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.

Name: Miriam Williams

Date: 28th June 2013
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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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Chapter One
Introduction
Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introducing cities of possibility

In this thesis I argue that actually existing justice and care can be revealed by reading the city as a site of possibility and by paying attention to the grounded practices that constitute everyday life. I ask the question: If the just city is what urban researchers are hoping to bring into being, then how might we undertake research that moves us closer to this goal? I think about the role of theory-making as a practice of creating new knowledges of the world and I avoid understanding knowledge-making through the mode of critique alone (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Latour, 2004). I align with Gibson-Graham’s (2006: 7) aspiration of asking:

[w]hat if we believe, as Sedgwick suggests, that the goal of theory were not only to extend and deepen knowledge by confirming what we already know—that the world is full of cruelty, misery, and loss, a place of domination and systematic oppression? What if we asked theory to do something else—to help us see openings, to help us to find happiness, to provide a space of freedom and possibility?

By focusing on possibility I view the act of research as a practice of world-making, as a performative practice and a practice of creating new knowledges of the world (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Law and Urry, 2004). I approach the city by adopting a politics of possibility (Gibson-Graham, 2006), a hopeful politics attuned to progressive worlds and oriented towards the practice of amplifying and making these worlds visible.

My aim in the research is to develop rich sets of knowledges about how justice and care are practised ‘on the ground’ (Olson and Sayer, 2009) by viewing the city as a site of possibility and understanding research as performative (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Law and Urry, 2004). I make room for the ethics of care and justice to be revealed in ongoing unfolding everyday practice through an extended engagement via researcher volunteering in everyday sites of the city: urban commons. Understanding utopia as a ‘process-of-becoming’ (Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2003: 16), I argue for a new utopian dreaming, that of care-full urban justice, which strengthens urban theory by emphasising the relational, interdependent, contextual, everyday and mediated ways in which care and justice are being practised in the present. While volunteering at three community-based organisations—The Women’s Library, Newtown; Our Place Support Centre, Enmore; and Alfalfa House, Enmore—over a period of approximately 15
months, I observed and participated in everyday practices in order to develop grounded insights into the ways in which the ethics of care and justice are reflected in practice. As collectively run sites that are sustained by communities of people, I understand these sites to be urban commons (Chatterton, 2010; Eizenberg, 2011). This is a hopeful project, a beginning point for work centred on uncovering actually existing justice and care, which can sit usefully alongside the many descriptions of injustice that comprise justice knowledges in urban theory (Fincher and Iveson, 2012).

Hope in the not-yet become (Anderson, 2006) and the here and now of urban life seems difficult to assemble amidst stories of injustice, suffering and greed that dominate many accounts of contemporary cities (Davis and Monk, 2007; Dorling, 2010; Hubbard, 2004; Merrifield and Swyngedouw, 1996). Descriptions of injustice are moving, unsettling, and they play an important role in work that challenges through the mode of generative critique: work that exposes, opposes, and proposes solutions to injustice (Marcuse, 2009a). According to Fincher and Iveson (2012), urban theory is brimming with stories that focus on injustice and consequently accounts of actually existing justice are largely absent. In urban theory, formulations about justice are often abstract conceptualisations that are difficult to connect to everyday life due to their articulation as abstract ideals such as fairness or equity (Connolly and Steil, 2009: 3). Due to these abstract conceptualisations of justice and accounts of injustice, it can be difficult to understand justice as a practiced ethic. Moreover, the modes in which justice may be practised on the ground may not fit neatly into the categories, such as redistribution and recognition, that are theorised in response to forms of injustice. Therefore I argue for an engagement with grounded justice practices that have been developed in response to particular contexts, and I locate my search for these justice practices in urban commons. I adopt the practice of weak theorising and argue that this practice helps make justice visible amidst the seeming dominance of injustice in our world (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003).

In this thesis I engage in the practice of weak theorising in order to be open to the contingency and possibility present in cities. I do this in order to reveal care and justice as practices that shape the urban. Weak theorising enables us to view the multiple ways in which worlds are different from dominant accounts, or strong theories, that portray cities as fashioned by abstract aggregative forces (Gibson-Graham, 2003, 2006;
This way of approaching theory is therefore useful for thinking about the role of knowledge-making in relation to searching for justice and care in the city. Weak theory allows for multiplicity and possibility to come into view through a theoretical openness that does not close down other ways of being/thinking/doing from the outset (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 8). It allows us to see beyond the strong theories and discourses which portray gentrification, neoliberalism, globalisation, and capitalism as the totalising and hegemonic forces shaping cities and influencing how we read and research cities (Fraser and Weninger, 2008; Gibson-Graham, 2006; McGuirk and Dowling, 2009a). Connected to weak theory is the practice of ‘reading for difference rather than dominance’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxi) which I use as a conceptual tool in order to open up theoretical and political space to look beyond dominant stories and engage with grounded practices of progressive possibility.

Practising situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988), I argue that, for urban theory to move beyond abstract understandings of justice, conceptualisations of actually existing justice need to be drawn on and be situated in the context in which they have been developed (Fincher and Iveson, 2012). Arguably, it is in the everyday that urban life is reproduced, maintained and constituted through ordinary and banal practices and routines (Felski, 1999). The everyday is therefore a potentially transformative space, brimming with moments of progressive resistance, creativity and subversion in which to situate the search for actually existing justice and care in the city (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). This thesis reveals how examining everyday life offers rich insights into practices of care/carelessness and justice/injustice. By developing an ethnographic case study approach, I uncover practices of care and justice in urban commons.

Urban commons are collectively made sites in the city, and are understood to be practised and peopled (Eizenberg, 2011: 4). They sustain and are sustained, they are collectively produced and shared whilst always being in a state of becoming (Eizenberg, 2011: 4; McFarlane, 2011). Urban commons can be community gardens, bicycle repair groups, cooperatives, community organisations, collectively owned land, or other sites of encounter (Carlsson, 2008; Chatterton, 2010; Eizenberg, 2011). There are similarities between conceptualisations of urban commons and work that has been done on micropublics (Amin, 2002; Sandercock, 2006) and spaces of care (Conradson, 2003b, 2003c), as sites that may be founded in progressive politics. Commons are potentially ‘full of
productive moments of resistance that create new vocabularies, solidarities, social and spatial practices and relations’ (Chatterton, 2010: 626). Moreover, De Angelis (2003: 4) effectively positions commons as ‘coordinates of a new political discourse’, recognising the potential for urban commons to empower humans to think through, imagine and put into practice alternatives in the present. Therefore urban commons are sites where justice and care practice may be revealed in the city alongside other ways of thinking/being/doing urban life. However given the banal and everyday nature of commons they are often hidden in plain sight and difficult to recognise (Hardt and Negri, 2009: ix). Engaging with a performative ontological politics, this research aspires both to identify and to grow progressive/positive forms of urban commons through participation as a way to exemplify that ‘alternatives do exist, are everywhere and plural’ (De Angelis, 2003: 2). It is in urban commons that I situate my search for care and justice and the possibility of the city because urban commons may be teeming with moments of resistance, contestation, and creativity, echoing more just and caring worlds (Chatterton, 2010; De Angelis, 2003; Eizenberg, 2011).

