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Read Carefully! Conceptualizing Reading as Care in *The Book of Form & Emptiness* and *My Salinger Year*

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Read Carefully! Conceptualizing Reading as Care in *The Book of Form & Emptiness* and *My Salinger Year*

_Abstract

Reading and care are two concepts which inspire extensive discussions in current research, especially because both of them are perceived to be in crisis and, as a result, reconsidered and re-conceptualized. Despite this fact and despite conceptual overlaps in areas such as attention, affect and attachment, reading and care have not been contextualized or studied in relationship to each other comprehensively. Delving deeper into intersections of reading and care, this article inquires which concepts of reading emerge when it is viewed through the lens of care. Studying the two contemporary American works *My Salinger Year* and *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, the *_Article* analyzes how reading can constitute acts of caring about, caring for, and self-care. This introduces new perspectives on reading as a practice embedded in broader socio-cultural issues it mirrors and participates in, highlighting functions ascribed to reading.

1_Introduction

"That's what books are for, after all, to tell your stories, to hold them and keep them safe between our covers for as long as we're able. [...] We care about your feelings and believe in you completely."[1] As Ruth Ozeki's novel *The Book of Form & Emptiness* grants books a narrative voice, the books are quick to establish two important objectives for themselves—to make stories readable and to promote care. Ozeki's novel is no exceptional example with its interest in reading and care, and relations between the two domains. Exclamations such as "reading has become a focal point of cultural debate"[2] and "[c]are is omnipresent"[3] frame reading and care as topics of animated discussions in both public and academic discourses.

When reading and care are considered important contemporary issues and subjects of study, they are often imbued with a connotation of crisis. Critics fear a loss of reading in the digital age[4] and carelessness in a neoliberal world of self-centered individuals.[5] Apart from the mere topicality reading and care share, they have considerable conceptual overlaps. More precisely, attention, affect, and attachment are all evoked in current (re)definitions of both reading and care. Applying overlapping concepts of reading and care to the two contemporary novels *The Book of Form & Emptiness* and *My Salinger Year*, in this *_Article* I argue for a possible convergence of reading and care. Reading, I contend, can constitute an act of care on different levels.

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Care covers, on the one hand, "affective and ethical dispositions involved in concern, worry, and taking responsibility for other's well-being" and, on the other, "material practices—traditionally understood as maintenance or concrete work involved in actualizing care,"[6] such as familial care or care in institutions such as care homes, hospitals, and schools.[7] Care can also be directed towards the self and its well-being. In line with these distinctions, I examine reading as care about, care for, and self-care in this *_Article*. These different dimensions are, however, not clearly separable and may interact.

An area of research striving to join reading and care is the field of narrative medicine. Scholars of narrative medicine assume that providing excellent medical care requires of one "to listen to the narratives of the patient, grasp and honor their meanings, and be moved to act on the patient's behalf."[8] Reading, these scholars claim, serves as a "training ground"[9] for these skills that improve healthcare. Narrative medicine highlights the combination of affective and cognitive processes that are activated in both reading and care by introducing attention, representation, and affiliation as its key components.[10] While this framework resembles the use of attention, affect, and attachment in my approach, a central difference—and possibly also a point of criticism—is that narrative medicine mostly conceives of reading as a precursor of care, but does not consider reading itself as an act of care, as this article aims to do in extension of the preceding studies.

Outside of narrative medicine, reading and care have not been contextualized or studied in relation to each other in much detail. While literature and care have been linked, such as in the German 2023 essay collection *Literatur und Care* (*Literature and Care*), reading—as the practice through which an audience consumes literature—is usually not specifically addressed.[11] The essays in *Literatur und Care* mainly deal with literary depictions of care and the relationships between writing and acts of care. Some of the rare studies which zoom in on reading are Christina Lupton and Johanne Gormsen Schmidt's "Confined to Care: Reading Autofiction During the Covid-19 Lockdowns," which studies how readers related the novel *My Work* by Olga Ravn to "routines of care they were caught up in."[12] Another piece of scholarship is María Angélica Thumala Olave's "Reading Matters: Towards a Cultural Sociology of Reading" which, in part, studies how reading can offer readers possibilities for self-care. It is addressed in this article's section on self-care.[13]

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By delineating how reading can equal care about, care for, and self-care in this article, I aim to enrich existing understandings of reading by questioning established assumptions about it. Even though many scholars of reading acknowledge that reading encompasses a spectrum of practices, the understanding of reading as "scanning a [printed] text's words and sentences and thereby deciphering or interpreting it"[14] in a linear and immersed way remains prominent.[15] Additionally, it ties reading to favorable outcomes such as humanist values, education, and empathy. Conceiving of reading as care problematizes this idealized understanding. The notion of reading as care about someone or something, as I point out in my analysis, challenges established connections between reading and empathy. Reading as care for someone or something frames reading as care work in which reading mirrors problems of care, such as an uneven distribution of care tasks, especially in terms of gender. Investigating reading as self-care critically juxtaposes personal growth and well-being expected to result from reading with the responsibility it places on the individual instead of public institutions of care. All perspectives on reading and care I propose—reading as care about, care for, and self-care—involve various media, genres, and forms[16] in contrast to prevailing discussions of reading, which tend to concentrate on novels.[17] The suggested perspectives also take on board the multidirectional attachments between participants such as authors, readers, and characters, by transferring circular relations of care to reading.

Viewing reading as care highlights how reading is situated in larger socio-cultural contexts. This invites inquiries into the functions and impact of reading when it merges with momentous social practices of care. The aspects of attention, affect, and attachment shared by contemporary concepts of reading and care provide insights into the sometimes paradoxical interplay of cognitive, affective, material, and social characteristics of reading.

