13

CARE AND GENEROSITY IN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

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Introduction

This chapter discusses two independent yet related ethical concepts, care and generosity, within the context of social architecture. Unlike the fields of medicine or caregiving, it is highly unusual to describe the architectural profession as 'caring', mostly because caring involves an emotion perceived to be at odds with the professionalism and aloofness required of architects. This chapter argues that architectural initiatives for marginalized communities demonstrate generosity, and the architects' early involvement in the projects allowed them to express their professionalism and care to the occupants just as doctors care for their patients.

The chapter compares and contrasts expressions of generosity and care in two examples of social architecture in Israel/Palestine, which benefit groups exiled outside the Israeli authority. The first precedent analyzed here, the Levinsky Garden Library project (see Figure 13.1), was built for migrant workers and asylum seekers in Tel Aviv; the second, the Wadi Abu Hindi school (see Figure 13.2), was renovated for Bedouin communities in Area C, east of Jerusalem, in the West Bank.[1] Based on the analysis of the two, it is easy to assume that caring and generous architecture can be considered part of the broader context of humanitarian action and philanthropy. In contrast to public institutions in Israel/Palestine where the architects are brought in at later stages in the project, the architects of the analyzed buildings here have either initiated the design process or joined a budding initiative of civil-society organizations early on at the outset of the work. Their early involvement allowed them to have a say in the planning process and assert more control in the projects' programmes and the design development.

Moreover, in the case studies, the architects' care and generosity take shape not only in the act of initiating the projects but also in the architectural design that addresses the specific needs and capabilities of users from marginal groups.[2]

FIGURE 13.1   Arteam, Levinky Garden Library (2009).

FIGURE 13.2   ARCò Architettura & Cooperazione, Wadi Abu Hindi school (2013).

The resulting architecture illuminates the ethical aspects and aesthetic contributions of a recent global trend in architecture, in which architects attempt to address and alleviate pressing yet unaddressed social problems by planning and delivering appropriate architecture.[3]

One pressing question lingers throughout most if not all responsible architectural design initiatives, that is of the relationship between the designs' spatial and formal organizations and the social or communal activity that they host. This fundamental relation is akin to the connection between form and content. According to Kant's distinction between *free beauty* and *dependent beauty*, some features of objects can be judged purely formally[4]. That is, the judgment of the free beauty of a certain object is independent of its purpose. In contrast, the dependent beauty of another object can stem from its intended purpose or proximity to the perfection of the object. For Kant, architecture is exemplary of dependent beauty. A palace, a church, or a gazebo are examples of architectural dependent beauty. It can be understood that this distinction contributes to the distinction between formalism, anti-formalism, and functionalism in architecture.[5]

Reflecting on Kant's distinction: I distinguish between specific design for marginalized users and the free or abstract expression of generosity in architecture aesthetics. I propose the term user-dependent architecture to describe architecture with physical and aesthetic properties related not only to the building's function and purpose but also to its inherent consideration for users from a marginalized group. What I refer to as free or autonomous design is a pursuit of architectural, technological, and aesthetic qualities; these are indifferent to social dilemmas or the identity of the user; however, the autonomous design might serve contingent communal values. While user-dependent design expresses care by focusing on the intended user of architecture, it attempts to solve social problems by focusing on socially significant architectural qualities.

Generosity, care, feminist ethics, and civilian involvement

In this section, I will examine the conceptual framework of 'care' through the lens of feminist scholars. I will focus on and will be guided by the writing of Joan Tronto, who is a leading scholar in the field of ethics of care. Her definition of care implies 'reaching out to something other than the self' and acting out of concern for others rather than out of self-advancement.[6] Based on Tronto's notion of care as a political issue, one can easily assume that generosity is a concept that places one's relation to another as a foundation stone for moral as well as political aspects of human life. These concepts and tendencies allow us to recognize and cherish our independence but also to act emphatically. They lie at the heart of our capacity to recognize the needs and feelings of others, to share fleeting moments of joy, and connect in a way that allows us to not only enjoy but build sustainable and engrossing relations.