In approaching urban commons as sites of possibility I aim to reveal practices of care and justice that shape everyday sites in the city. My utopian dreamings are founded in the ethics of care and justice as they play interdependent and holistic roles in repairing our world and addressing injustice and carelessness. The search for justice in the city has long been a focus of urban theorists (Fainstein, 2010; Fincher and Iveson, 2012; Harvey, 1973; Marcuse et al., 2009). A focus on justice is vital for fostering equity and progressive diversity and has been conceptualised as being practised through the logics of redistribution, recognition and encounter (Fincher and Iveson, 2008). Yet, there are few studies of actually existing justice as practised on the ground in cities (Fincher and Iveson, 2012). Urban theory from North America has been critiqued for focussing on justice as expressed in ‘class-based revolution’ and being distanced from everyday life (Till, 2012: 13). Here I want to conceptualise justice as more than a response to injustice, as more-than-contestation or revolution and as able to be practised in the everyday city and in the here and now. I conceptualise justice as an ethic that is shaping other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life and as being present in the everyday city in real, yet perhaps incomplete, ways. To do so I argue that the justice-thinking contained within urban theory can be enriched by the grounded theorisation of care-thinking.
In this thesis I make the case for including an ethic of care in conceptualisations of what is possible in the just city because care is a radical, transformative and grounded ethic that enriches urban justice-thinking and its focus on injustice (Conradson, 2011; Lawson, 2007; Till, 2012). Care is a relational ethic that can assist urban theory to locate justice in the here and now by placing emphasis on relationships, places, contexts and sites where both care and justice are present (Lawson, 2007: 3). While often problematically positioned as part of a binary, the ethics of care and justice are complementary and equally important ethics (Clement, 1996; Held, 2006; Popke, 2006; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). According to Clement (1996: 2) the exclusion of care from theorisations of justice and vice versa ‘has resulted in extreme forms of the two ethics, in uncaring forms of justice and unjust forms of care’. Care-thinking directly challenges the assumed dominance of competition and individualism in our wider world and, in so doing, moves beyond the conceptualisations of abstract individual rights and freedoms to place interconnectedness at the forefront of how we theorise beings (Conradson, 2011; Lawson, 2007).

Together, care and justice are integral to the three aims of this thesis, as they inform my conceptualisation of care-full urban justice. My first aim is to develop a theoretical approach to identifying sites and moments of possibility in the city in order to recognise more just and caring worlds. I adopt a performative ontological politics (Gibson-Graham, 2008), I engage with weak theory (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003), situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) and I practise ‘reading for difference rather than dominance’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxi) in order to look to the city as a site of possibility and to locate urban commons. The second aim is to demonstrate what is made possible when care and justice are considered as valuable, interdependent ethics in urban theory. Care-thinking enriches justice-thinking by placing emphasis on the relational, contextual and everyday ways justice and care can be practised, moving away from an exclusive focus on injustice to develop new knowledges of the city. And my third aim is to develop grounded understandings of actually existing care-full urban justice practised in the here and now. The main body of my work is focussed on addressing this aim, which I achieve through providing rich insights into the diverse ways people are engaged with care and justice practice within my three case study organisations. In the next section of my introduction I provide an overview of the thesis and discuss how I have addressed each of these aims.
1.2 Aims and chapters: an overview

Chapter 2 addresses the first aim of my thesis. In this chapter I explore how I have adopted a politics of possibility, engaged with the theory of situated knowledge, and come to understand research as performative (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008; Haraway, 1988). My epistemological framework has been shaped by the work of J. K. Gibson-Graham and her development of a performative ontological politics that situates researchers as world makers (Gibson-Graham, 2008). It has also been shaped by a politics of possibility growing from the claim that components of utopian dreamings are locatable in the present (Gibson-Graham, 2006). I go beyond the hope in the ‘not-yet-become’ (Anderson, 2006) that shapes urban theory, to look for hope in the here and now of the city; being alert to the moments of inclusivity and the solidarities formed in the urban, in the present, and in the everyday (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Latham, 2003).

I turn to the idea of urban commons as sites that contain practices of care and justice. As I suggested previously, urban commons do not necessarily comprise grand acts of protest and revolution; rather, they are constituted through mundane, banal and everyday practices like care and kindness (Chatterton, 2010). Commons are not essentially beneficial or progressive; they can be corrupted, they can be regressive and they can potentially be harmful (Hardt and Negri, 2009). As I outline in Chapter 2, I focus on what I term progressive urban commons that I understand to be shaped by the ethics of care and justice. I do this in order to reveal sites of possibility in the city and to uncover ways in which these ethics are shaping everyday practices or other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life rather than on dominant stories of injustice. The practice of ‘reading for difference rather than dominance’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxi) allows a conceptual openness to the spaces where justice might be brought into being which, in turn, facilitates the recognition of progressive urban commons amidst the more dominant characterisations of cities.

The second aim of my thesis is to demonstrate what is made possible when care and justice are considered as valuable, interdependent ethics in urban theory. To enable this, in Chapter 3 I propose a new conceptual tool for understanding the city as a site of justice and care, a concept that encompasses the ways care and justice might be manifest as interdependent practices. I name this concept care-full urban justice. I demonstrate that much is possible through connecting the grounded, everyday,
A relational, and radical focus of care-thinking with the rich history of justice-thinking in urban theory. Urban justice-thinking has conceptualised the just city as a utopian dreaming that is shaped by the values of fairness, equity and democracy (Fainstein, 2010; Marcuse et al., 2009). Attention has also been paid to the radical, yet abstract, vision of the Rights to the City (Harvey, 2012; Harvey and Potter, 2009; Mitchell, 2003; Purcell, 2002) and a more practical application of justice-thinking through the lens of redistribution, recognition and encounter (Fincher and Iveson, 2008). I argue that representations of justice in urban theory need grounded understandings of actually existing justice that take into consideration the banal and ordinary ways justice may be practised. My argument is that justice-thinking, and its focus on the logics of redistribution, recognition and encounter (Fincher and Iveson, 2008), could be enhanced by care-thinking and its focus on the values of taking care of, caring for/care giving, caring about and care receiving (Tronto, 1993). The situated and everyday framing of an ethic of care enriches theorisations of justice, often mobilised as an abstract and universal ethic. It is on this basis that I develop the concept of care-full urban justice in order to capture the interdependent ways in which care and justice are practised in the urban. Care-full urban justice may only be fully just when full of care and only fully caring when just. Yet, in my empirical explorations of care and justice in the urban, I mobilise this unification of care-thinking and justice-thinking in a way that accepts that both care and justice may be practiced in partial ways. My aim is to expose how, within everyday urban commons, the transformative, relational and radical vision of care-full urban justice can be revealed, if often in partial and incomplete ways. In this revelation and through a focus on everyday practices, our understandings of activism and social change are expanded.