After examining how attention, affect, and attachment inform contemporary definitions of reading and care, I turn to Joanna Rakoff's memoir *My Salinger Year* and Ruth Ozeki's novel *The Book of Form & Emptiness*. I analyze how reading takes the form of care about, care for, and self-care in these two contemporary texts. The novels reflect on reading as a set of practices they themselves are subjected to in the self-reflexive stance various contemporary works take.[18] The literary studies approach applied in this article to unpack ideas about reading collected, created, and circulated in

https://doi.org/10.22029/oc.2024.1404

the two works draws on cognitive and affective narratology, theorizing different readerly approaches to texts. It is also combined with the social environments of reading with which narrative medicine and narrative care engage.[19]

2_Conceptual Overlaps of Reading and Care: Attention, Affect, Attachment

Attention is the first term that crops up in current discussions and renegotiations of reading and care. As scholars such as María Puig de la Bellacasa or Michelle Murphy point out, caring about or for someone or something requires and equals directing attention at them.[20] Reading is also "linked to […] the ability to focus one's attention and to concentrate on a meaningful task"[21] and for some scholars even the prime example of paying attention.[22] Viewed through the lens of attention, reading can appear as care when it includes readers' cognitive decisions to focus on a text's contents, themes, and characters. The attribution of attention to reading is especially central in discourses which contrast reading with other media practices, especially digital ones. A common assertion is that "shorter textual forms, such as Tweets and the internet's flashy, distracting overload of textual and visual fragments" decrease readers' attention spans.[23] This line of argument does not only exclude digital practices from definitions of reading, but also cements the high socio-cultural status and value of reading as the skill to uphold "sustained, unbroken attention to a single, static object."[24] Conceiving of reading as an act of care highlights the defining influence of attention on reading. However, some reading scholars have recently begun to argue that reading is an oscillation between different levels of attention, countering the prominently established and idealized relationship between reading and attention.[25]

Another term appearing in discussions of reading as well as care is affect. Care entails an affective relationship between the carer and the recipient of care, which is frequently described in terms of love:[26] "Love is also involved in compelling us to think with, and for, what we care about."[27] This approach alerts to a problematic side of care—affect (and love) can create "moral pressure for [care] workers who might rightfully want to preserve their affective engagement from exploitations of waged labor."[28] Affect also has a problematizing effect on reading, helping to rethink established understandings. Scholars increasingly express the need to make affect a more central point of discussion in reading studies. Rita Felski, for example, introduces four uses of literature in her similarly titled 2008 book, which she deems are crucial

https://doi.org/10.22029/oc.2024.1404

motivations for and outcomes of reading.[29] Listing recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock as these four uses, Felski concentrates on affective-cognitive components of reading. Another area of reading that affect has entered is academic reading. While it had been considered rationally detached for a long time,[30] affect has recently begun to be argued as capable to extend academic reading into a set of methods,[31] and that love has become an influential factor in literary studies where loving literature turns reading into affective labor.[32]

Related to affect is the notion of attachment. Positive affective relations involved in care can also be reformulated as "the state of being emotionally attached to or fond of something"[33] or someone, "a strong sense of attachment and commitment to something"[34] or someone. This conceptualization of reading as a means of forming attachments underpins, for instance, Felski's postcritical reading. By proposing this reading practice, which is highly influential in current scholarly discussions of reading, Felski aims to deconstruct boundaries between academic and non-academic reading practices, and attachment plays a vital role therein. This is because, according to Felski, attachment is not only affective, but can shape reading in a number of further ways:

> Attachments, after all, can be physical—the dog-eared book I carry around with me; institutional—the novel that crops up every year on my syllabus; cognitive—the essay that gave me a new intellectual vocabulary; ethical or political—the commitments that inform my response to a work of fiction.[35]

The range of adjectives Felski names, such as "physical" or "ethical," shows that attachment is diverse. Because of this, the concept of attachment might be considered as a possibility to bridge the previous terms 'attention' and 'affect.' Whereas contradictions between analytical attention and affect can arise, Felski's framework proposes that attention can also have an affective side to it, for example, when it develops through enchantment. Attachment can therefore extend the concept of attention and place it in proximity of affect. Furthermore, as attachment can refer to different aspects, Felski suggests, it unites different readers, including even those who are supposedly not attached to the text in an affective sense. It is an invitation to scrutinize the nature of different relationships between readers and texts, similar to different relationships in care practices.

https://doi.org/10.22029/oc.2024.1404

3_Care About

A longstanding assumption about reading is that it can increase empathy,[36] frequently viewed as a prerequisite for care.[37] Experts in the field of empathy studies define empathy as "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, [which] can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state […]."[38] In contexts of reading, however, the term empathy is frequently adopted to summarize the idea that readers are inclined to feel for others.[39] This is the case, for example, in claims that by confronting readers with the perspectives of characters, reading can advance

> the ability to imagine what it is like to live the life of another person and see ourselves as other […] by developing imaginative abilities in the reader—in particular, the ability to understand how others' similar wishes and hopes develop differently in different social circumstances […].[40]

Scholars of empathy call this phenomenon, which, according to their research, can follow empathy, "the moral emotion sympathy"[41]. These experts make a distinction between empathy as a sudden affect and sympathy as an emotion and moral behavior whereas other voices in the field of reading conflate the two terms. Adoptions of empathy as sympathy promote a direct connection of reading, empathy, and care. They suggest that empathetic readers are trained to care about the texts they read as well as the texts' characters and events.[42] Since causal relationships between reading and empathy are highly contested in research,[43] however, I propose to complicate the established entanglements of empathy and care in the context of reading.

The imprecise use of the term 'empathy' in connection to reading is not the only reason why "the contemporary truism that novel reading cultivates empathy that produces good citizens for the world"[44] leaves room for critique. In her book *Empathy and the Novel*, Suzanne Keen points out that even if readers experience empathy, this does not automatically lead to sympathy and care. Vice versa, care is not always grounded in empathy and can also result from other cognitive processes.[45] Engaging with this point of criticism, I challenge the synonymous use of empathy and care in contexts of reading and, instead, suggest that the notion of reading as caring about someone or something can serve as an alternative to empathetic reading. This article's understanding of care about someone or something encompasses mental dispositions or attitudes of acknowledging that what is cared about constitutes a serious concern in need of awareness and support.[46] This may involve affects such as empathy, but is not solely dependent on empathy. Readers can also care about what they read because of

https://doi.org/10.22029/oc.2024.1404

their attention or attachment(s) as further components of reading and care. Care about can spark physical acts of care. It can also remain a standalone reaction, in contrast to the idealized version of empathy applied in the context of reading which takes social change as a given result.

