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CARING: MAKING COMMONS, MAKING CONNECTIONS

Kim Trogal

This chapter aims to open up some questions around care[1] and the production of architecture and space. I consider both the spatiality of care and how care *as a practice* might involve working with different concepts of space. Following feminists thinkers and activists, especially Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, Silvia Federici and architect Leslie Kanes Weisman, I explore how such concepts have, historically at least, structured dominant value systems that marginalise and disavow care labour. Through this discussion I want to make a case for the importance of including care within our understandings of architectural production, to highlight a critical yet often unseen relationship between space, architecture and care.

While spatial concepts have implications for care, care is also something that produces *spaces and relations*. It is a form of spatial production. I turn to practices of collective care to consider how they have produced different architectures, as well as different spatial concepts and practices, such as commons and mutual aid. In Nel Noddings' terms, these forms of care makes 'circles', namely, we care for those close to us and care exists in a 'circle' of proximity (Noddings, 1984). For this reason, I look at how contemporary spatial practices work *beyond the proximate.* I ask how can care make transversal[2] connections in spatial practice, how can care create connections *across* diverse social and cultural groups. I also consider how care might make 'trans-local' connections to avoid becoming territorially exclusive or localised practices.

THE SPATIALITIES OF CARE AND INTERDEPENDENCE

[1] *Care* is a common word that we all know but one that can mean quite different things at different times. It is an emotion (to care about someone), it is an activity (to take care of something), it is a form of labour and feminists have developed it as a name for a specific kind of ethics. Caring, as an everyday activity, does not at first glance seem to be directly connected to architecture.

[2] The concept of transversality is Guattari's and I elaborate it a little below, see also Guattari (1984) and Genosko (2009).

One way to think about care is as a form of labour, in which one person or a group of people are looking after or supporting another. With care, we have relations of interdependency. Political theorist Joan Tronto suggests that the question of 'who is caring for who?' is probably the biggest political question there is:

> Because the provision of care in human society has almost always proceeded by creating rigid hierarchies (castes, classes) by which some are able to demand the services of others, care has basically been of little interest to those in positions of power. The exclusion of care from politics grows out of an unwillingness to look at care on its own terms. … care is a complex process that ultimately reflects structures of power, economic order, the separation of public and private life and our notions of autonomy and equality.
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> (1995: 12)

When we make 'who is caring for who?' central, we reveal hierarchies, dependencies and exclusions. What is important from the fields of architecture, planning, urbanism, and so on, is that the question of 'who is caring for who?' is part of a spatial dynamics at multiple scales, from global, regional, in neighbourhoods, in our homes to the scale of microscopic organisms. The spatial dynamics of care are part of what is usually called the geography of uneven development, or reductively put, in our current mode of development, we only have advancement or 'progress' in one place, at the expense of others in other places.

As prominent geographers have long argued, 'space matters', that space, and the ways we make space, have a dialectical relation with society (Massey, 2005; Smith, 2008; Soja, 1996). Across many disciplines, and in architecture and geography especially, feminists have shown how relations of care and dependency are structured along spatial conceptions, such as the dichotomies of city/country, home/work, public/ private, so-called Global North/ South. These dichotomies, feminists argue, function

with exploitative divisions of labour, specifically care labour and reproduction.[3] While the terms of the dichotomies are not discrete in lived experience, they are often deployed in discourse as though they were, both in general and in urban policy. The dichotomies of home/work, North/South belie their complexity and support 'perverse subsidies'.[4]

In the fields of architecture and design, we are perhaps more familiar with the idea of dependency in material terms. Architects and designers work with concepts such as ecological footprints[5] and are working increasingly with chains of material dependency, of material flows, including urban agriculture, waste and construction materials. However, there are other forms of dependency that are equally unsustainable, which we don't tend to recognise, neither as designers nor citizens. In *World City*, Massey draws attention to work on health inequality, in particular, research into the migration of skilled workers like nurses and midwives, from low- to high-income countries. Such research shows the inequity of access to health care, leaving countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with very low numbers of midwives and very high rates of infant and mother mortality (Mensah *et al*., 2005, cited in Massey, 2007: 175). Many factors contribute to this but there can be no doubt, this is one resulting factor from our economic model and lack of social sustainability, which is displaced to different, poorer regions.