The third and final aim of my thesis is to mobilise the ideas developed in Chapters 2 and 3 to frame a grounded understanding of actually existing, care-full urban justice practised in the here and now. Using a performative research methodology, I have sought to participate in growing more care-fully just worlds through academic practice. I acknowledge that actually existing care-full urban justice practices, and our ability to fully grasp the context in which they are practised, are contextual, grounded, incomplete, and imperfect, much like actually existing commons (Eizenberg, 2011). To link academic practice to producing care-fully just worlds, I draw together three justice logics—redistribution, recognition and encounter—and four values of care—taking care
of, caring about, caring for/care giving, and care receiving. I locate my theorisations of how actually existing care-full urban justice is practised in urban commons because, like cities, commons are always in the process of becoming, and in this way, justice and care are always in process (McFarlane, 2011).

In Chapter 4 I look beyond the strong theories or more dominant characterisations of places to identify progressive urban commons in the inner city. I read Enmore and Newtown—my case study neighbourhoods—for difference. Located in the inner west of Sydney, Australia, these neighbourhoods are close to Sydney’s central business district (CBD). They are typically read as gentrifying and also as diverse neighbourhoods (Bridge and Dowling, 2001; Fasche, 2006; Wirth and Freestone, 2003). I focus my research on three urban commons within these neighbourhoods: the Women’s Library in Newtown, and Our Place Support Centre in Enmore, and Alfalfa House Organic Food Cooperative in Enmore. These case study organisations are where I engage with the grounded practices of reproducing and participating in commons. Within these sites I explore how everyday material practices and connections are imbued with care-full urban justice.

Recognising that there is a need for grounded insights into how care-full urban justice is practised, I selected an ethnographic method that provides insight into the mundane and ordinary complexity of everyday practices. My empirical research involved participant observation via researcher volunteering at each of the three case study organisations, a method that is commonly used to study the practices that transform and constitute spaces of care (Cloke et al., 2005; Conradson, 2003a, 2003c; Johnsen et al., 2005a). Volunteering at each commons, I reflect on the ways in which the logics and values of care and justice were emergent in these spaces through the organisational ethos, practices, and connections at work in these commons. Desiring to identify and grow urban commons, researcher volunteering enabled me to contribute to each organisation whilst gaining an embodied understanding of practice. Alongside this intensive engagement as a volunteer over 15 months, I interviewed 36 volunteers and staff members across my case study organisations. This provided a range of perspectives about the role of the organisations in other people’s lives and how people were enrolled in the practices of care and justice via their own volunteering or work.
Materials, bodies and connections constitute the city and play a role in mediating our lived experiences of places (Latham et al., 2009: 66). From my experience as a volunteer, everyday material practices and connections became key analytical frames through which I viewed how actually existing care-full urban justice was manifest. These practices can be mundane and everyday and are what Horton and Kraftl (2009) term ‘implicit activisms’. Alternatively they are at times more spectacular acts of protest that connect each organisation to broader justice movements. Amongst these practices I look specifically at the relational, interdependent, context-specific, everyday, and mediated ways in which actually existing care-full urban justice is discernible. In each commons I uncover moments where volunteers and staff make affective movements towards one another, or seek to address what they perceive to be a form of injustice through growing and creating other ways of doing/being/thinking the urban.

I begin my elaboration of case study organisations with the Women’s Library, Newtown in Chapter 5. The Women’s Library is a volunteer-run organisation dedicated to providing books by women authors, and providing a safe place for women to be in the city. The library plays a significant role in enabling recognition to be practised through the provision of a space that encourages women’s voices. This library is a critically exclusive commons (Hubbard, 2001: 66), a space women constitute through different forms of contextually dependent practices of justice and care. I explore how actually existing care-full urban justice is reproduced through banal acts, implicit activisms or more spectacular forms of activism such as participating in broader feminist and lesbian rights movements (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). The co-presence of care and justice is articulated through the interrelationships between the aims of the library and the everyday material practices that occur there. Practices of justice such as redistribution and recognition are enacted through the provision of a safe space for members and strangers. The materials of the library are also enrolled in the practice of taking care of people in the city (Tronto, 1993). Volunteers play an essential role in transforming the library into a space of care at particular moments.

In this chapter I discuss the role of connections in mediating forms of care and justice and highlight the importance of relationships grown at the library, between the library volunteers and other groups. The Women’s Library is a meeting place and a site of encounter for women in the city and becomes a space for spontaneous conversations to
take place that address injustice and grow other movements such as the feminist movement in Australia. The way everyday implicit activisms can reproduce a commons that then enables other more spectacular forms of activism to take place, is shown at the Women’s Library. My analysis provides grounded insights into how actually existing care-full urban justice is practised, as well as the role of urban commons in bringing people together in the city to make space for care and justice.

In Chapter 6, I focus on the organisational ethos and everyday material practices and connections made at Our Place Support Centre, Enmore. Our Place is a volunteer-run drop-in centre which, I argue, becomes a social commons (Nonini, 2007) through the intentional practices of volunteers. Our Place aims to be a welcoming, non-judgemental and safe environment for members of the neighbourhood who need access to food, shelter, a place to ‘hang out’, and other services. I explore how care and justice are woven through the organisational ethos of Our Place and how the centre mediates care. Our Place becomes a place of acceptance (Cloke et al., 2010; Johnsen et al., 2005a) and a safe place for community members to hang out, in a context of fear and threat, through the affective orientation and care-full acts of recognition practised by volunteers.

This chapter focuses on the way ordinary actions constitute the organisation and enable practices of everyday more-than-material redistribution which take care of community members. People connected to Our Place care for and about the community members and organisation, and in doing so support and sustain the commons. I also focus on the connections between community members as examples of how Our Place becomes an important social space in which relationships can facilitate care. Volunteers encourage a sense of ownership over Our Place and do this through intentional practices of care and respect. The provision of a space for marginalised people to come and be present in the city emphasises how urban commons can intentionally elicit practices of care and justice and ordinary practices of generosity to take care of strangers in the city. Volunteers play a central role in advocating and practising ‘Just Care’ (Reitz-Pustejovsky, 2002) in order to address the failings of existing welfare systems and forms of redistribution that can at times be unjust and uncaring. In the example of Our Place I reveal how care and justice are practised through growing relationships of trust
and respect in order to facilitate contextually-responsive justice for vulnerable members of the neighbourhood.