Reading can familiarize readers with characters and perspectives radically different from their own. For some scholars such as Moritz Baßler, it is even a central aim of contemporary readers to encounter a diverse set of characters and perspectives in literature, differing from canonical, usually white and male-centered ones.[47] The related expectation that empathizing with these perspectives through reading creates more awareness, understanding, and acceptance, which will eventually have a positive socio-cultural impact, is highly debatable. In her essay "Reading Teaches Us Empathy, and Other Fictions," the author Elaine Castillo, for instance, voices the concern that this assumption limits readings of certain authors' works:

> The problem with this type of reading is that in its practical application, usually readers are encouraged […] to read writers of a demographic minority in order to *learn* things; which is to say, as a supplement for their empathy muscles, a metabolic exchange that turns writers of color into little more than ethnographers —personal trainers, to continue the metaphor. The result is that we largely end up going to writers of color to learn the specific—and go to white writers to feel the universal.[48]

The intention to feel empathetic towards members of marginalized groups through reading may result in skewed, partial representations with which readers engage.[49] A further related issue is that the functions of characters in literary works are reduced to either embodying sources of identification and empathy, or providers of information similar to textbooks.

Ruth Ozeki's novel *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, published in 2021, presents an ensemble of characters with diverse and non-canonical perspectives in terms of the characters' race, social class, gender, etc. The novel delves into the experiences and hardships of the thirteen-year-old Asian-American Benny Oh and his mother Annabelle Oh after the death of Benny's father and Annabelle's husband Kenji. While both characters grieve their loss, Annabelle additionally struggles with her new role as the single mother of a teenage boy;[50] with her hoarding issues;[51] with maintaining a steady job;[52] and with a broken ankle keeping her immobile for parts of the novel.[53] All these problems are amplified by Annabelle's lack of a social support system.[54] Benny, meanwhile, begins to hear voices of objects speaking to him in the

https://doi.org/10.22029/oc.2024.1404

wake of Kenji's death, which brings about instances of self-harm.[55] Further significant characters in Ozeki's novel come from a group of homeless Benny befriends, among them a young female artist who calls herself the Aleph and has a history of mental health problems and substance abuse,[56] as well as an older man called Slavoj or the bottleman who is a Slovenian philosopher-poet, an alcoholic, and a wheelchair user.[57]

Reading Ozeki's novel can result in readers' care about these characters and the broader social issues they introduce. The basis for this form of care does not have to be empathy, even though it is possible that readers experience affective reactions, perceiving, for example, Annabelle's despair, and then develop sympathy and care. However, *The Book of Form & Emptiness* contains moments of estrangement, a device which counters empathy, according to Keen.[58] The majority of the novel is narrated by a book, one of the objects Benny begins to hear speaking. After a scene in which Benny kisses the Aleph and she objects, a fight between Benny and the book ensues. Benny accuses the book of manipulating him:

> That was you, wasn't it? You knew I wanted to kiss her, and you told me to do it! […] That was your voice. *Do it!* you said. And so I did. […] You were just using me, making me do stuff, so you could tell a better story.[59]

The accusation raises the question whether Benny can choose his own actions or whether his behavior is prescribed by the text. This conundrum creates estrangement by reminding readers that Benny is a fictional character in Ozeki's novel who may be constructed in a certain way, for example in a way which invites identification and empathy. Estrangement can challenge readers to rationally reflect on their (affective) reactions to reading about Benny. The book's response to Benny's protests can, additionally, be interpreted as a critical comment on the idea that books can make readers act in a certain way by evoking affects such as empathy: "Oh, Benny, no. We didn't make you kiss her. That wasn't our voice you were obeying. It was the voice of an impulse far more primal and urgent than anything a book can muster."[60]

Apart from the selection of characters featured in *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, the novel's paratext also invites readers to read with care. For example, the book's Acknowledgements name sources Ozeki drew on in her depiction of auditory hallucinations:

> I want to mention Intervoice: the International Hearing Voices Network (www.intervoiceonline.com), and Hearing Voices USA (www.hearingvoicesusa.org), as well as the pioneering work of Dr. Marius Romme and Dr. Sandrea Escher, whose experience-focused, non-pathologizing approach to perplexing states and unshared experiences has widened and deepened our understanding. I offer special and heartfelt thanks to the voice hearers, the artists, and the mad activists, whose courageous accounts, both written and recounted, have expanded my understanding and affirmed my experience.[61]

By detailing this background, and rooting the novel's depictions in the extra-novelistic 'real' world, Ozeki highlights how the novel can inform readers about the phenomenon of hearing voices and prompt them to care about persons with this experience. This form of care does not necessarily have to stem from empathy; it can also be grounded in the conscious decision of readers who want to pay attention to the topic of hearing voices or in attachments to persons such as the ones Ozeki mentions in her Acknowledgements. Reading turns into acts of caring about through a complex blend of affect, attention, and attachment, not through a single source such as empathy.

The connection between reading and caring about someone or something has further implications than those related to the readers of Ozeki's novel. It is also addressed through the novel's action when Annabelle's job as a reader at a media-monitoring agency is cut and her work materials are taken possession of by the company:

> They took her entire archives: all the newspapers and magazines; the old audio and VHS video cassettes; the floppy drives and CDs and DVDs containing almost two decades of stories she'd monitored; and with the stories went all the people, all the bodies left behind after the shootings and riots and natural disasters, the dead bodies and living bodies, too, carried along on the tide of old news.[62]

Annabelle cares about the fates of the persons reported on in the news and views archiving and reading as acts sustaining this care. This type of care even extends into non-human realms in *The Book of Form & Emptiness*. The book which tells the story of Ozeki's novel as a narrator frequently comments on its own status as a non-human object and expresses a desire for readers' care: "We liked being dusted and cared for. We dislike neglect."[63] Together with ecological aspects introduced in *The Book of Form & Emptiness* and a critique of consumerism and resource use in the owning of a lot of books,[64] caring about books as reading materials, as proposed by the novel's narrative focalization, connects reading with caring about non-human entities.[65]

