

CARE / CONTROL. NOTES ON COMPASSION, DESIGN AND VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

What kinds of relationships do design researchers engage with when their work is based on a compassion to care for, empathise with and empower the poor, the subaltern, the powerless, the ‘other’? What kind of epistemologies and politics are produced through such relationships? How do we, as design researchers, with different privileges account for our positions in these complex relationships? What mechanisms are at work that frame certain political concerns as matters of these types of design, rendering certain sites as potential space for design interventions and certain bodies as possible subject of these design works?

As a seemingly innocent term and well-intentioned endeavour, compassion tends to foreground a moral position to design practices such as humanitarian and social design. It mobilizes a sense of care through a binary relationship. For instance, by being empathic to someone, the empathizer enters into a relationship with the empathized which the later has little or no control over it.

As designers’ engagement with social and political issues in general and with vulnerable groups and individuals in particular proliferate in academic, commercial and governmental contexts, it is necessary to ask what other practices beyond the actual or anticipated design solutions, services or systems are produced in these situations? What if there is a fine line between care and control?

BIOGRAPHY

Mahmoud Keshavarz is Post-Doctoral Fellow in Engaging Vulnerability Research Programme at the Department of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University. Previously, he has been Senior Lecturer in Design at Linnaeus University and Visiting Scholar at Parsons the New School, University of Gothenburg and Konstfack. His research and publications sit at the intersection of design studies, cultural anthropology and politics of movement and migration. His forthcoming book *The Design Politics of Passports* (Bloomsbury Academics) is an investigation into the contemporary politics of movement and migration and its counter-practices as a series of design and designing. He is co-founder and member of Decolonizing Design Group.