In Chapter 7 I turn to Alfalfa House—a collectively owned and run food cooperative. I explore how this urban commons can be seen as a space of care and justice through intentional practices that create a different food system. Alfalfa House is not just changing how food is consumed, but is also changing the infrastructures of food provisioning (Barnett et al., 2011) by changing how food is sold and by growing relationships with suppliers and producers. The everyday material practices of knowledge-sharing, gifting, ethical decision-making and waste management help facilitate care-full urban justice in contextually specific ways. The interdependence of care and justice is particularly evident in the way Alfalfa House is a site of spontaneous learning about the politics of food, and this interdependence shapes how and what food is supplied. Ethical decisions are made as situated responses to people’s ethics, and they are articulated through consumption and participation in a food system that is different from mainstream supermarkets. Caring for producers, consumers and the environmental commons is at the forefront of these ethical discussions.

In this context I explain how connections grown through Alfalfa House enable care to be practised and the importance of intentional policies for the practice of recognition. As an example of an urban commons, the connections between care and consumption are reinforced as care-full and just, as particular kinds of connections with producers and suppliers are sought and grown through practice (Cox, 2010; Popke, 2006). These connections illustrate how care and justice are practised in situated, mediated and everyday ways, and how people are doing/being/thinking the city differently from prevailing characterisations of inner city neighbourhoods as being dominated by neoliberalism and injustice.

My overarching goal is to develop and document a rich set of knowledges about how justice and care are practised on the ground through mobilising a performative politics and a politics of possibility. By engaging with weak theory and situated knowledges I ask urban theory to make space for the development of other knowledges of the city, knowledges that enable care, justice and possibility to be in process in the present, in practice and in place. The types of justice and care practiced in the everyday are always
unfolding and never fixed. Yet, with the assistance of the new concept of care-full urban justice, I argue for a situated and hopeful engagement with the possibility of the city and the importance of grounded theorisations of what ethics of justice and care can and are doing in our worlds. This thesis is, hopefully, a beginning point for urban theory in developing a rich set of knowledge on how actually existing justice and care are practised in the here and now.
Chapter Two
Performing possible cities
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2.1. Introduction

In urban theory cities have been approached as sites of possibility and celebrated for their emancipatory potential (Amin and Thrift, 2004; Lees, 2004b: 5). Overall there has been a broad scepticism towards ‘the traditional utopianism of spatial form’ (Harvey, 2000: 182) and so the emphasis in utopian thought has also been on the broader guiding ethics or rallying cries such as the Just City or Rights to the City movements. Some urban theorists have engaged with cities through theorising what the composition of a good city would be (Amin, 2006) or dreaming the city as cosmopolis—as having the potential to foster and celebrate diversity (Sandercock, 2003). Others such as Fainstein (2010) and Marcuse et al. (2009), have developed frameworks for searching for the just city. Additionally urban theorists have begun to place hope in particular types of collective organisations, which are seen as engendering the broader goals of radical leftist politics, such as progressive urban commons (Chatterton, 2010; De Angelis, 2003). Each approach expresses a (sometimes veiled) hopefulness that life in cities can be improved.

However the role of utopian thinking in urban theory has been contested, as have the practises and understandings of critique. For some, the role of urban theory is to expose existing forms of injustice and power, especially those arising from the twin forces of globalisation and neoliberal capitalism that are shaping cities in unfavourable ways (McFarlane, 2011). In accounts shaped by this view, existing forms of injustice or ways in which the city does not live up to the ideal of the just city are documented and critiqued (see for example Dorling, 2010; Marcuse et al., 2009; Merrifield and Swyngedouw, 1996). These accounts mostly operate through the mode of generative critique, seeking to expose injustice, propose solutions and generate new solidarities (Marcuse, 2009a). However, such accounts risk framing neoliberalism and globalisation as totalising discourses, as implicit and assumed forces that shape urban life and urban form. While the influence of neoliberalising and globalising forces are undeniably powerful, the portrayal of discourses as unified or reified wholes can obscure other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life from view (Fraser and Weninger, 2008; Gibson-Graham, 2006; McGuirk and Dowling, 2009a). In particular, it may elide the possibility that cities and utopias are in a ‘process-of-becoming’ (Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2003: 16), coexisting with forms of injustice in the here and now.
The focus of urban theory on injustice and on totalising discourses has inspired some to ask what justice looks like and to question the performative effect of theorising that looks for hegemonic forces such as neoliberalism from the outset (Fincher and Iveson, 2012; McGuirk and Dowling, 2009a). There have been calls for, as Latham (2003: 1719) puts it, accounts of cities that document ‘instances where the spaces of the city might be becoming more inclusive, less divided’ in order to recognise the ‘new solidarities and new collectivities that urban life is constantly generating’. My intention is to go beyond uncovering injustice and beyond focussing on hegemonic discourses and to engage in the practice of imagining and growing other ways of doing/being/thinking the urban that echo care-full urban justice, a concept I develop more fully in Chapter 3. If research is recognised as productive of worlds, and if research is seen as a performative endeavour, research is political (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Law and Urry, 2004). As Law and Urry (2004: 390-391) explain, ‘social inquiry and its methods are productive: they (help to) make social realities and worlds. They do not simply describe the world as it is, but also enact it’. Being committed to reflexively engaging in the politics of research practice by viewing research as a political act, I present my research politics, ontology and epistemology in Section 2.2. I situate myself as a world maker, recognising the roles of researchers in performing worlds through practice (Gibson-Graham, 2008).

Unlike common approaches to utopian city theory, I bring to light actually existing forms of care-full urban justice (cf. Chapter 3). I do so in a way that does not deploy theories that treat the world as shaped by ‘singular entities’ (Woodward et al., 2010: 272); rather, I deploy the practice of weak theory, as discussed in Section 2.2.1, in order to uncover the multiplicity of forms of actually existing injustice/carelessness and justice/care present in the here and now. My approach is to uncover everyday spaces in the city as sites of possibility performed into being, as moments brimming with potential, as already containing forms of progressive resistances, creativity, and as other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life (see Section 2.2.2) (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Rose, 2002). I make visible the multiple everyday practices and moments that are different from the dominant story. In Section 2.2.3 I discuss how a politics of possibility has shaped my approach to cities and research practice. The framework of situated knowledges positions the research in a particular point in time and place, and acknowledges the role of the researcher in writing and performing research. I discuss
situated knowledges in Section 2.2.4 as a way of practising reflexivity and the importance of contextualising the knowledge claims made.

In Section 2.3 I discuss how progressive/beneficial urban commons can be approached as sites of possibility, as sites brimming with moments of progressive resistance, contestation, and I discuss other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life that can be uncovered and grown (Chatterton, 2010). Here I perform a politics of possibility by locating urban commons as sites of potential, and I commit to growing these through participation via researcher volunteering (discussed in Chapter 4). Through my research practice I uncover and name urban commons within particular neighbourhoods that have been characterised in numerous ways (see Chapter 4). To do so I rely on the practice of ‘reading for difference rather than dominance’ explored further in Section 2.3.1 (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxi). In documenting everyday practices of care-full urban justice that constitute urban commons, I provide a starting point from which to develop further accounts of the spaces of the city that are becoming more inclusive or less divided (Latham, 2003).