While the act of caring in a transient and intangible way asks for protecting, improving, or maintaining the health, welfare, or wellbeing of another, associations of generosity (in our current cultural context) often involve material gifts. By giving generous gifts, one demonstrates virtue by forgoing material possessions. What is given must have value to the donor, not just the receiver, and must be more than what would be considered necessary in the given circumstances.[7]

As such, the pursuit of autonomous beauty in architectural design can therefore be viewed as a quality which in itself is an expression of generosity as it grants the environment and its users more than what is functionally required.

Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) act in the spirit of care and generosity; this spirit evolved from social movements in the West and often includes architects in their projects to prompt social change. These architects plan projects that, without compromising professional standards, meet the urgent needs of marginalized groups in depressed areas.[8] The 1968 student revolution instigated a heightened social awareness sensitive to violations of human rights. These touched on issues of gender, environmental protection, and international peace. They expressed the anger and frustration of a new educated middle class that included mostly people that worked as medical doctors, lecturers, or social workers. They opposed the direction of the development in the global markets and the ethical or moral discourses of welfare states.[9] In architecture, international organizations in the United States, Australia, and European countries, such as Architects Sans Frontières (ASF) or Architecture for Humanity (AFH), were established and operated in conflict zones since the 1970s onwards.[10]

Carol Gillian distinguished a dominant male-oriented moral discourse that emphasizes separation and autonomy from a female-oriented moral discourse that emphasizes closeness, care, responsibility, and interpersonal connection.[11] Following Gilligan's research, Nel Noddings theorizes an ethical approach that puts caring at the centre of human connection.[12] Traditional discourses on ethics and morality revolve around concepts of justice and fairness, while Nodding's approach suggests that the human affiliation to care is based on our early childhood memories as recipients of motherly attention. While the morality of justice posits abstract rules, the ethics of care emphasizes relationships between people and is tied to real circumstances of life. In contrast to theories of justice, which deal with the autonomous individual,[13] Tronto's ethics of care remembers the dependent individual who cannot take care of his or her needs.

Bearing all this in mind one can then say that generosity is attributed to those who donate to – and support – common initiatives. While traditional generosity is associated with philanthropy and the privileged, more recent debates around the subject take a more feminine focus on the vulnerable and rely on the agency and care of experts. This broadens the professional obligations that architects have to respond not only to clients but also to the general public and especially marginalized groups.

Designing for marginalized users

Approximately 7,500 Bedouins live in Area C, between eastern Jerusalem and Jericho, most of which are from the Jahalin tribe (originally from the Tel Arad area in the Negev). Following the 1948 war (in which Israel conquered the Negev and instated martial law), when Bedouin residents were exiled from their homes and transgressed Israeli borders, they became refugees and finally settled

east of Jerusalem where they live in tents, shacks, and even caves. Uncertain of their future they are under constant watch by Israeli authorities, who regularly issue demolition and evacuation orders.[14] Weighing heavily on their precarious social life is the Israeli planning policy which limits their access to public utilities and health services as well as restricting legal grounds to lay infrastructure and build proper homes or public institutions.

The legal situation of Tel Aviv's migrant workers mainly from the Philippines, Nepal, and India is poor as none are recognized as citizens or residents, in spite of the fact that, since the late 1980s, they have become a significant workforce in Israel contributing to industries such as construction, agriculture, nursing, and domestic help.

The situation of asylum seekers who fled poverty, civil wars, and political persecution, and who since the mid-1990s entered Israel mainly through the border with Egypt (not via appropriate channels) is even worse. Most of them are originally from Sudan and Eritrea and from other countries in Africa. In 2011, two years after the establishment of the Levinsky Library, Tel Aviv's migrant-worker and asylum-seeker populations counted 61,000 people or 13% of the city's residents. The response of the Israeli officials is to deport illegal immigrants.[15]

Repairing and sustaining the world

Tronto and the ethicist Bernice Fisher both argue that the act of caring is a reparative practice aimed at correcting and sustaining the world – ourselves, our bodies, and our environment – in order to lead better lives.[16] The projects presented here attempt to counter and correct spatial injustice. The library project 'repairs the world', so to speak, by providing a library – a service that was needed in the neighbourhood and especially for the migrant communities.[17]

South Tel Aviv generally suffers from a lack of adequate community services.[18] While authorities and civil-rights organizations usually focus on meeting urgent basic needs, the Arteam Association treats the migrant worker and the refugee community as a collection of human beings whose needs are not only physical or nutritional but also cultural. In practice, the library became an activity and children's play centre.[19] The development of the library as a cultural centre met an urgent need of migrant mothers and their children for play and education activities outside of their home.[20] Similarly, the school project was meant to fill an educational and cultural void in Area C by providing adequate learning conditions and by opening educational possibilities for the local students, specifically young girls, who found it difficult to attend schools located far away from their villages. The school renovation thus directly contributed to the continued education of students approximately ages 6–14.