We tend to deal with these problems through charity and benevolence, but it doesn't stop because the problem is structural. Midwifery is a very literal example of care giving and my argument here is not around this specific problem but to point to a broader question of value. Care is not only carried out by midwives and nurses, but can

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[3] Leslie Kanes Weisman has argued that the spatial dichotomies that support exploitative or dominating gender relations are placed in a masculine-feminine dichotomy. 'Feminine' spaces, including reproductive and servile ones, are connected by association and are often situated behind, below, left, back, or generally concealed (Weisman, 1992: 11).

[4] Namely, these terms and discourses obscure the relations of actual dependency and our perceived notions of dependency: a dominant group (potentially associated with class, race, gender or geographical region) that is subsidised and dependent on a weaker one, constructs a situation where the weaker one is regarded *as* the dependent. Examples of this are to be found literally everywhere, the mother seen as dependent on another's wage or welfare payments, or the financial aid, for instance, sent to 'developing' countries. Each payment sets those in a position of perceived dependency (from the Western perspective or from the wage perspective), but with the land, resources and labour of the country that supports the West, it is the relation of actual dependency that is obscured (Massey, 2007: 175).

[5] An ecological footprint shows the amount of resources the city consumes. It shows the physical area it takes to produce and maintain those resources, in order to allow the city to function in its current state. The total ecological footprint for London, for example, is over 34 million global hectares, which is an area over 200 times the city itself. The main contributors are electricity and fuel use for housing and food (Environment Agency, 2012).

include all the people who make our cities and regions liveable: teachers, cleaners, youth workers, community workers, the people who remove your rubbish, people who grow your food for you, and so on (Figure 11.1). This is why it is important. This is what is called today a 'crisis of care', that we cannot actually re-produce and maintain the society in which we live.

[INSERT FIG 11.1]

Advocates of a feminist ethics of care have strongly argued against the myth of individual independence. We are all cared for by others at certain moments in our lives, and most of us will care for others at some point too. As Richard Sennett (2004) has argued, the condition of dependence whether occurring naturally or constructed, has acquired a shameful status.

Care, then, is not a call for autonomy, that each person or place should be more independent or self-sufficient but is to question the very notion of autonomy and to recognise that care structures our world. If relations of care and interdependency are structured along spatial conceptions, which spatial concepts can we use (and perform) that are more attuned to care? In feminist political economy, thinkers like Silvia Federici, Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen have pointed to the commons as one such space (Federici, 2004; Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999).

COLLECTIVE CARE AS POTENTIAL COMMONS

There are different kinds and concepts of commons, but in its most traditional form, commons are frequently understood as shared spaces or resources that are neither public nor private. They are shared and held in common, a form of ownership or responsibility *made through use rather than as a property relation*. Commons are both material (such as a fishery) and immaterial (like language). In their historical and traditional forms, commons are/were essential to reproduction and livelihoods, they provided subsistence. Historians connect their privatisation with the separation of (wage) labour from other life activities, and feminists thus show that it is in the money-economy that housework and reproductive tasks ceased to be viewed as 'real' work (Federici, 2004: 25).