2.2 Situating self as world-maker performing a politics of possibility

Informed by a performative ontology that has been inspired by the work of J. K. Gibson-Graham, my research is founded on the idea that research writing and performance bring worlds into being (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008; Law and Urry, 2004). The question of how we might undertake this is as much methodological as it is theoretical. In this section I explore the role of theory and research performance in shaping what can be made known through research by discussing the role of theory more broadly, and by discussing the role of weak theorisations in enabling diversity and multiplicity to be revealed (Gibson-Graham, 2006). I discuss the role of the everyday as a site of transformation and position research as a productive endeavour that is shaped by the politics of the researcher. In this research, I have embraced a politics of possibility that recognises the here and now as containing moments of care-full urban justice that can be learnt from and grown in the present.

To do so, I have adopted what Gibson-Graham (2008) terms a performative ontological politics in order to bring caring and just cities into being through my research practice and writing. This hopeful ontology rests on investigating what it means to do research,
what can be uncovered and the types of knowledge claims that can be made in order to strengthen multiple understandings of the world (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008). Cameron (2012: 580) explains that for Gibson-Graham (2006) a performative ontological politics is ‘a practice that involves writing about, engaging with, performing, and taking seriously the alternatives they wish to see in the world as an act of conscious, political, and creative (re)production’. It involves viewing research as a performative act, and the researcher as a maker of worlds. It involves thinking through the worlds that, as researchers, we want to encourage and grow (Gibson-Graham, 2008). Instead of only exposing injustice, proposing alternatives and politicising actors, we might also

‘excavate, experiment, evaluate, amplify’—excavate the alternative trajectories within the present context, engage in collective experiments in world-making which seek to exploit these trajectories, evaluate their successes and limitations, and amplify lessons learned through written reflections on these experiments circulated to a variety of audiences. (Iveson, 2010: 439)

A performative approach would query the role that accounts of the city might play and the worlds that are brought into being through those accounts. For me, adopting a performative ontological politics involves being committed to experiment in growing caring and just worlds through my research practice and performance. To do so, I view the process of knowledge creation and research as an attempt to create openings which enable other ways of doing/thinking/being cities to be seen. This way of doing theory and research is alert to moments of alterity in the urban, where moments of care and justice might break through the many other stories that might be amplified. Practising weak theorisations plays a key role in revealing the obscured stories that are part of the urban milieu.

2.2.1 Weak theorising and hopeful ontologies

Weak theorising makes space for other ways of thinking/being/doing cities to be uncovered because it broadens the scope of academic knowledge beyond dominant framings. Weak theory produces a helpful understanding of the practice of theorising as the process of making space for new forms of knowledge and new understandings of the world (Gibson-Graham, 2006). In A Postcapitalist Politics (2006), J. K. Gibson-Graham builds upon the work of Eve Sedgwick in adopting the notion of weak and
strong theory in interrogating what these forms of knowledge do. Gibson-Graham (2006: 4) argues that:

[s]trong theory definitively establishes what is, but pays no heed to what it does. While it affords the pleasures of recognition, of capture, of intellectually subduing that one last thing, it offers no relief or exit to a place beyond.

Sedgwick (2003) questions the work that knowledge does and how the creation of strong theory, through a heavily critical or paranoid stance, has become seen as the appropriate work of academics and theorists. The production of strong theories is conflated with the production of critical knowledge that is perceived as the very work of theory and knowledge creation (Sedgwick, 2003). Latour (2004: 248) echoes this point, asking the question:

What would critique do if it could be associated with more, not with less, with multiplication, not subtraction. Critical theory died away long ago; can we become critical again … That is, generating more ideas than we have received, inheriting from a prestigious critical tradition but not letting it die away, or ‘dropping into quiescence’ like a piano no longer struck.

To be engaged in critical theory does not necessarily mean operating in the mode of critique; it can mean being involved in the generation of new ideas and new ways of thinking about the world. To be critical is to gather together new knowledges and understandings of the ways worlds are constituted and made (McFarlane, 2011). Theory can create openings and being critical can mean adopting a different way of doing theory (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

In thinking through the potential of knowledge to do more than reproduce strong theories, we can practise what Sedgwick (2003) terms weak theory— a way of doing knowledge that is open to contingency, possibility and surprises (Gibson-Graham, 2006). In her doctoral thesis Askew (2008: 5) explains how ‘a weak theory approach also exercises active and productive ways of thinking in which theory and practice are fundamentally co-constitutive’. Weak theory allows for multiplicity and possibility to come into view through a theoretical openness that does not exclude other ways of being/thinking/doing from the outset, but makes space for multiple ways of knowing to emerge through the research process (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 8). Weak theorisations are open to possibility, drawn from the ground, shaped by an understanding that knowing is messy and complex (Askew, 2008). They allow us to uncover practices that can at times
be obscured from view due to the dominance of more visible and well-rehearsed theories of systems or processes (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

For example, urban theory can operate in what Gibson-Graham (2006) and Sedgwick (2003) term a ‘paranoid stance’ that constructs cities as sites of rampant neoliberalism. An example of this is the approach often taken to analysing master-planned residential estates (MPREs) as ‘iconic expressions of urban neoliberalism’ (McGuirk and Dowling, 2009a: 122). McGuirk and Dowling (2009a: 122) explain that this approach limits the reading of MPREs and the practices that constitute them from the outset, confining what can be known about MPREs through in-depth study:

… the absence of sufficiently nuanced interpretations of neoliberal articulations with other forms of governance and practice, the possibilities of other political projects that coexist with neoliberalism are occluded. Further, the potential for progressive political possibility within techniques and mechanisms that are ‘named and framed’ as neoliberal remains unrecognised and, consequently, unactivated as these techniques are removed from the frame as potential objects of policy and politics.

The practice of reading for neoliberalism, or arguably reading for injustice within the ‘just city’ context, limits other ways of doing/being/thinking cities from being constituted, written about and learned from. Moments of intervention and practices of progressive politics taking place in spaces that grow other-than-neoliberal worlds can be missed or excluded from view due to a focus on injustice or assumed processes that are presented without an understanding of the diverse ways they may be produced on the ground (McGuirk and Dowling, 2009a).

Urban theorists thus play a central role in constituting and producing the urban through academic writing and research practice (Fraser and Weninger, 2008: 1438). It is important to broaden our understanding of the complexity of the urban beyond ‘the overarching, intertwined narrative of globalization and neoliberal governance [that is] increasingly deployed as the lens through which the transformation of urban space is written’ (Fraser and Weninger, 2008: 1436). The possibility for surprises, for joys, and for diverse ways of doing things that do not adhere to the framings of neoliberal subjectivities may be written out or elided because we are unable to think outside the dominant framing of already agreed upon systems and processes that arguably govern the spaces of study (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Instead theory making and writing can
make room for difference and surprises in and amongst the known stories and trajectories (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

The example of approaches to MPREs shows that research projects and methods have effects by closing down and opening up possibilities for knowing, and also that ‘they make difference; they enact realities; and they can help to bring into being what they also discover’ (Law and Urry, 2004: 392-393) and thus they are political. By being alert to neoliberalism as a given process shaping MPREs, these spaces are read for neoliberalism from the outset. This knowledge practice can obscure from view the everyday progressive resistances (Rose, 2002), practices and ‘implicit activisms’ (Horton and Krafth, 2009) that might also be present in the urban. I argue that being open to diversity and multiplicity instead of reading for dominance offers new ways of knowing and understanding the possibility of the city (Fraser and Weninger, 2008; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Prytherch and Marston, 2005). In this way, the practice of knowledge-making becomes a responsibility and opportunity for experimentation. It also provides opportunities for exploration of the ways in which writing makes cities and an exploration of the ways in which research practice, thinking, writing and doing bring worlds into being (Fraser and Weninger, 2008: 1436).