It is not by mere words that care and generosity turn into actions and lead to the erection of physical structures;[21] the situation at hand requires social organization and deliberate action. To plan the Levinsky Garden Library, the creators established the Arteam Association partnership. Likewise, several European

architects and engineers from the architecture cooperative ARCò Architettura & Cooperazione planned and constructed the Area C project, heeding the call to action of Vento di Terra, an Italian NGO.

Arteam members partially financed the library with the support of the Israel Lottery Council, the Centennial Administration of Tel Aviv Municipality, the Ministry of Culture and Education, The Israeli Center for Libraries, and The Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, while the Italian Church, municipal authorities, and private donations with the support of the Jerusalem Bedouin Cooperative Committee financed the Wadi Abu Hindi school. Both are philanthropic actions that aim to relieve the pain of a particular social problem. Importantly, the architects' involvement in the projects lies in their professional contribution to the social initiative in a way that exceeds philanthropic funding.

Free or dependent design as an expression of generosity or care

Both projects examined here feature free qualities resulting from autonomous design, as well as dependent qualities stemming from user-dependent design. Sometimes, these qualities are different aspects of the same architectural element. For the purposes of this discussion, I will emphasize user-dependent, care-based qualities evident in the Levinsky Garden Library, as opposed to the free, generosity-based qualities of the Wadi Abu Hindi school. I find these two aesthetics complementary.

The library is not a closed structure. It comprises an open space between two cabinets, facing each other and attached to the public bomb shelter in the garden (see Figure 13.1). There is no security guard to monitor its visitors. When planning the library, Arteam considered the vulnerability of the visiting public. As architect Yoav Meiri, an Arteam member and the designer of the library, explained: 'Enough doors are shut to them. It is important that there be at least a sense of no supervision, that they are free'.[22] The traditional distinction of inside versus outside determines not only who can enter but also who may leave. The open design gives users freedom to avoid surveillance and, when necessary, allows them to leave the space and flee from the immigration police.

According to estimates, more than half of Israel's migrant workers and asylum seekers lack stay permits and are therefore pursued by the authorities.[23] Had they been forced to pass a guard, they probably would have avoided visiting the library altogether. The library's openness, therefore, has a symbolic dimension. It sends a message of inclusion and acceptance to permit-less migrants and asylum seekers, who may visit without having to worry about deportations or arrests, although some are still reluctant to enter the public space of Levinsky Park, where the library is located.[24] The library's openness draws from the openness of Levinsky Garden, which attracts both migrant workers and asylum seekers – a user-dependent quality adapted to the perspective of marginalized and vulnerable users and their personal experiences.

In the Levinsky Library, the two book cabinets open out towards the readers. The adult cabinet grill is made from metal tendrils. So, as it opens upwards, it becomes a pergola that shades from the sun (the Tel Aviv municipality later added a standard shading element). The children's cabinet door opens towards the floor in the form of an L, becoming a seat and play area for children – an expression of attention to the users' physical experiences (see Figure 13.1).

Following care-oriented ethics, the interpretation of user-dependent design suggested here does not fully adopt Kant's formalism;[25] rather, it suggests a social interpretation of aesthetics.[26] It refers to the cultural and social context of architecture, such as the political status of the users of architecture. At the same time, paying attention to concrete circumstances of care, the library's open design produces a specific spatial solution that exceeds abstract rules of justice. In addition to this, it considers the point of view of vulnerable and weakened users and not that of the general public, who, through various channels are empowered to influence public design decision-making.

