In this review, 7 Advanced Synthesis Option Studios present their response to the semester theme of CARE, through the lens of their studio agenda. Here we set out a provocation for each studio, taking quotes from a key text, Shannon Mattern’s article, Maintenance and Care, from Places Journal, November 2018.

Sarah Rafson and Mary-Lou Arscott 12/13/21
Maintenance and Care

A working guide to the repair of rust, dust, cracks, and corrupted code in our cities, our homes, and our social relations.

https://placesjournal.org/article/maintenance-and-care/

Shannon Mattern

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MORE BY SHANNON MATTERN
Concealment and Compassion
Tree Thinking
How to Map Nothing
taking care — connecting threads, mending holes, amplifying quiet voices.

the world is being fixed all around us, every day.
Values like *innovation* and *newness* hold mass appeal — or at least they did until *disruption* became a winning campaign platform and a normalized governance strategy. Steven Jackson’s now-classic essay “Rethinking Repair,” written in the *before-time* — way back in 2014 — proposes that we “take erosion, breakdown, and decay, rather than novelty, growth, and progress, as our starting points” in considering relations between society and technology.
Given the degree of brokenness of the broken world (and the expense of fixing it), we need *all* maintainers to apply their diverse disciplinary methods and practical skills to the collective project of repair. ... repair-thinking [could] be considered a distinct epistemology. Fixers, ... “know and see different things — indeed, different worlds — than the better-known figures of ‘designer’ or ‘user.’”
... we need to acknowledge traditions of women’s work, domestic and reproductive labor, and all acts of preservation and conservation, formal and informal. At the same time, we have to avoid romanticizing maintenance and repair. We can learn from feminist critiques of the politics of care (particularly the reliance on poorly paid immigrants and people of color) and look to maintenance practices outside the Western world.

**COMMONING THE CITY**
… consider recuperative strategies that don’t normalize care as inherently virtuous and good-feeling. Aryn Martin, Natasha Myers, and Ana Viseu propose that a critical practice of care would “pay attention to the privileged position of the caring subject, wary of who has the power to care, and who or what tends to get designated the proper or improper objects of care.” We could extend these questions to every scale of maintenance work — from transit networks and school systems to homes and objects.
How can we position “care” as an integral value within the city’s architectures and infrastructures of criminal justice, designing systems and spaces for restoration rather than retribution?
...we see how the multi-scalar nature of broken systems impedes repair. Consider the New York City subway. Mayor Bill DeBlasio and Governor Andrew Cuomo have famously fought for years about whether the city or the state is responsible for fixing the subterranean mess. Nobody wants to pay, so one of the world’s great transportation systems falls into disrepair.

Text from Shannon Mattern, Maintenance and Care, Places Journal, Nov 2018
We can zoom in from that regulatory apparatus to see all the other labor involved in maintaining a building. At the architectural scale, maintenance involves a wide spectrum of professional expertise: “preservation, material science, development, policy, insurance law, and building codes,” and more ... Different styles of buildings — from pre-modern dwellings to modernist airports — call for different modes of upkeep, preservation, or conservation.

CULTIVATED FROM FARM TO BUILDING

Text from Shannon Mattern, Maintenance and Care, Places Journal, Nov 2018