This project is about creating space for understanding the city, a space that creates room for more hopeful readings of urban life by uncovering moments of possibility. To recognise this involves adopting a hopeful ontology, one that is alert to possibility:

> Hope is easily identified and its quantitative presence or absence highlighted, but the taking-place of hope, its mode of operation, remains an aporia … hope anticipates that something indeterminate has not-yet become (Anderson, 2006: 733).

I understand this project as one that holds the present in tension with the not-yet become: a commitment to looking for moments of progressive possibility that echo other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life in preference to the more dominant narratives of injustice and neoliberalism. Instead of reinforcing and re-performing the problems of cities I want to be a part of growing and uncovering more just and caring ways of living and knowing in order to provide a rich set of documented knowledges about the ways cities may be becoming less divided in response to particular contexts of injustice and carelessness (Latham, 2003). I do not do this in a naïve attempt to ignore
the very real problems, injustices, systematic oppressions or forms of enclosure that are part of the urban milieu; indeed these problems are part of the stories I tell about the neighbourhoods I study. I do this because I desire to make visible the moments of progressive resistance, play, contestation and creativity that are also part of the urban story. I see this as a political act that reveals how urban life can be guided by diverse and situated expressions of what I term care-full urban justice, a concept I develop in Chapter 3. I do so by recognising that, like hegemonic systems and injustices, these resistances or other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life are also brought into being through practices and that these practices take place in contextually specific ways (Latham, 2003). Cities are constituted, they are reproduced, and they are always in a state of becoming because they are performed into being by complex assemblages of actors (Amin and Thrift, 2004; McFarlane, 2011). I use this project to question how, in the here and now, we muster the potentiality of everyday practices to create and transform cities.

2.2.2 The possibility of everyday practices and everyday life

Cities are performed into being through complex and multiple practices, relationships, technologies, objects and environments that are always in a state of becoming (Amin and Thrift, 2004; McFarlane, 2011). Everyday life is a vital part of the experience of the city that is often difficult to comprehend (Felski, 1999). Everyday life ‘is a world that we are so inured to that we often inhabit it as if anaesthetized, in which we wander about distractedly whilst in a kind of “dreamless sleep”‘ (Gardiner, 2004: 229). The ordinary can be obscured from view because it is so mundane and banal. Yet the everyday is the site in which capitalisms and injustices are reproduced and therefore there is, equally, space for a justice response in the everyday (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). In this section I explore the significance of focusing on everyday life as an entry point to understanding the contextually-specific emergence of care and justice in the here and now.

Often discussed as the mundane, banal or ordinary site of the life world, the power of the everyday to be a space of transformation can at times be overlooked (Vaiou and Lykogianni, 2006). Lefebvre has played an influential role in highlighting both the stagnation and the possibility of the power of the everyday to be a site of transformation and extraordinary happenings (Vaiou and Lykogianni, 2006: 734). Everyday practice
can be understood as a ‘routinized activity which involves connected elements of or nexuses between bodily and mental activities, objects/materials and shared competencies (knowledge, skills)’ (Horne et al., 2011: 90). Some everyday practices, habits and routines are *intentional*, others are learnt, unconscious and unable to be known through cognition (Amin and Thrift, 2002). I want to focus on the idea that the city and spaces are produced through assemblages and argue that the everyday practices, habits and routines that constitute the urban can be moments of possibility. At the same time I do not wish to romanticise everyday life (Amin and Thrift, 2002). Far from it, I want to bring everyday life into view as a site of politics and a site where power is brought into being through practice (Rose, 2002).

Spaces are made by bodies in space at particular moments and re-made by the performance of different processes, practices and subjectivities in those spaces (Gregson and Rose, 2000). Spaces are not fixed as the everyday is not fixed, but are sites of continued performance and reproduction made and re-made in each moment. If we consider spaces as made and re-made through practice and performances of different types (Gregson and Rose, 2000), then there are different ways of doing/being/thinking the city that can be revealed in the diversity of these practices. There are also moments in the performance of spaces and the cities for progressive intervention.

My focus on the everyday is in part a political move to value those practices that are often seen as marginal or unimportant yet play a role in constituting injustice/justice and/or care/carelessness. In valuing the everyday as a potential site of transformation, I am placing a theoretical emphasis on those mundane habitual practices that echo beneficial ways of being/thinking/doing cities. If we understand that worlds are made every day by routines, habits and practices, then we see how ‘we need to look around in the relative normality of daily routines to see that every social node “knows” of different ways to do things within its life-world’ (De Angelis, 2003: 2). Mundane, banal and ordinary practices can become acts of progressive resistance, creativity and subversion (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Felski, 1999). I push this one step further to argue that the urban is brimming with such moments, such other ways of being/doing/thinking that echo more caring and just worlds. Our inability to see them is potentially due to their banality and ordinaries or to our fear of naming them that can restrict what is made visible and known. I use the idea of the *here* and *now*, which I
have adapted from Gibson-Graham’s (2006) politics of possibility, to signify the emergent becomings of moments and practices in the present—in the everyday.

2.2.3 A politics of possibility in the here and now: concrete engagements with present worlds

By evoking the term here and now I am practising a politics of possibility, recognising that practices taking place in the present can reflect the ethics of care and justice. Arguably, the possibility of more caring and just cities is always present and waiting/in the process of becoming in the here and now of the everyday city. A politics of possibility needs to be continually worked at (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxvii). And, in following this thinking, it could be said that either our inability to see beyond strong theories closes down the potential for other ways of doing the city, or that these other ways of doing the city are potentially taken for granted and positioned as insignificant. For example, large scale or spectacular forms of activism are often privileged or seen as more significant than banal and ordinary acts or what Horton and Kraftl (2009) term ‘implicit activisms’. The diversity of practices that bring more just worlds into being can be obscured from view.

A politics of possibility sits well with weak theory, in that it aims to ‘denaturalise the idea of a single, unified trajectory within which all urban stakeholders operate’ (Fraser and Weninger, 2008: 1436). It is a hopeful politics that looks for instances of progressive collaboration and transformations within the world in order to make these visible and known (Gibson-Graham, 2006). In the urban, this politics would question rather than focus on dominant narratives of decline and destruction, instead looking for instances where other ways of doing/being/thinking cities are present in order to uncover multiple stories of urban reality.