In her literary memoir *My Salinger Year*, Joanna Rakoff finds herself in a similar position as Annabelle Oh, caring about subjects in the texts she reads. *My Salinger Year* chronicles a year of experiences Rakoff has while working for a literary agency in New York. A part of Rakoff's job in the memoir is to handle the fan mail sent to J. D. Salinger, who is one of the agency's most famous clients and does not want to read the letters himself. After Rakoff is encouraged to read the letters and reply with a form letter,[66] she quickly notices how the letters and their writers, "those documents of so many people's lives,"[67] constantly occupy her mind and haunt her, especially a letter from a boy living in Winston-Salem, which is mentioned repeatedly throughout the memoir.[68] Rakoff begins to send personalized replies instead of the form letter:

> *Why could I not leave these letters alone?* […] *Why could I not just send on form letters to every single fan?* The answer was plain: I loved them. They were exciting. […] I felt a strange charge, a mixture of anger and affection, disdain and empathy, admirations and disgust. These people were writing to me—or, well, no, to Salinger, care of me—about their marital frustrations, their dead children, their boredom and desperation; they wrote about their favorite songs and poems, about the trips they'd taken to the Grand Canyon and Hawaii, about their favorite dolls. They told me—Salinger—things I knew, for sure, they'd never told anyone else. Could I, over and over, respond to them in the most formal, impersonal manner possible? Could I just abandon them? Could I let them think that no one cared, no one was listening?[69]

Rakoff's care about the fans in this passage is of mixed origin. She names empathy, but also affects directed at her personal pleasure such as excitement. In addition, Rakoff's employers demand that she pays attention to the letters' contents.[70] Care about others is not always followed by physical acts of care in *My Salinger Year*. Even though Rakoff cares about the boy from Winston-Salem who repeatedly occupies her mind, she never replies to his letter.[71] Rakoff's care about this fan leads to pressure, suppressing the act of care that sending a letter back forms.

While Rakoff reads a lot of letters in the course of *My Salinger Year*, her memoir has also been compared by reviewers to a letter, calling it a "love letter to reading and New York"[72] or a "love letter to literature, and to being young and figuring out who you are […]."[73] This showcases how reading as care recognizes genres and text forms such as memoirs and letters, in addition to novels. It also suggests that readers might turn to *My Salinger Year* in a similar way as Rakoff turns to Salinger's fan letters, caring about Rakoff's story and its protagonists in a similar way as Rakoff cares about the fans. *My Salinger Year* draws attention to Rakoff as a lower-ranking staff member

https://doi.org/10.22029/oc.2024.1404

of the literary business and to common readers and fans of literature, but not so much to prominent figures of the literary field such as Salinger whose appearance in the work has been labeled a cameo appearance by some reviewers.[74] If readers of the memoir care about these characters, parallel to Rakoff's care about the fans in it, they engage with lesser-known perspectives. With the help of *My Salinger Year*, they can care about those who care about Salinger's works, who feel attached to it and write to and about Salinger as a reaction. Care about unfolds in circular relations between readers, authors, and characters. All participants are simultaneously providers and recipients of care. Reading as care is circular and not merely a source from which readers can extract effects such as empathy.

4_Care For

Annabelle Oh's and Joanna Rakoff's acts of reading in the two respective works might be considered as caring about the persons in the texts they read, but also as caring for others—as instances of care work. The idea of care work covers "the unwaged work of caring"[75] within families such as raising children or caring for old or ill relatives, as well as "waged emotional labor in the expanding service industries"[76] such as the work of

> stewardesses, nurses, waitresses, receptionists, clerks, teachers, child care workers, nurses, or customer services representatives […] perform[ing] the affective labor of smiling, friendliness, warmth, and caring as part of their paid work […].[77]

Apart from concrete (physical) acts like cooking a meal to feed a child (in the domestic context) or teaching it how to read (in a professional context), a further component of care work scholars have only begun to single out recently is the mental load, the

> *cognitive* labor […]—the *thinking, planning, scheduling* and *organizing* […]—and the *emotional* labor associated with this work, including the feelings of caring and being responsible […] but also the emotional impact of this work.[78]

Thus, the concept of the mental load as part of care work comes close to the notions of caring about discussed in the previous section of this article.

Reading can be part of all types of care work—paid and unpaid, physical and mental—as *The Book of Form & Emptiness* and *My Salinger Year* illustrate. This may include reading a bedtime story to a child, or in Annabelle and Benny's case a lunar map with which Benny is fascinated.[79] A relationship between reading and familial care is furthermore established in a description of how Annabelle and Kenji care for

Benny when he is still a baby: "[T]hey would lie on their sides in bed with the infant Benny between them, their bodies like two parentheses, enclosing a small star. (*)"[80] The typographical rendering of the family members' bodies sets up Annabelle and Kenji's care (work) as something readable. In both works, reading also appears as care work when Annabelle and Rakoff read letters and news reports in the context of paid work. *The Book of Form & Emptiness* stresses that Annabelle begins to work as a reader at the media-monitoring agency after Benny's birth to support the family.[81] When her job is cut and the company comes to collect the equipment Annabelle uses for working from home, the novel emphasizes that Annabelle has invested a lot of care in archiving the texts she has read. Moreover, the equipment is compared to newborn children: "They swaddled the hardware in shipping blankets like newborns, trailing cables like umbilical cords as they carried them out to the truck."[82] The devices Annabelle uses for reading professionally are coupled with maternal care work in this simile. In *My Salinger Year*, reading the letters addressed to Salinger and acknowledging their contents constitutes a considerable mental load for Rakoff:

> But I also understood—I did, I did—why he [Salinger] didn't want to receive those letters anymore. […] You can't go around revealing your goddam emotions to the world. No, but you could reveal them to J. D. Salinger. You would presume he'd understand. […] For years, Hugh [Rakoff's colleague] told me, he'd tried to respond to his fans. But the emotional toll grew too great. It was, in a way, already too great for me.[83]

As various scholars emphasize, under capitalism and patriarchy, care work is a strongly gendered phenomenon in which the role of the carer is traditionally ascribed to women.[84] Within this role, women are not only expected to do most of the domestic, unpaid care work, but also feature strongly as workers of paid care professions.[85] A similar tendency concerning gender can be detected in reading, as some scholars have observed a feminization of the reader throughout the last decades.[86] The gendered overlap between reading and care (work) is not difficult to discover in *The Book of Form & Emptiness* and *My Salinger Year*, in that both feature female main characters who participate in reading as care work. Yet the works also offer more copious insights into this aspect.

