but the fantasy is very much alive: you

¹ In January 2020, more than 1,000 doctors at the head of major health departments in French hospitals threatened the French government with leaving their administrative posts; a hundred of them have since done so.

have to be “up to date”, *i.e.* “present,” and aging is out of the question, as it would be a sign of the passage of time. Stars of the cinema, singers, retain their youthfulness on a face often reshaped. Although cosmetic surgery has made a lot of progress, it diminishes the expressiveness of the face: the present is frozen¹.

Lucien Sfez (1937-2018) noted this early on: the ideology of communication, born in the United States with the Palo Alto School, is an ideology of the perpetual present, which he explains by the fact that the United States is a very young country in its Western form; and maybe should we add that the history of the USA is a history of oppression, something preferable to forget anyway. Such an ideology culminates in 2025 with the USA Government’s decision to erase the past works of so many scientists, be they biologists, physicians, historians *etc.* This precisely witnesses how terrified by the passage of time and the possibility of a past this Government and, most of all, a technophile ideologist of the present as is Elon Musk, are. This lack of history and reluctance to memory is compensated for by an emphasis on the present, driven by the ideology of communication and “everything, right now” (Sfez, 1988). This ideology now pervades the modern world, in the form of both new technologies and services. Its ultimate realization is generative artificial intelligence, which gives the appearance of immediacy to reflection. In contrast, reflection by definition requires a mediation (etymologically and in optics, reflection is the second time of a process in which a reflecting surface mediates the observer’s perception to himself; that’s why Descartes decided to borrow this term from optics in order to conceive of consciousness).

Artificial intelligence produces drawings without drawing them, it produces results without calculating, it produces texts without reasoning. The ideology of “everything, right now” has suppressed the processual dimension of *logos*, and the excessive rationalization of the healthcare times in healthcare institutions, close to rationing, stems from the ideology of suppressing what lies in-between; of suppressing the human relationship. A relationship takes time; juxtaposing facts does not. Opening an Amazon Locker is so much more time-efficient than having a deliveryman come to your home. The problem arises, however, when it comes to caring for people, especially those who are more vulnerable than the average person. In such cases, the capitalist ideology of the eternal present encounters two difficulties:

1/ Death is unacceptable and unwatchable, while vulnerable people reflect it in their faces, especially at the end of their lives; but it is still even unacceptable to watch a small child about to die of leukemia. Death as something happening to us is unbearable in countries where the modernist disease of burning out increased in proportion to the capitalist organization. At the same time, quite oddly, killing someone has become somewhat banalized by video games, so that death becomes something virtual, never really happening; this, too, illustrates how Western societies exclude death from life. On the contrary, older adult in Cameroon die surrounded by

¹ At the same time, this anti-ageing discourse results in a fruitful market. See Petersen, A. (2018).

their family, because they lived together until the end, also because there aren't so many medicalized structures where people can put and close the face of death on itself... So, let's think that this inability to bear the fact that we, human beings, are condemned to death, and that time flies, is a particular modern and occidental disease.

2/ In the Western world, shaped in Taylorist and managerial ideologies, and condemned to reproduce the tyranny of immediacy, older adults portray a present that is fleeing towards a future, with a slowness that has become unbearable. Although many care-workers in institutionalized care system fight against such a gaze towards the elderly (I think of clown companies and artists working in hospitals for old people, but they are not supposed to be care-givers), it has become unbearable to see time pass, conditioned as we are from early childhood to see images scroll by ever faster on screens. Although aging and death are part of life, whereas immortality is the opposite of life (Leroy 2023), the reign of sensory hyperstimulation permits us, and is made so, to escape the idea of death. As French philosopher Blaise Pascal underlines in France in the 17th century, we *know* that time passes and that we are “miserable”, *i.e.* finite and condemned to death, but we tend to escape this knowledge by closing our eyes and divert ourselves a lot. Blaise Pascal is sarcastic towards the French aristocrats, whom he describes as “incapable of remaining at rest in a bedroom” because they want to escape the knowledge that human life on earth is not eternal (Blaise Pascal's solution to such an existential anxiety is the Catholic belief in the afterlife, which he shares with many other religions).