A politics of possibility is a hopeful politics, that can be coupled with utopian thinking in their shared discontent with how things are now and move to ‘expand senses of what is possible’ (Pinder, 2002: 7). Utopian visions play a role in critiquing the present state of cities in order to politically and critically envision new ways of doing cities, opening up the space for thinking critically about the here and now (Pinder, 2002: 233). Utopian city theory is not grounded in a particular place, but rather ‘the focus on no place raises important questions about how to realise those ideals in some place’ (Lees, 2004a: 6). It
recognises cities as sites of possibility but has been plagued by often well-founded critiques surrounding the modernist utopian planning paradigm (Sandercock, 2003: 2).

The positioning of possibility within everyday urban practice shifts the debate of utopian thinking away from a revolutionary project that seeks to overthrow and re-make what is, to one that starts with the present. According to Swyngedouw and Kaika (2003: 16), ‘recapturing utopia as a process-of-becoming, but one that is already geographically realisable within the interstices of everyday urban practice, constitutes precisely the foundation for transformative urban programmes’. A similar position is expressed by Pinder (2002: 245) who explains that situationists looked to the present for the means to bring utopian dreams into being in the ‘here and now’ rather than in an abstract ‘time and place’. He explores the similarities between the situationists and the work of Henri Lefebvre in seeking to envision ‘a “concrete utopia” that addresses a possible future within the real’ (Pinder, 2002: 245). So we see how there has been a tradition of looking to the here and now, in the present, to find moments of hope that can be fostered and grown and of viewing the everyday as a potential space of transformation (Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2003: 16).

Utopian thinking is performative as the city is brought into being by imaginings and dreams (Pinder, 2002: 233). According to Pinder (2002: 233) cities are made as much by imaginings as material practices. He connects the materiality of cities to dreamings and reveals the effect of imaginings. Practising a politics of possibility in/for/of the city means looking for the diverse stories of other ways of being in the here and now in order to encourage their becoming through research practice. In doing so, I rely on understanding how cities are in a state of becoming; they are not fixed in place and neither is their future (McFarlane, 2011). As urban theorists and researchers we have a responsibility to think critically about the type of interventions and engagements we want to make in the world. I acknowledge the potential of cities to be sites of emancipation and care/justice in the here and now and wish to participate in creating openings and room for the constituting of progressive urbanisms through research practice. This is no small task, as it produces a need for an attentiveness and reflexive engagement with research politics and positionality made possible by situating my knowledge making practices as coming from somewhere.
2.2.4 Situating knowledge of/in/from the everyday city

Situated knowledge is a research politics and practice that acknowledges the partial ways knowledge can be constructed and recognises the importance of context and location to the development of that knowledge (Kobayashi, 2009). It is the practice of reflexively locating the knowledge-maker and the knowledge itself. Woodward et al. (2010: 272) put it this way:

For, whereas theory from the perspective of the eagle can disregard the intricacies and complexities that go into organising and mobilising specific political actions, favouring instead generic procedures and projects, it is often the nature of such universalisms to pass over the very specificities that produce the ‘monkey wrenches’ capable of jamming up systemic oppression and exploitation. Thus, by deploying an aggregative theory of power that treats capital, globalisation or the state as singular entities, countless alternate political possibilities and actualities transpire beneath the radar, which in turn necessarily leave or pass over gaps that become potentially useful for minoritarian politics.

The theory of situated knowledges is similar to that of weak theory and has affected this research in two ways. Firstly, it has shaped how I view writing practice and the knowledge claims I make and, secondly, it has shaped my understanding of the importance of grounded and located uncovering of everyday practices within cities.

In part the practice of situated knowledges is about acknowledging the nature of all knowledge as partial (Haraway, 1988). Drawing on feminist theory, Slocum (2004: 418) argues that ‘better empirical descriptions of truth, of objectivity, can be found sometimes in temporary, local resting points for facts, rather than in universalized facts that are not time or space specific’. The researcher is locatable in the same ways that knowledge claims are locatable to a particular person (understood as a relational being made through the social), moment, time and observation (Haraway, 1988). Post-structural and feminist theorists have critiqued the absent and hidden researcher that is often produced in writing claiming to be objective (Mansvelt and Berg, 2005). Situated knowledges involve ‘a different form of writing practice’ (Mansvelt and Berg, 2005: 253) that recognises the context-specific nature of knowledge production as being locatable. All researchers write from somewhere, about somewhere and all knowledge is produced by someone. But no account of research is ever complete (Jupp, 2007: 2837). Practising situated knowledge involves an acknowledgement that researchers hold partial opinions and values shaped by particular cultural contexts (Cope, 2002: 48).
The idea that the researcher exists outside the research as an independent observer is contested, as researchers are called to reposition themselves in order to struggle with the call for reflexivity as a challenge to conventional understandings of objectivity (Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1997).

Situating knowledge calls for the researcher to struggle with the practice of reflexivity as a way to move towards a more holistic account of the nature of research (Rose, 1997). Writing situated knowledges involves critically approaching the writing task through a consciousness of our own position in shaping knowledge, in attempting to be self-aware and reflexive, and it involves being intentional about the knowledge claims we make and about our ability to be transparent (Rose, 1997). But it is also more than this; it is a way of writing that attempts to make space for difference and messiness. Writing situated knowledges is not a perfect practice, but an ongoing commitment to attempting a difficult task. Understanding research and writing in this way connects back to a recognition of research as performative and of the way in which no research methods are innocent (Law and Urry, 2004: 402). Instead, to practise situated knowledge, we need to start from the position that research is formative, partial, political and messy and to theorise in a way that makes room for this. Moreover, situated knowledges and weak theory allow us a means to mobilise theory from the perspective of the fly rather than the eagle, a perspective that pays attention to the multiple gaps that are potential moments or spaces for progressive political intervention or mobilisation (Woodward et al., 2010).

As discussed above, when we consider all knowledge as powerful, as crafted from somewhere, and all research as performative, research practice itself gains an additional meaning. I situate myself as a researcher who has mobilised a politics of possibility in order to uncover practices of commoning (De Angelis, 2010) that reflect moments of actually existing care-full urban justice in a particular place. I do this in order to engage in the political practice of making commons visible and reproducing the commons, ideas that will be explored in the next section. I acknowledge the potentiality of adopting a performative ontological politics to view research as productive of particular worlds and the hopefulness of the idea that academics can contribute to bringing more ethical worlds into being. Inspired by the hopefulness and vision found in utopian and emancipatory thinking on cities, I begin my search for places that reveal other ways of
doing/being/thinking cities in urban commons as potentially transformative everyday spaces.

2.3 The possibility of urban commons

The common represents a whole system of property rights and production relations … it suggests a model of the desired city, which should not be a city with only distributional equity, but one that supports the full development of human capabilities for all (Marcuse, 2009b: 91).