The delegation of care work to a female carer, which occurs when Rakoff is tasked with reading Salinger's fan mail and responding to 'hundreds of—a thousand?—fan letters'[87] in *My Salinger Year*, becomes even more compelling when it compares

https://doi.org/10.22029/oc.2024.1404

Salinger to a second author briefly entering the memoir—Judy Blume. Famous to this day for the children's and young adult books she published in the 1970s and 1980s, Blume first appears in the memoir as a client of the agency submitting a new novel to Rakoff's boss who, in turn, asks Rakoff to read the manuscript and state her opinion on it. Rakoff is excited about this opportunity, having been an avid reader and fan of Blume's novels as a teenager. While Rakoff declares her love of Blume's work, Rakoff's boss is less convinced of the new novel, and eventually Blume decides to leave the agency.[88] What this brief interlude in *My Salinger Year* interestingly omits is that, similar to Salinger, Blume received a lot of fan mail. As a recent profile of the author in *The Atlantic* reveals, fans sent her approximately 2,000 letters per month throughout the 1980s. In contrast to Salinger, however, Blume "replied directly to 100 or so kids every month, and the rest got a form letter—some with handwritten notes at the top or bottom."[89] Blume thus read a large number of her fans' letters, caring about and for their writers, as some examples in the profile make clear:

> Blume's involvement, in some cases, was more than just emotional: She called a student's guidance counselor and took notes on a yellow Post-it about how to follow up. One teenage girl came to New York […] for a weekend visit […]. Blume thought seriously about inviting one of her correspondents to come live with her. "It took over my life at one point," Blume said of the letters, and the responsibility she felt to try to help their writers.[90]

While Salinger as a male author passes reading as care work on to a female assistant, Blume as a female author participates in it herself, so that in both cases female readers are responsible for this type of care work and the mental load that comes with it.[91] Reading features similar inequalities as care, which conflicts with the humanist values frequently attached to it.

The character of the caring female author, reading fan mail, also features in *The Book of Form & Emptiness* in the form of Aikon Konishi, a Japanese Buddhist monk and author of the book *Tidy Magic*. Annabelle, to whom the book offers strategies to rid herself of some of her belongings and to tackle her hoarding issues, frequently sends e-mails to Aikon, which the author receives in the following way:

> The email was a long one, in English, and it had taken her almost an hour to read it. […] ever since the international publication of *Tidy Magic*, fan mail was coming in from all over the world. Most of these were in English—never Aikon's strongest subject in school—and she often had to consult her battered English-Japanese dictionary to understand what they said. Many were just brief notes of thanks from women who had enjoyed her book, but others were longer, lengthy confessional missives, filled with the kind of determined cheer that masked a

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> deeper despair. When she found the time to read them, they broke Aikon's heart.[92]

Aikon's experience of reading e-mails resembles Rakoff's and Blume's experiences of reading letters as she cares for her fans by reading, acknowledging what they have to say, including their names in well-being rituals,[93] or writing back to Annabelle.[94] For Aikon, reading additionally becomes care work because of the efforts she has to make to work through texts that are not written in her native language and translate them to be able to care.

The overlap of reading and care work does not only arise from Aikon's fan mail but also from her book *Tidy Magic*. Aikon writes her book while she cares for her master, who is on the brink of death, and their temple, which is falling into disrepair.[95] As a result, Aikon's motivations for writing are mixed: "*Please help me write this book. Please let my book be of help to others who suffer like I did. Please let my book be a huge best seller so I can pay for the new roof*."[96] Having the intention to read *Tidy Magic* and buying a copy of it, readers consequently support Aikon's care work in the temple. Similar to the social exchanges of care about others enacted through reading (in) *My Salinger Year*, this calls for a circular understanding of reading.

5_Self-Care

Aikon and her book can be approached from yet another angle in the context of reading as care. As the full title of the book, *Tidy Magic: The Ancient Zen Art of Clearing your Clutter and Revolutionizing your Life*, especially the notion of revolutionizing readers' lives, makes clear, Aikon's work is a self-help book. The thematic fascination of *The Book of Form & Emptiness* with the "global self-help industry [which] has grown significantly over the last two decades,"[97] and with self-help texts as "the largest and fastest growing genre of books available on the planet"[98] is further reinforced by the strong resemblances between Aikon and the Japanese author Marie Kondo whose guide book on decluttering has a similar title as Aikon's—*The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*.[99]

Self-help books such as *Tidy Magic* are one way of setting up reading as self-care. A culmination of this is bibliotherapy in which one is advised to read in order to improve one's mental and emotional health, based on the idea that reading is good for you.[100] Self-care, in general as well as in the context of reading, is a controversial concept of care. Scholars criticize self-care as a neoliberal project of self-improvement

that is grounded in egoism and a reluctance to care for others.[101] Another underlying assumption of self-care these scholars view as problematic is that responsibilities for care, well-being, and success are transferred to individual subjects,

> deflecting from societal responsibilities and accountability. […] The operating premise is that individuals suffer because of themselves due to their own bad choices, high risk lifestyles, and/or lack of desire to improve.[102]

This aspect is also tackled in Leah Price's essay on bibliotherapy. She describes how a psychiatrist "saw his patients waiting months to be prescribed antidepressants, and years to receive talk therapy"[103] and beginning to consult self-help books to account for the lack of professional help, which then boosted bibliotherapy. Finally, self-care products such as self-help books, scented candles, or fluffy towels gain "massive profits […] from widespread social problems."[104]

While all these arguments do not shed a positive light on reading as self-care and problematize the idealized association of reading and personal thriving, reading does not necessarily have to involve self-help books to function in this way. In her sociological study, Thumala Olave finds that reading can serve as self-care by allowing readers to experience and process different affective states, and by granting them time and space they can fill all by themselves:[105]

> Participants […] speak […] about the solace and joy of reading at the end of their working day, during their commute, when on a queue, or alone in a cafe. The book in these occasions is associated with rest and the domestic or with personal space.[106]

What Thumala Olave describes also occurs in *My Salinger Year*. One weekend, Rakoff's boyfriend attends a friend's wedding and does not want Rakoff to come along for the occasion. Instead of making other plans with her friends, Rakoff borrows all of Salinger's books from the agency and reads through them:

> I read and read and read. I did not stop for the ringing phone […] and only occasionally stopped to grab a peach or a piece of cheese or a glass of water. I carried the books into the bath with me […] and on Monday, Labor Day, when I had eaten all the food in the apartment, I brought *Catcher* with me to the Mediterranean place on the corner and read it over eggs with harissa, then went straight home and finished it, with tears rolling down my face.[107]

Spending the weekend reading alone, Rakoff concentrates on her own emotions and pleasures reading Salinger's works. Upon her boyfriend's return, Rakoff notices:

> I had not wondered what he was doing at the wedding, at the beach, if he was thrilled to be able to stare at the various young women in attendance without fear

> of my censure, if he had woken this morning with some blonde by his side. I had not really thought about him at all.[108]

Reading thus takes her mind off the conflict with her boyfriend and offers her pleasure, combined with other self-care activities such as taking a bath or eating at a restaurant. A similar sentiment is expressed in *The Book of Form & Emptiness* when Benny reflects that "[b]ooks were what he read in order not to feel sad"[109] and realizes that reading can make the voices of the objects he hears go quiet.[110]

The larger part of what *The Book of Form & Emptiness* dedicates to the discussion of reading as self-care, however, revolves around Aikon's self-help book *Tidy Magic*. The status of *Tidy Magic* is reviewed from different perspectives and depicted as ambiguous in Ozeki's novel. On the one hand, the novel reiterates many of the issues critics have raised regarding self-care. Aikon, for instance, worries that her book might prompt women to pursue unrealistic ideals, "another false standard of unreasonable perfection […],"[111] whereas the librarian Cory affirms that

> [a] person's clutter wasn't the result of laziness, procrastination, psychological disorders, or character flaws. It was a socioeconomic and philosophical problem, one of Marxian alienation and commodity fetishism […].[112]

On the other hand, the novel clearly states that Aikon's intention is to help others with her book.[113] The narrative focalization and agency books are assigned in *The Book of Form & Emptiness* stress the aim of providing help by offering self-care through reading further. Benny's book, who serves as the narrator, insinuates that

> there's no denying that self-help books can be helpful, and so when *Tidy Magic* launched itself from the New Releases table into the thin air of Annabelle's life, it was hard for us to object. Annabelle needed help, and the feat that little book performed was impressive.[114]

Self-care derived from reading books and human care are also approximated when the narrator underlines that the books in Ozeki's work and the therapist Dr. Melanie share the same goal: "She […] had grown fond of the boy and his mother. They were suffering, and she wanted to help. Realizing this, we felt a kinship with her. Her wish was not unlike ours."[115] Moreover, Benny's book cautions against the biases and devaluation self-help books face: "Literary novels look down on romance and pulp fiction, and there's an almost universal disregard for certain genres, like self-help."[116] *The Book of Form & Emptiness* complicates this notion by including various chapters from *Tidy Magic* as excerpts, which integrates reading a self-help book into reading a novel and thus establishes a link between the two practices and the different forms of

care attached to them. In addition to novels, self-help is hence a further genre that reading as care integrates into its definition of reading.

In the end, what helps Annabelle cope with her hoarding problems is not practicing self-care by reading *Tidy Magic* all by herself. Instead, Annabelle is cared about and for by persons such as Cory and Aikon with whom the book helps her connect:

> Look at the way *Tidy Magic* jumped in, literally, leaping off the table and into your mother's life and opening up all sorts of possibilities. That little book gave your mother hope when she really needed it, and when Annabelle started writing fan mail, we grew hopeful, too.[117]

Reading *Tidy Magic* is therefore only one step on Annabelle's way towards confronting her personal issues on which reading as self-care alone is insufficient. Reading as self-care in *The Book of Form & Emptiness* is therefore inseparable from reading with others as well as caring about and for others.

6_Conclusion

The perspective of reading as care taken in my analysis questions some of the widespread assumptions about reading which have been naturalized over time. Reading is frequently idealized as the ultimate pathway to humanist development, empathy, education, and values. The overlaps of reading and care, however, make clear that reading is not such an innocent practice as this understanding suggests. In Ozeki's novel and Rakoff's memoir, the uneven distribution of care work among genders and the problematic sides of self-care are exchanged between reading and care. It follows that reading is not isolated from socio-cultural issues, but is shaped by them and participates in them. This aspect is an important one to keep in mind when reading is assigned a heightened cultural value, especially compared to other media practices. Widely established definitions of reading often hinge on literature with a capital L, usually in the form of the novel, as preferred texts. The intersections of reading and care in *The Book of Form & Emptiness* and *My Salinger Year* introduce readers of letters, e-mails, and self-help books. The influence of these texts on the action of the two works shows that reading these types of texts counts as reading, too, and has a considerable impact on characters' thoughts, emotions, and actions.

Despite the potential to problematize popular assumptions about reading, the overlaps of reading and care tend to reiterate some of the features that have been assigned to reading for a long time. This includes the strong connection between reading and

attention as well as the claim that reading can summon affects such as empathy. Relying on attention, affect, and attachment at the same time, however, reading as care highlights the complex combinations of these characteristics in reading processes.

Reading and care intersect in manifold ways and the possibilities to view reading as care that these intersections bring up suggest, in line with earlier scholarly claims, that reading is not a unified practice, but a spectrum of practices which can vary and even contradict each other. Scanning a customer's e-mail at work, reading aloud to a child at night, enjoying a novel on the couch after a busy day, skimming news headlines to gain an overview of current events—all these acts constitute different reading and care practices. To read carefully, to read with care, in all these different ways, is ultimately about more than the text. It is about readers' attachments to others, to the world around them. Reading the two works *The Book of Form & Emptiness* and *My Salinger Year*, readers can observe and experience reading and care simultaneously and intertwined, caring about characters, watching characters care about and for others and for themselves, practicing self-care—and reflecting on the effects reading as care brings into their lives.

_Endnotes

1 Ruth Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, Ltd., 2022), 36.

2 Dorothee Birke, *Writing the Reader: Configurations of a Cultural Practice in the English Novel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 5–6.