In contrast to the isolation of reproductive work in spatial dichotomies, commons are the spaces, physical or virtual, of alternative economies and economies that are more reciprocal. There are practices of care that belong to commons and commoning practices, such as forms of responsibility, of sharing, of reciprocity, of democratic organisation and of welfare. However, *care as a practice can be said to produce commons too.*

Some built examples of collective care can be found in Dolores Hayden's seminal work, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (1981). In this book she pieces together some of the lost history of women's work in architecture and offers numerous examples from the 1800s and early 1900s in which women and men experimented with the socialisation of domestic work. In these cases domestic work was organised within a collective, rather than on an individual household basis, and took place at the scale of: housing blocks or estates; neighbourhoods; at municipal level or even at a national level. As domestic work was socialised, new kinds of domestic workspace, cooperative forms of organisation and architectures were developed:

> In order to overcome patterns of urban space and domestic space that
> isolated women and made their domestic work invisible, they
> developed new forms of neighbourhood organisation including
> housewives' cooperatives, as well as new building types, including the
> kitchen-less house, the day care centre, the public kitchen and the
> community dining club.
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> (1981: 1)

To glance at this example of cooperative housing in Letchworth (Figure 11.2), there is perhaps not anything special to be seen architecturally. On closer inspection, it becomes apparent that it is very different to what the majority in the UK would expect or demand for their own homes. In some cases, it is quite challenging, the plans look ordinary until you realise there is no kitchen in each dwelling, it is elsewhere. To live in these places means to live very differently, to the lives we know and consider normal.

[INSERT FIG 11.2]

In *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, there are examples of new types of organisation *and spatial organisation*, public kitchens, day care centres, cooperative laundries. In this case, design, architecture and planning were very much part of this movement. However, as Dalla Costa and James (1975) argue, communal facilities like public kitchens cannot be a spatial project alone, otherwise they simply risk becoming the site of low-paid work for women outside the home, without actually challenging the notion of work or wage. What is important in projects based on *collective* 'shadow-work'[6] such as childcare or domestic work, and subsistence work such as agriculture, is that they must challenge the validation of different forms of labour and challenge the separation of the monetary economy from domestic ones. The examples in Hayden's book are no longer in existence, but they are a vital part of the history of the collective spaces of care. Her book is still important and 30 years after it was published, it still provokes interest. In 2009, Casco Office for Art, Design and Theory in Utrecht, began a long-term programme of projects, research and exhibitions called *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A User's Manual*. As part of their research, they interviewed Hayden to ask her if we could talk of a Grand Domestic Revolution today (Choi and Tanaka, 2010: 37– 52). Her answer was no, as she argued that while there are small interventions, there is *no movement.* There is no feminist movement today concerning domestic work as there was in 1970s and neither is there anything like the scale of the movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that is documented in Hayden's book. But today, there are other movements generating and working with alternative economies, such as the ecological movement. Here we find experiments with different forms of exchange, like time banks as well as Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETs), and different forms of collective and commoning practices, such as gleaning as well as urban agriculture

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[6] 'Shadow-work' is Ivan Illich's term, which in fact *excludes* agriculture and subsistence work, it is unpaid work whose 'performance in the condition for wages to be paid'.

> I call this complement to wage-labour 'shadow-work'. It comprises most housework women do in their homes and apartments, the activities connected with shopping, most of the homework of students cramming for exams, the toil expended commuting to and from the job. It includes the stress of forced consumption, the tedious and regimented surrender to therapists, compliance with bureaucrats, the preparation for work to which one is compelled, and the many activities usually labelled 'family life'.
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> (Illich, 1980: 1–2)

and gardening.[7] These are perhaps opportunities and possibilities for a new 'grand domestic revolution'.

While care may potentially produce commons, what is also notable is that commons involve a different kind of care than the kind we are usually familiar with. Caring is often typified by dyadic relations (e.g. parent-child; nurse-patient; teacher-student) and thus consists of chains of people (you care for your mother, who cares for her neighbour, and so on).[8] Commons are a form of care that historically existed within a group or community of people, as did practices of mutual aid. They could both be considered in Nodding's terms, as care circles. What differentiates the two perhaps, among other things, is their relation to space.

