

## **Call for Participants**

### **Roundtable: CLEANING WORK REIMAGINED: STRUGGLES, MAINTENANCE, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF CARE JUSTICE**

20th September 2024

Unfinished Art Space

Valletta, Malta

[www.unfinishedartspace.org](http://www.unfinishedartspace.org)

Convenors: Valeria Graziano (Justus-Liebig University, Giessen) & Davor Misković (Drugo More, Rijeka)

Event organised as part of the activities of the Working Group „Analysis, Theory & Politics Of Care”, part of the COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology)- funded project: TOOLKIT OF CARE (TOC), CA21102 (<https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA21102/>)

## **About**

This interdisciplinary roundtable aims to explore the diverse narratives and experiences of those engaged in various forms of cleaning labour, in formal and informal conditions and settings, including data cleaning and artistic practice.

Cleaning involves the removal of unwanted elements—dirt, dust, germs, disturbing images, and inaccurate information—from spaces, bodies, and systems. It is a form of care essential for maintaining safe, healthy, and comfortable environments for individuals and communities. Clean and organized spaces can positively impact our mental and emotional well-being. However, those who perform cleaning tasks often receive the least care and recognition in our society, both materially and symbolically.

This kind of work is often racialized, gendered, and pauperized. Workers are frequently unpaid, underpaid, and unglamorized, reflecting broader societal inequities. Historically, feminist refusal of cleaning has been a significant aspect of social struggles, challenging the traditional gender roles and labor expectations imposed on women. Additionally, questions of purity, dirtiness, and hygiene have long accompanied Western philosophical and colonial discourses. These notions continue to influence how cleaning work is perceived and valued, often reinforcing existing power structures. Social pressures to maintain a clean home and body act as key normative mechanisms in society, reinforcing certain standards and expectations. This extends to the necessary infrastructure for the functioning of our institutions, where cleanliness ensures the smooth operation and maintenance of order. Nowadays, technological imaginaries often promise a future where cleaning is no longer necessary, presenting a vision of automated perfection. However, the reality is far more complex, with technology both enabling and challenging traditional cleaning roles. By examining the often-invisible labor of data cleaners, we

aim to uncover hidden power dynamics and systemic issues that underpin our digital age. Cleaning also produces pollution while attempting to remove dirt. The environmental costs and impacts on workers' health are often overlooked, raising significant ethical and practical concerns.

The roundtable will delve into the complexities of care within the context of cleaning, examining how individuals navigate their roles as both workers and caregivers. We will explore innovative practices and strategies employed by cleaners, including creative uses of technology, to reclaim agency and challenge dominant labor patterns.

Through a multidisciplinary lens, we will explore the intersections of labor, care, and technology, highlighting the transformative potential of these seemingly mundane yet vital forms of work. While we will touch upon the struggles faced by migrant and undocumented cleaners, we will also broaden our scope to include various other cleaning contexts. Our discussions will address the social, economic, cultural, ethic, aesthetic, somatic and political implications that shape and are shaped within the realm of cleaning labour.

#### **POTENTIAL TOPICS FOR CONTRIBUTIONS:**

- The social and economic implications of cleaning work
- Health and environmental impacts of cleaning practices
- Technological innovations in cleaning and their effects on labor and daily practices
- The aesthetics and poetic of cleaning in art and cultural expressions
- Ethical considerations in data cleaning and digital labor
- Historical and philosophical perspectives on cleanliness and hygiene
- The intersection of race, gender, and class in cleaning work
- Strategies for improving the visibility and valuation of cleaning labor
- The impact of automation and AI on the future of cleaning work
- Case studies of migrant and undocumented cleaners' experiences
- Feminist perspectives on the refusal and redefinition of cleaning labor
- Social pressures and normative mechanisms surrounding cleanliness
- Cleaning as essential infrastructure for institutional functionality

#### **PARTICIPANTS SUPPORT AND REIMBURSEMENTS**

The open call is principally directed to scholars and researchers, artists and creative practitioners, policy makers and activists. We especially encourage individuals under the age of 40 and individuals affiliated to [COST Inclusiveness Target Countries](#) to apply. We will consider gender balance and geographical diversity in our selection.

We are pleased to be able to offer financial support for travel expenses and a daily allowance to approximately 5-6 selected participants (depending on overall travel costs) according to COST travel reimbursement rules:

[https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2022/09/Travel-Reimbursement-Rules\\_March\\_2022.pdf](https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2022/09/Travel-Reimbursement-Rules_March_2022.pdf). This support will cover accommodation, meals and incidental expenses.

Please note that participants who are not selected for financial support are very welcome to contribute to the roundtable, yet they would need to cover their own expenses.

## **TO APPLY**

Please submit a short description/abstract of max. 300 words (including, if relevant, images or links to video/audio) of your proposed presentation, intervention, or short workshop activity, together with a biography (max. 300 words) outlining relevant experiences. Please state it in your submission email should you also wish to apply for funding.

Please send your proposals to the following email address: [davor@drugo-more.hr](mailto:davor@drugo-more.hr) using the email subject line: WG3\_Malta\_YOURNAME.

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE:** 18th August 2024, 12pm (midnight).  
Notification of acceptance will be issued by August 21st 2024.

## **Eligibility:**

Practitioners/researchers of any nationality or place of residency affiliated with an academic or other legal entity<sup>1</sup> in one of these countries: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, the Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary,<sup>2</sup> Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Israel, Jordan, Kosovo, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Republic of North Macedonia, Netherlands,

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<sup>1</sup> A non-exhaustive list of examples of such an affiliation: work contract, enrolment in a PhD or Post-Doctoral programme, voluntary service in a NGO, and Emeritus professorship.

<sup>2</sup> Following the CSO decision of the 16 October 2023, considering the new guidance from the European Commission, as of 1 November 2023 until further notice, individuals from universities maintained by public interest trusts established under Hungarian Act IX of 2021 and concerned by the [Council Implementation Decision 2022/2056](#) (see entities listed in [Annex I of the Hungarian Act IX of 2021](#)) are allowed to participate in COST activities without receiving financial support from the COST Association (either grants or via reimbursements). Individuals from the flagged institutions can apply to get funded via the Guarantee Fund established by the Hungarian government. The [Hungarian Act IX of 2021](#) is available in Hungarian. You can use one of the frequent translation web-based tools in order to get an English translation. A non-exhaustive list of the affected Hungarian legal entities is available [here](#).

Norway, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine (government controlled territories), United Kingdom, as well as in one of the EU Member States Outermost Regions (French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, Reunion Island and Saint-Martin, Azores and Madeira, and the Canary Islands).

For more detailed information:

<https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2023/11/Annex-I-level-A-Country-and-Organisations-Table-Version-1.7.pdf>

TOOLKIT OF CARE (<https://toolkitof.care>) is an international project led by an interdisciplinary group of creative practitioners, academics, researchers, and arts organizations specializing in creative technologies. With significant experience in producing and disseminating knowledge across Europe and internationally, this "critical network of care" will collaborate to share expertise and technical knowledge, developing methodologies of care.

COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology - [www.cost.eu](http://www.cost.eu)) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. COST Actions connect research initiatives across Europe, enabling scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with peers, thereby boosting research, careers, and innovation.

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