The aesthetic considerations in designing the Wadi Abu Hindi school express the planners' idea of using sustainable construction methods, using common reed mats to isolate and cover the original tin structure (see Figure 13.2). According to the ARCò Architettura & Cooperazione's representative, sustainable design will allow the Bedouin in Area C to build by themselves.[27] In this light the interviewed architects were open to discussing the functional solutions but reluctant to talk about aesthetics in design. An ARCò representative said that aesthetics is secondary in low-budget projects:

> We have so little money and so many things to do that we cannot pretend to invest money in something that is just aesthetic. But of course, everything you do has a consequence … So you do it with care, you know. You can put the things in many ways, but we tried to put them in a way that also works aesthetically.[28]

Mats of reed attached to the wall by wooden frames create its unique weaving aesthetic. The reeds shade the isolated walls from both sides of the school's original structure – a wooden foundation overlaid with tin boards.[29] The original idea was to plaster the reeds from both sides, but after both architects and the construction team saw the beauty of the unplastered reed-shaded wall, they opted to leave its external walls (see Figure 13.2) and parts of the internal walls (see Figure 13.3) exposed, giving the structure its unique appearance. An additional and unexpected aspect of this type of construction resulted from inaccuracies in the original structure construction phase. The classrooms were of unequal size, unequal height, and built with irregular angles. Architects decided to use same-sized reed boards and cover any remaining abnormalities with a smaller reed board set at the structure's centre.[30]

Architectural beauty remains abstract and unspecific and serves changing contents as well as values according to its specific programme. In a different location,
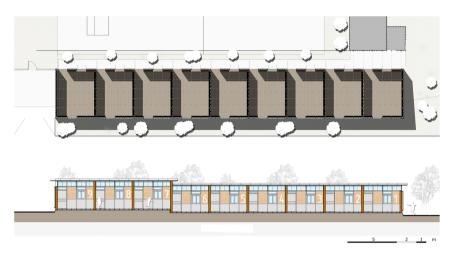
FIGURE 13.3   Arco: Architettura & Cooperazione, ARCò Architettura & Cooperazione, Wadi Abu Hindi school, plan and section drawings, 2010.

it could even serve as a desert resort, supporting recreation and enjoyment. But in Area C, in the social context of humanitarian architecture, the Jahalin school structure represents the high value and hope its community places in education and its tremendous efforts to build a school against all odds.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the cases in this chapter it could be said that in the range between user-dependent design and autonomous design lie qualities expressing architectural generosity towards different users, not strictly the vulnerable ones.

The architect's initiatives to construct or renovate public structures providing communities with much-needed educational and cultural services demonstrate their concern with maintaining and repairing at least part of the world. The library's open design is a user-dependent quality. In addition to user-dependent design and the attempt to alleviate social and environmental problems, the architects also pursued the autonomous values of beauty, not directly rooted in purpose. It is architecture's formal and abstract qualities, which are not geared towards a particular social problem or dependent upon specific users, that make it a suitable foundation for realizing different values. Beauty, in this light, gains a noble dimension – the inherent dignity of adult and child, the importance of education, and culture.[31] In the poor, marginalized environment of Area C Bedouins, the beauty of the school's exteriors endows its internal activities with the utmost importance. Where architectural aesthetics meets modest means, the resulting design departs from the usual architectural testaments to the rich and powerful. Rather, the school's beauty represents a generosity of spirit where it is needed the most.

Notes

1 The Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Oslo 2) from 1995, divided the West Bank into different areas: Area C is a continuous area around and outside Areas A and B that spreads over the entire West Bank. Israel has retained almost complete control of Area C which covers 60% of the West Bank (about 330,000 hectares) including security matters and all land-related civil matters, planning, and construction.

2 Shelly Cohen, 'The Ethical, the Social and the Aesthetic in Contemporary Architecture in Israel' (doctoral thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2017); Shelly Cohen and Tovi Fenster, 'Architecture of Care: Social Architecture and Feminist Ethics', *The Journal of Architecture*, 26.3 (2021), pp. 257–285; Shelly Cohen, *Architecture and Care: Ethics and Aesthetics in Social Architecture Initiatives* (Tel Aviv: Resling Publishing, 2021) [Hebrew].

3 Andres Lepik, 'Building on Society', in *Small Scale Big Change: New Architecture of Social Engagement*, ed. Presse Jason and Roberts Rebecca (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), pp. 12–21.