CARE THROUGH OBJECTS AND EVENTS: MUTUAL AID AS COLLECTIVE PRACTICE OF CARE

Mutual aid is the name given to the process when people voluntarily work together or pool resources for mutual benefit. It is something done for others but also for oneself. In his classic work on the subject, Kropotkin argued that different human societies all invented mechanisms and rituals to maintain mutuality and collective life. He showed how, over several hundred years coinciding with industrial capitalism, such practices were heavily regulated against. He cites for example, until 1884, in France, it was forbidden to form groups of more than 19 people. In England, between 1760 and 1844 over 4000 Acts of Parliament were passed to remove all traces of common ownership of land and possessions (Kropotkin, 1987: 180–207). The Combination Laws also prevented people from organising themselves, making unionism illegal.

What Kropotkin showed is that even when such laws are made and commons enclosed, mutual aid takes place through other institutions (ibid.: 197–198). What is interesting is that these practices survived longer as they were attached to objects and events. For example, in rural regions of Southern France, Kropotkin tells of wine growers who formed associations, consisting of between 10 and 30 growers, who had a steam-powered water pump in common ownership. There was thus a network of people

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[7] Similarly, Federici, Dalla Costa, Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen have all pointed to urban agriculture as possible locations for new commons (Dalla Costa, 2007; Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999; Federici, 2005).

[8] The concept of care circles and care chains is taken from Nel Noddings (1984).

attached to this object, which moved across private space. The group or part of the group would cooperate in such a way that each vineyard could be irrigated. There are many examples like this across the world and I mention this one precisely because it was considered ordinary. The point is that it is the object and the task that connect, rather than the space.

Kropotkin suggests another example, in regions of Germany, people would help to build each other's houses, using timber from the common forest. Sometimes there would be a fete or an event, which was a call for aid. On that day, everyone participated in the building of another person's house. Again, this was common and it was often the custom that whoever was being helped had to throw a feast for everybody. If they did not feed the others well, it was considered extremely bad-mannered as everyone had had a day of hard labour (1987: 197–198).

In the example of the vineyards, a network is mobilised by a task and a commonly owned object, and in the example of the house, a network is mobilised by the construction of private property. These examples are interesting from an architecture and design perspective. It suggests that the actual space may be of less importance than the community and practices associated with it, which can continue to be supported through common objects or activities rather than spaces.[9] It also suggests that private spaces, buildings and their care can still support common or mutual practices.

Historical examples of mutual aid could be interesting for designers, both as a way of working against a hyper-individuality as well as something useful to know when we have a widespread loss of public (state) space. From a design point of view, I wonder what kind of contemporary objects and events could be invented? And what would it take to sustain them?

We have a contemporary form of mutual aid in the time bank movement, which sometimes also shares objects, as well as time. One example, local to me, is *Haringey Green Bank,* who as part of their time banking scheme are building a tool bank, a library of equipment for gardening. The objects are held by the time bank and individuals may borrow them, but a condition of their use is that they are not for private use, they may only be used for community projects. While a spade, or other commonly owned gardening tool is perhaps not that remarkable in itself, as someone with a design

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[9] This corroborates the findings of action research by *aaa* in their Eco-Box project (Petrescu, 2010).

background, I start to wonder what would it take for these tools to become more interesting in terms of the structures that exist around them. Is this a framework in which you can start to have new common objects of mutual aid?

The example of mutual aid being the way in which people built their houses is also interesting. Most of us are unlikely to undertake this kind of endeavour today. We are unlikely to build someone else's house without official remuneration or written agreement. But again it doesn't stop us asking, what it would take, because what makes it difficult to really imagine something today, is that in order to participate you need very high levels of trust and stability in a group.

As Marilyn Friedman (1993) says, we extend a special privilege to those we care for and we tend to care for those who are close to us. A community of mutual aid was one such circle of proximity, because there are limits to care. You can't care for everyone and everything all the time. Historically this was physical proximity, if you lived in the village or had commoners' rights. Time banking may be reminiscent of a historical form of community, one that is geographically based. But how are we to deal with this question of proximity and develop forms of care that do not bring territorial operations of space, which the historical commons and mutual aid would have been tied to? How can we understand the 'circles' of care that exist now, and make new ones, but not allow them to become exclusive structures? How to extend beyond the circle without undermining trust or stability?