3 María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 1.

4 See Birke, *Writing the Reader*, 5–6; Lisa Gitelman, "Not," in *Further Reading*, eds. Matthew Rubery and Leah Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 371–80.

5 See The Care Collective et al., *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London/ New York: Verso Books, 2020), 17–18.

6 Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 4.

7 See The Care Collective et al., *The Care Manifesto*, 5–6.

8 Rita Charon, "Narrative Medicine: A Model for Empathy, Reflection, Profession, and Trust," *JAMA* 286, no. 15 (2001): 1897–1902, here: 1897. Doi: 10.1001/jama.286.15.1897.

9 Rita Charon, "Close Reading: The Signature Method of Narrative Medicine," in *The Principles and Practice of Narrative Medicine*, eds. Rita Charon et al. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 157–79, here: 158.

10 See Rita Charon et al., "Introduction," in *The Principles and Practice of Narrative Medicine*, eds. Rita Charon et al. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–12, here: 3.

11 See Charlotte Alex et al., eds., *Literatur und Care* (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2023).

[12] Christina Lupton and Johanne Gormsen Schmidt, "Confined to Care: Reading Autofiction During the Danish Covid-19 Lockdowns," *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings* 10, no. 1 (2023): 2–21, here: 15. Doi: 10.16995/c21.8620.

[13] See María Angélica Thumala Olave, "Reading Matters: Towards a Cultural Sociology of Reading," *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 6, no. 3 (2018): 417–54. Doi: 10.1057/s41290-017-0034-x.

[14] Birke, *Writing the Reader*, 8.

[15] See Jessica Pressman, *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 28.

[16] This diversity is also mentioned in the field of narrative medicine, which links reading to engaging with art works, sheet music, graphic novels, film, theater, and dance performances (see Charon, "Close Reading," 166–7).

[17] See Birke, *Writing the Reader*, 5–6.

[18] In a study on four contemporary American novels, Regina Schober, for instance, argues that "such narratives critically reflect their own status in a changing media landscape, which (seemingly) threatens their existence" (see Regina Schober, "Between Nostalgic Resistance and Critical Appropriation: Contemporary American Fiction on/of the Information Age and the Potentials of (Post)Humanist Narrative," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 61, no. 3 (2016): 359).

[19] See Arne De Boever, *Narrative Care: Biopolitics and the Novel* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2013).

[20] See Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 92; Michelle Murphy, "Unsettling Care: Troubling Transnational Itineraries of Care in Feminist Health Practices," *Social Studies of Science* 45, no. 5 (2015): 717–37, here 721. Doi: 10.1177/0306312715589136.

[21] Birke, *Writing the Reader*, 170.

[22] See Alexandra Horowitz, *On Looking: Eleven Walks with Expert Eyes* (New York: Scribner, 2013), 17. With Alice Bennet's *Contemporary Fictions of Attention: Reading and Distraction in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), there is an entire book dedicated to the role attention plays for reading (in) contemporary literature.

[23] Inge van de Ven, *Big Books in Times of Big Data* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2019), 10.

[24] Nicholas G. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 64.

[25] See Bennett, *Contemporary Fictions of Attention*, 31.

[26] See Daniela Agostinho, "Care," in *Uncertain Archives: Critical Keywords for Big Data*, eds. Nanna Bonde Thylstrup et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2021); Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 5.

[27] Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 43.

[28] Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 5. An additional critical point raised by Michelle Murphy in "Unsettling Care" is that not all affects evoked in contexts of care are necessarily positive.

[29] See Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

[30] See Michael Warner, "Uncritical Reading," in *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical*, ed. Jane Gallop (New York: Routledge, 2004), 15.

[31] See Gulsin Ciftci, "The Affects of Reading," *Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies* 23, no. 2 (2023): 10–29. Doi: 10.5283/COPAS.366.

[32] See Deidre Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 1.

[33] Murphy, "Unsettling Care," 721.

[34] Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 42.

[35] Rita Felski, "Postcritical," in *Further Reading*, eds. Matthew Rubery and Leah Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 135–44, here: 138.

[36] See Maryanne Wolf, *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World* (New York: Harper, 2019), 42. The idea that reading bolsters empathy is not exclusively a contemporary one and can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century (see Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)).

[37] See Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 20; Charon, "Close Reading: The Signature Method of Narrative Medicine," 158.

[38] Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 4.

[39] See Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 5.

[40] Thumala Olave, "Reading Matters," 430.

[41] Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 4.

[42] See Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 20.

[43] See Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 20.

[44] Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, xv.

[45] See Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 22.

[46] This understanding of care about is also reflected in the terms "representation," making what is presented in a text newly visible to its readers, and "affiliation," binding readers to texts and other subjects involved. Narrative medicine presents these as outcomes of reading culminating in care (see Charon et al., "Introduction," 3).

[47] See Moritz Baßler, *Populärer Realismus: Vom International Style gegenwärtigen Erzählens* (München: C. H. Beck, 2022), 186.

[48] Elaine Castillo, *How to Read Now: Essays* (London: Atlantic Books, 2022), 30.

[49] Further critical points include that other media practices, for example watching a film, which might also present viewers with unfamiliar perspectives, are not linked to the development of empathy to the same extent as reading, and that reading might also promote empathy with problematic characters such as the paedophile criminal Humbert Humbert in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*.

[50] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 73, 264.

[51] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 471.

[52] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 471–2.

[53] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 393.

[54] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 392, 470.

[55] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 96, 400, 404, 532.

[56] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 192, 356.

[57] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 186, 227.

[58] See Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 56. Keen adopts this term from Brecht's use of estrangement as a "practice that reach for the defamiliarization or making strange that would promote a rational response and deflect viewers' emotional reactions" and identification with characters (Keen, *Em-*

pathy and the Novel, 56).

59 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 386.

60 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 387.

61 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 549.

62 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 501.

63 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 499.

64 See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 487–90. The Aleph, for instance, creates snow globes that feature scenes of disasters (see 249–252), which the narrator links to the photo of the earth astronauts took in 1972: "Even as the Blue Marble was miniaturizing your conception of Earth, it was inflating your sense of importance in relation to it, endowing you a godlike perspective and agency. […] As your anxiety about the disastrous effects of your behaviour on the biosphere grows, you console yourself with the thought that by changing a light bulb or recycling a bottle or choosing paper instead of plastic, you can save the planet" (253).