4 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), (§ 16, 5:229).

5 Saul Fisher, 'Philosophy of Architecture', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2016 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/architecture/.

6 Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), p. 102.

7 Marccella T. Joy, 'Generosity', in *Ethics*, ed. John K. Roth (Salem Press, 2005), pp. 566–567.

8 Cameron Sinclair, 'Introduction: I hope it's a long list', in *Design Like You Give a Damn: Architectural Responses to Humanitarian Crises* (New York: Metropolis Books, 2006), pp. 10–31.

9 Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

10 Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011).

11 Carol Gilligan*, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

12 Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1984).

13 Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, pp. 78, 120.

14 Noga Kadman, *Acting the Landlord: Israel's Policy in Area C, the West Bank* (Jerusalem: B'Tselem, 2013); Bimkom, 2014. 'Report on the Jahalin Bedouin Communities East of Jerusalem', http://bimkom.org/eng/report-on-the-jahalin-bedouin-communities-east-of-jerusalem [5 May 2016].

15 Annual Report 64C, 'State Comptroller: Strangers Who Cannot Be Expelled from Israel', 2014, www.mevaker.gov.il/he/Reports/Report_248/af07752c-7845-4f1d-ae97-23c45c702624/102-ver-5.pdf [accessed 15 February 2021]; Abrahams, Merav, *Data on Foreigners in Israel* (Jerusalem: Population and Immigration Authority, Policy Planning Division, January 2018).

16 Berenice Fisher and Joan C. Tronto, 'Toward a Feministic Theory of Care', in *Circle of Care: Work and Identity in Woman Lives*, ed. Emily Abel and Margaret Nelson (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press). pp. 35–62; Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, p. 103.

17 See a list of the public libraries in Tel Aviv, www.tel-aviv.gov.il/en/Live/Education/Pages/Public-Libraries.aspx [22 January 2019].

18 Talia Margalit and Nurit, Alfasi 'The Undercurrents of Entrepreneurial Development: Impressions from a Globalizing City', *Environment and Planning A, Economy and Space*, 48.10 (2016), 1967–1987.

19 See The Garden Library website, http://thegardenlibrary.org/about–us [accessed 21 May 2019].

20 Dalia Ben–Rabi and Talia Hasin, *Pre-schoolers whose Parents Are Foreign Workers in Tel Aviv-Yafo: Lifestyle, Needs and Directions of Action* (Jerusalem: Brookdale Institute, 2004); Neta Moshe, *Services of the Education System for the Population of Children of Foreign and Non-Civil Status* (Jerusalem: Knesset Research and Information Centre, 2014). See *Mesila*, www.Tel-Aviv.gov.il/Residents/HealthAndSocial/Pages/Mesila.aspx [accessed 15 February 2021].

21 Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*.

22 Zandberg Esther. 'Surroundings: A Library Is the Best Welcome', *Haaretz*, 30 July 2009, www.haaretz.com/israel–news/culture/1.5084078 [accessed 1 January 2019].

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24 Yacobi, Haim, '"Let Me Go to the City": African Asylum Seekers, Racialization and the Politics of Space in Israel', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 24.1 (2011), pp. 47–68.

25 Eva Schaper, 'Free and Dependent Beauty', in *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, ed. Paul Guyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), pp. 101–119.

26 Nick Zangwill. 'Against the Sociology of the Aesthetics', *Cultural Values* 6.4 (2002), pp. 443–452.

27 ARCò architect, interview, 24 November 2013.

28 Ibid.

29 The school was known in the professional literature as the school of Bamboo but was built of common reeds which grow in the Middle East. See ARCò Architettura & Cooperazione's website, www.ar-co.org/en/progetti/realizzati/deserto/index.php [accessed 1 November 2019].

30 ARCò architect, interview, 24 November 2013.

31 A similar approach to beauty's moral function can be found in the work of Elizabeth Meyer, who claims that the aesthetic, sensual experience created by landscape design can raise awareness of the cyclical nature of life, and evoke care for the environment. Meyer, Elizabeth K., 'Sustaining Beauty. The Performance of Appearance: A Manifesto in Three Parts', *Journal of Landscape Architecture* (spring) (2008), pp. 6–23.