CARE THROUGH TRANSVERSAL, TRANS-LOCAL CONNECTIONS

To start thinking about what kinds of connections can exist both *within and between* localities, a common proposition is that small initiatives need to be networked together. Jeanne van Heeswijk is certainly someone who practises care and her work provides one example of how to think about the question of 'circles' and connections. One of her best-known projects is the Blue House in Ijburg, Amsterdam, which has been described as a collective research project and a networked practice.[10] Ijburg is a newly built, large suburb of Amsterdam that was planned to contain 18,000 new homes for 45,000

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[10] Heeswijk was effectively self-commissioned and inaugurated the Blue House herself. She negotiated for one of the dwellings to be taken off the market and donated to the community for four years. She called the dwelling the Blue House, as a play on van Gogh's Yellow House and Frieda Kahlo's blue house, as meeting place for artists, a hosting place for artists to stay. See O'Neill (2011).

residents (O'Neill, 2011). In collaboration with the architect Denis Kaspoori and the artist Hervé Paraponaris, they created a framework for artist residencies over a four-year period. A condition of the residencies was that artists had to engage with the locality and part of their brief was to create new models of sociality. The Blue House ran alongside the phased construction of the suburb, so the estate was partially inhabited for a number of years until the building work was complete.

With each of the projects, and in total there were some 900 for the Blue House, different networks of people were involved. Each intervention, object and use had a community of people attached to it to make it work. They are all groups with different timescales, some overlap, sometimes people are part of different groups at the same time.

While Heeswijk is very much engaged with the locality in which she is working, she also works with an international network of artists. She traces some of this network on her website where she really acknowledges all the contributions made. She recognises all the people it took to make it happen and recognises things that are not normally considered work, such as moral support. Through her website you can see the group a project brings together and if you have enough patience, you could trace where people have multiple affiliations to different projects.

Another example of working with trans-local networks is the Rhyzom project, organised by five partners: Agency in Sheffield; Public Works in London; PS2 Belfast; aaa in Paris, and Cultural Agencies in Istanbul. Each of the partners set up field trips and workshops to help explore some of the questions they had emerging from their own local cultural practices. What maybe differentiates this work from other forms of networked practice is that rather than connecting individuals from an art network to a specific locality, here an art/architecture/academic network of friendship is used to *connect local groups to one another*.

In a lecture, Ruth Morrow, one of the participants in Rhyzom, gave an example of an exchange between *Oda Projesi* from Istanbul and the *Forever Young Pensioners* in Ballykinler, with each presenting their group and experiences to the other (Morrow, 2012). She emphasised the significance of the *mutual qualities of the exchange and connection*. For *Rhyzom*, each of the groups organised workshops and visits for the others, with the aim of 'setting up connections and networks of production and

dissemination' (*aaa*, 2010). So a network of friendship established the initial project, but each workshop enabled relations to be extended a little, making new connections each time: 'performing a rhyzom' as *aaa* say (2010: 21).

The *Rhyzom* network now has a life in *Eco Nomadic School*, a project that I have been involved in.[11] Here the network is mobilised to test the mutual teaching of ecological practices, sharing of skills and experience between different groups (Figure 11.3). In October 2011, as part of a 'live project'[12] a group of Masters students in architecture from the University of Sheffield organised a public workshop for the network. Over two days the students organised a variety of different activities, walks, lectures, discussions, brainstorming as well as informal aspects, like a meal. Through the workshop the students organised, other connections began to be made. This led to the later involvement of other groups, specifically members from *Incredible Edible*, in the second workshop in Brezoi, Romania. A connection and presence which would otherwise never have taken place.

