Cities of Possibility: Performing Care-full Urban Justice

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Abstract

Urban theory has a well-documented set of knowledges on actually existing injustice shaping cities in the here and now. Inspired by a politics of possibility, weak theory, theories of situated knowledges and an understanding of knowledge-making as performative, this research project reveals moments where people are doing/thinking/being cities differently by uncovering actually existing justice and care in three urban commons. Viewing the everyday as a potentially transformative site and understanding utopia as a ‘process-of-becoming’ (Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2003: 16) I read the city for possibility. By developing connections between urban justice-thinking and care-thinking I argue for a new way of approaching the possibility of the city—a concept I term care-full urban justice. This research documents actually existing forms of care-full urban justice manifest in three urban commons in Sydney, Australia: The Women’s Library, Newtown; Our Place Support Centre, Enmore; and Alfalfa House organic food cooperative, Enmore. Through engaging in an average of 15 months volunteering at each organisation, along with conducting 36 semi-structured interviews, I explore how these spaces are brought into being through everyday material practices and connections. I demonstrate that much is possible through connecting the grounded, everyday, relational, and radical focus of care-thinking with the rich history of justice-thinking in urban theory. The insights gained offer new ways of thinking through the role of urban commons and reveal how care-full urban justice might be used as a theory to uncover actually existing practices of care and justice in the here and now.
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