65 The book's narrative voice pushes this aspect further. It speaks of itself in the first person plural with the explanation that "[b]ooks like each other. […] You could even say we are all related, enjoying a kinship that stretches like a rhizomatic network beneath human consciousness and knits the world of thought together. Think of us as a mycelium, a vast, subconscious fungal mat beneath a forest floor, and each book a fruiting body. Like mushrooms, we are a collectivity. Our pronouns are we, our, us" (Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 94). Benny's additional explanation is that manufactured things such as books often have several voices which are shaped by everyone involved in the production process (see 3–4). There are thus relationships of mutual care between humans and non-human entities such as books.

66 See Joanna Rakoff, *My Salinger Year* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 68, 72.

67 Rakoff, *My Salinger Year*, 244.

68 See Rakoff, *My Salinger Year*, 71, 171, 195, 214, 243.

69 Rakoff, *My Salinger Year*, 154.

70 See Rakoff, *My Salinger Year*, 72.

71 See Rakoff, *My Salinger Year*, 153.

72 "Xueting's Review of My Salinger Year," accessed April 24, 2023, <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/947245592>.

73 "Julie Ehlers's Review of My Salinger Year," accessed April 24, 2023, <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/966147240>.

74 See Suzanne Berne, "Bright Young Assistants," *The New York Times*, June 6, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/08/books/review/my-salinger-year-by-joanna-rakoff.html>.

75 Murphy, "Unsettling Care," 723.

76 Murphy, "Unsettling Care," 723.

77 Murphy, "Unsettling Care," 723.

78 Liz Dean, Brendan Churchill, and Leah Ruppanner, "The Mental Load: Building a Deeper Theoretical Understanding of How Cognitive and Emotional Labor Overload Women and Mothers," *Community, Work & Family* 25, no. 1 (2022): 13–29, here: 13. Doi: 10.1080/13668803.2021.2002813.

79 See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 320–21.

[80] Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 40.

[81] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 21.

[82] Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 472.

[83] Rakoff, *My Salinger Year*, 198.

[84] See Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 9. I am aware that this is a binary understanding of gender and is thereby limited and has to be taken critically, acknowledging its neglect of other genders on the gender spectrum. A lot of writing on care does not address this issue, but The Care Collective comments on it in its manifesto: "The traditional nuclear family still provides the prototype for care […]. This remains true even as queer people have been increasingly incorporated into the mainstream—on the condition that they reproduce the traditional nuclear-family model" (17).

[85] See The Care Collective et al., *The Care Manifesto*, 16.

[86] See Karin Littau, *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies, and Bibliomania* (Cambridge, UK / Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006), 151–53; Steven J. Tepper, "Fiction Reading in America: Explaining the Gender Gap," *Poetics* 27, no. 4 (May 2000): 255–75. Doi: 10.1016/S0304-422X(00)00003-6.

[87] Rakoff, *My Salinger Year*, 207.

[88] See Rakoff, *My Salinger Year*, 107–20.

[89] Amy Weiss-Meyer, "Judy Blume Goes All the Way," *The Atlantic*, February 27, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/04/judy-blume-books-are-you-there-god-margaret-movie/673091/>.

[90] Weiss-Meyer, "Judy Blume Goes All the Way."

[91] Ironically, Blume's interactions with her fans are compared to Salinger's famous character Holden Caulfield of *The Catcher in the Rye* in the profile: "I began to see Blume as a latter-day catcher in the rye, attempting to rescue one kid after the next before it was too late" (Weiss-Meyer "Judy Blume Goes All the Way").

[92] Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 404.

[93] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 405.

[94] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 475, 487.

[95] See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 406.

[96] Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 407.

[97] Heidi Rimke, "Self-Help, Therapeutic Industries, and Neoliberalism," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures*, eds. Daniel Nehring et al. (Routledge, 2020), 37–50, here: 37. Doi: 10.4324/9780429024764-5.

[98] Rimke, "Self-Help, Therapeutic Industries, and Neoliberalism," 38.

[99] See Marie Kondo, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2014). Further parallels between Aikon and Kondo are that both feature in reality TV series where they help others sort their belongings (see Marie Kondo, *Aufräumen mit Marie Kondo*, The Jackal Group, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/de/title/80209379>; Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 474). Both are also criticized in online communities for their advice to reduce the number of books a person owns (see Arianna Davis, "Sorry, Marie Kondo, but I Refuse to Throw Away My Books," Oprah Daily, January 8, 2019,

<https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/books/a25800198/netflix-tidying-up-marie-kondo-book-advice/>; Ozeki, 487–88, 499).

100 See Jesse Miller, "Medicines of the Soul: Reparative Reading and the History of Bibliotherapy," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 51, no. 2 (2018): 17–34. Doi: 10.1353/mos.2018.0015; Leah Price, "Prescribed Print: Bibliotherapy after Web 2.0," *Post45*, September 17, 2019, <https://post45.org/2019/09/prescribed-print-bibliotherapy-after-web-2-0/>.

101 See Rimke, "Self-Help, Therapeutic Industries, and Neoliberalism," 38; Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 9; The Care Collective et al., *The Care Manifesto*, 4.

102 Rimke, "Self-Help, Therapeutic Industries, and Neoliberalism," 40.

103 Price, "Prescribed Print."

104 Rimke, "Self-Help, Therapeutic Industries, and Neoliberalism," 38. See The Care Collective et al., *The Care Manifesto*, 11.

105 See Thumala Olave, "Reading Matters," 434.

106 Thumala Olave, "Reading Matters," 435.

107 Rakoff, *My Salinger Year*, 192.

108 Rakoff, *My Salinger Year*, 199.

109 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 364.

110 See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 143.

111 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 486. This aspect can also be tied back to the traditional relegation of care work to women, which, according to Aikon, requires women to juggle multiple tasks waiting to be fulfilled in a satisfactory way: "No wonder they wanted simple rules to govern the way T-shirts should be folded, children raised, careers managed, lives lived" (486).

112 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 490.

113 See Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 407.

114 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 94.

115 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 419.

116 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 94.

117 Ozeki, *The Book of Form & Emptiness*, 528.