[INSERT FIG 11.3]

Bringing in Guattari's concept of 'transversality in a group', one can start to see that the kinds of relations both within and between groups in these projects have particular importance. Understanding that institutions contribute to the creation of certain kinds of subjectivity, Guattari introduced the notion of transversality. Transversality means (crudely put) to overcome the structures and routines that have become sedimented in practices and make new kinds of connections and subjectivity. In his case, within the psychiatric clinic, roles and relations are highly structured, such as the doctor-patient relation or medical staff-service staff relation. Artist Susan Kelly describes transversality like this:

> Broadly speaking, Guattari used the term transversality as a conceptual tool to
> open hitherto closed logics and hierarchies and *to experiment with relations of*

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[11] The project has four main partners, Agency in Sheffield; *aaa* in Paris; *myvillages* in the Netherlands and Germany and the Foundation for Community and Local Development in Brezoi, Romania.

[12] Live Projects are part of the curriculum of Masters students at the Sheffield School of Architecture. They are six weeks long and students are required to work in groups for 'live' situations, working with real clients, and so on.

interdependency in order to produce new assemblages and alliances ... A
movement or mode of transversality explicitly sets out to de-territorialise the
disciplines, fields and institutions it works across.

(Kelly, 2005)

Projects like *Rhyzom* and *Eco Nomadic School* follow something of a transversal
approach. They bring together different constellations of people: community activists,
community growers, local residents into relation with those in academia, in art. It is not
simply a 'bridge' between the civic realm and academia/arts institutions, but rather aims
to produce mutual relations. In *Eco Nomadic School*, for example, in one context
participants are 'teachers' or experts, yet in another they participate as students, and
roles are reversed. These projects demand a repositioning of the self in relation to
others, putting oneself in different roles and contexts.

My experience in *Eco Nomadic School* has changed my preconceptions about the
nature of trans-local connection, care and dependency. Initially I felt that trans-local
connection should resolve issues regarding our material dependencies, questions of
food, energy, and so on. But this experience (for me) has emphasised that an important
connection between places is maybe not (only) material, but also about immaterial
connections. Projects like this can make not only trans-local connections, but also
transversal ones, creating the context in which your ways of seeing are altered through
exposure and connection to those who live differently.

Gibson-Graham also bring in the idea of immaterial trans-local connections in their
work. They make special reference to shared languages in order to help create a shared
imaginary as well as building community through shared knowledge (Gibson-Graham,
2006). This is surely something that universities can contribute to and indeed they do
through an initiative like *Eco Nomadic School*. Through the platform one can enter into
another circle and learn from them.[13]

Considering the long-term nature of connections is important, as *Blue House*, *Rhyzom*
and *Eco Nomadic School* are all projects with defined timeframes. What can make them

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[13] This is also very much the case with Kathrin Böhm's work, particularly in her work with Public Works and their
project 'International Village Shop'. See her contribution to this volume as well as 'International Village Shop'.

sustainable? Here it becomes clear that both connections and commons, circles and chains need care themselves, they need to be looked after.

Following feminist approaches, I have tried to elaborate some of the spatial aspects of care and consider some of the ways that care can produce different architectures and different spaces. I think to bring care into understandings of the 'social production of architecture' means considering the paradigms in which things are both produced and 'taken care of'; it means considering the spatiality of interdependence and care.

I have tried to consider how practices of care work with concepts of space and how those concepts operate alongside, and even produce, value systems. I think making care central introduces the necessity of valuing different kinds of labour, contributions and activities. I have suggested some possibilities of how this might be done architecturally, through the spaces of collective care, or practices such as commoning and mutual aid. The trans-local practices in connected disciplines of art (Heeswijk) as well as the cultural networks and teaching and research practices of *Rhyzom* and *Eco Nomadic School*, also suggest *transversal* forms of care between groups and places. The examples I chose here also importantly make reference to other contributors to this volume. This is to acknowledge that many contemporary practitioners are *already practising care*. Just as other practices of care risk being hidden, taken for granted and undervalued, an important point is to recognise them as crucial kinds of action, which help make our world(s).

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