More than only part of French culture of the aristocrats, this difficulty in dealing with the end of life is characteristic of Western societies, which should question ourselves and our model of the world. Because on the other hand, it is heartbraking for the family of the elderly, whoever they may be – Western people or not – to see how, in nursing homes, time is supposed to stand still, everything seeming out of any passage of time, and almost everyone being resigned to a life that the elderly think no longer worth living; it's hard not to get the feeling that in our institutions – here I am talking about what we observe in France, but also make reference to *Human Forever*,¹ a brilliant and extremely moving film by Teun Toebe & Jonathan de Jong – the elderly are waiting to die, watching time pass slowly, with no rhythm anymore. This is a generalization although some institutions do their best to propose “activities” to the residents, but most of the time this doesn't hide enough the fact that most structures devoted to the end of life are only a corridor to death; which is not only heartbreaking for the family that has no other option, because of living in such a Taylorist world, but also frightening regarding our own aging. So, should we let the elderly experience the stillness of time, characteristic of death, during their life, and shirk our responsibility to care for them, *i.e.* to face death ourselves? What place should care have in a so-called “modern” world where we try to eradicate the necessary duration and passage of time, *i.e.* death? Although violent, the organic metaphor of “necrosis” is apt for thinking about a technophile society that makes the present succeed a present without tomorrow: by way of illustration, the new version of the

¹ See <https://teuntoebes.com/documentaire/>

iPhone will never be “the one,” “the one we stop at”; the present doesn’t last, and in order for there to always be a present, marketing and modernist discourses superimpose a new present that radically eliminates the previous one, without ever throwing it back into a past that it immediately erases. There is no memory in such a present. In the words of Simone Weil, it is by introducing “moments of pause, as brief as lightning, which constitute the secret of rhythm and give the spectator, even through extreme rapidity, the impression of slowness,” that we could imagine giving or breathing life into the now-timed cadence of care, which is in fact incompatible with all rationalization. Would’t there be a more cost-effective solution? Yes, but then we could no longer speak of care in the ethical sense of the word. And that’s the point of useless activities like dance performances: the spectator and the dancer take time to waste it, time for themselves, which is not a waste at all.

Opening: dance

I do not develop here the relationship between dance and desire, which I have made clear in my previous works (see, for example, [Leroy, 2025 \[2021\]](#)); I will simply state the conclusion in a way that is as compelling as it is simple and, I believe, sufficient: dance, in whatever form, in any of its variations, whether it embraces it or rejects it, is the incarnate sublimation of desire, in all its frustrating and, as such, driving aspects. Playing with the sigh, the inhalation, the desire to fly, as well as with the exhalation and the last breath, dance stages the motor impulses, the impulses, the rhythm, the rhythmic breaks, as well as the rhythmic variations that are proper to this breath that animates and moves us, even carries and sustains us. As such, it is a definitive breakthrough in cadence, an example of how we might rethink the test of time as the *sine qua non* of a service society worthy of the name.

In his ballet *Requiem*, Angelin Preljocaj choreographs spirituality, *i.e.* breath, and flight “beyond” the body itself. From the very title, the ballet questions the relationship between the living and death, that is, the disappearance of a loved one. This loss digs a hole in being, rather than in having. To lose a loved one is to lose a part of oneself, and to feel a sense of collapse that manifests itself physically: we experience gravity, an inability to stand up, but above all an intimate feeling of being drawn to the ground. The religious imaginary associates the death of a loved one with their spiritual “elevation,” as if the body’s “last breath” were also the breath by which the soul rises out of the body. Astronomy tells us that there are no more flying souls in the sky than anywhere else, at least as far as our senses can perceive. But suppose these metaphors of spirituality, breath, flight and aspiration persist in the common imaginary and in metaphysics. In that case it’s because they say something about the living: it is through our breath and our motor impulses that we participate in the course of human existence, and in short, there is good reason to encourage more breath in caring, more spaces for inhaling and exhaling. I’m not advocating meditation sessions in caring: everyone knows how to breathe. Perhaps caring for society requires no more than that: breathing in, breathing out, slowing down, taking the time needed to care for others as well as ourselves. If “time is money” is a maxim, it doesn’t apply to caring. To gain time, to speed up the work of caregivers, makes that work lose all its value. This work, which should no longer be called “care,”

can then be done by an artificially intelligent robot, but it lacks what makes authentic care valuable: its processual dimension, its temporality, and the lived and embodied experience of caregivers (Hamington, 2004, 2015, 2024).

Conclusion

Contemporary societies are condemned to necrosis if they ignore the temporality required by care and, more generally, by ethics. The model of dance is not just an easy illustration, but a paradigm of authentic care: if care is not to be reduced to dance, we can grasp its human specificity from the practice of dance, which cares for both dancers and spectators through the play of gravity and rhythmic variation. I've insisted elsewhere (Leroy, 2024, 2025) on the importance of gravitational play for personal care, but here I'd like to insist on the *sine qua non* of such care: breathing slowness into the cadence in order to break its rhythm and encourage the flow of a duration, a lived time. Without this experience, the human species is condemned to a monstrous present of its own perpetual self-reproduction, not at all generative, as we'd like it to be, but eminently sterile.

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