The discourse of the commons is a rallying cry mobilised by urban theorists to help encapsulate the multiplicity of alternative ways of doing/being/thinking urban life present in the here and now (De Angelis, 2003). Commons have been positioned as ‘coordinates of a new political discourse’ (De Angelis, 2003: 4) that recognises the power and agency of humans to think through, imagine and put into practice alternatives in the present. In this section I discuss three political projects attributed to this growing commons movement. Firstly, I explore how commons are grown and reproduced, defining commons and the role of the urban in producing progressive forms of commons. Urban commons are ‘continuously being produced’ (Harvey, 2012: 77) in the urban because ‘the metropolis is a factory for the production of the common’ (Hardt and Negri, 2009: 250). Secondly, I reveal how, within this political discourse, there is an element of resistance to enclosure and discuss the role of exclusion in how commons are recognised and defined. Finally, I focus on how commons are being made visible. Hardt and Negri (2009: ix) argue that it is ‘difficult to see the common even though it is all around us’ and that ‘much of the world is common’. The task of recognising commons is a political project, one that is open to multiple ways of doing and being in the world and new ways of thinking about political action.

There is a political project that is about building commons, creating the space for commons to grow and become a model for organising everyday life in their progressive form. Historically the idea of the commons has referred to land shared by peasants or commoners in England (Eizenberg, 2011). The term has regularly been used to denote physical forms of the natural world or common resources that are collectively owned or owned by no one, such as forests, pieces of land or the ocean (Eizenberg, 2011). Commons literature is thus often centred around the management of natural resources, common pool resources such as forests and common property arrangements (see
Bromley, 1992). More recently, commons have been understood to be collectively owned and shared sites, gestures, cultures, resources and knowledge practices (Gidwani and Baviskar, 2011; Hardt and Negri, 2009: 171). However, Chatterton (2010: 626) explains that ‘the common at its most basic level is a commonly understood spatial motif, evoking bounded entities, which exist to nurture and sustain particular groups’. Moreover, in looking to the urban as a site of possibility the term urban commons has emerged to apply to those commons that are produced due to their location in the urban. Drawing on the work of Eizenberg (2011) I understand urban commons to be spaces that are collectively and cooperatively shaped and managed by groups of people that both sustain and are sustained by the commons in an ongoing way. Unlike Eizenberg (2011:768) who claims that ‘urban commons fulfil these social needs in a non-commodified manner’, by drawing on the work of Gibson-Graham (2006) I conceptualise urban commons as able to involve the work of diverse forms of economies that may utilise commodities as tools to care for and about others. By doing so, I leave open the opportunity for urban commons to be present in unexpected sites in the city and to be sustained by a multiplicity of practices such as the buying and selling of ethically sourced food stuffs.

Urban commons are made and brought into being through habitual collective practices that reproduce the common (Blomley, 2004). A helpful way to think about commons is through the notion of assemblage, a lens through which to uncover the relationality of the world, as it ties to the perception of commons as performed (McFarlane, 2011). McFarlane (2011: 212) clarifies that commons are always in a state of becoming, brought into being through assemblages and multiplicities of practice. In some ways they are temporal rather than fixed because ‘[t]he common, then, is not a static entity; it is as much a verb as a noun. It is something that is perpetually made and remade, created, eroded and defended’ (Chatterton, 2010: 626). Practices of commoning grow and sustain commons on a day-to-day basis and so commons become a key entry point for uncovering the transformative potential of everyday life to contain other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life (De Angelis, 2010: 955; Harvey, 2012: 73). The practices that constitute commons at any point will open up or close down possibilities for other ways of doing/being/thinking in the urban as they reflect justice and care, or not.
It is important to recognise that commons are not progressive in their own right. Rather, they can be either beneficial or corrupted, or both (Hardt and Negri, 2009). For example, in one scenario a food cooperative may be a commons yet the labour may be divided along gender lines and homophobic attitudes may be practised. The space of the food cooperative might become regressive instead of progressive and the commons grown may be detrimental to the movement for recognition. In another scenario a food cooperative may mobilise progressive politics, seeking to recognise and respect diversity and encourage equal labour, intentionally shaping everyday practice so that this commons is beneficial to a movement for recognition. At times there may be slippages and homophobic attitudes practised, yet there is the possibility for care-full urban justice to shape practice because this commons is in a state of becoming. In this brief example, the complex role of practices of commoning and the intentionality of commoners in bringing the food cooperative into being in multiple ways, with varied effects, are highlighted. The point I wish to emphasise is that commons can potentially be progressive when the relations facilitating their becoming demonstrate and engage with a progressive politics and that the practices of commoners are always political as they are imbricated with power.

There are also political projects that are centred on resisting the enclosure of commons. For example, people are actively engaged in the practice of preventing the sell-off of collectively owned assets and services such as electricity and water, or fighting against the patenting of seeds and other life forms seen as part of a commons. Blomley (2008) provides an example of this in relation to the gentrification of Woodward, a suburb of Vancouver. In this example, people grow a commons through their practices that are aimed as resisting the enclosure of Woodward through gentrification (Blomley, 2008). What we see in these types of projects is people resisting the enclosure of commons or potentially resisting the dominance of particular forms of regressive commons (Blomley, 2008; Eizenberg, 2011: 765).

Connected to this, I would argue is the issue of how we define urban commons and the research practices we engage in that may limit and/or open up what we understand commons to be. One of the key political projects of commons work is thus to make existing commons visible. How we understand the role of property and practice are imperative to this project. In particular I refer back to a previous discussion of McGuirk...
and Dowling’s (2009a) work on MPREs and reflect on Lee and Webster’s (2006) work which focuses on the idea that urban commons have been enclosed through the creation of private neighbourhoods and gated communities. Whilst this may be the case, there may also be multiple commons formed within these private neighbourhoods with progressive elements. Our practices of knowledge-making may restrict our ability to recognise commons in our midst. As Blomley (2008) argues, the tragedy of the commons is not lack of ownership; rather, it is our failure to recognise what is common.

Making commons visible in the urban is a key political task as the tragedy of the commons is the difficulty we have in discerning the commons (Blomley, 2004; Hardt and Negri, 2009). Blomley (2008: 322) claims that:

> recognizing the commons in our midst thus becomes a crucial political task through which non-capitalist possibilities can be discerned and revalorized … a space of hope and potentiality is prised open. For Santos (2004:241) the project ‘consists in undertaking a symbolic enlargement of knowledge, practices and agents in order to identify therein the tendencies of the future (the Not Yet) upon which it is possible to intervene so as to maximize the probability of hope vis-à-vis the probability of frustration’. That we do not see the commons reflects our failure to look, I believe, rather than an intrinsic absence.

In part this difficulty can be attributed to a conflation of publics and commons; they are not the same. Commons can come into being in public, private, micro-public, semi-private spaces, and are made through processes of commoning. They are not restricted by different forms of property ownership (Eizenberg, 2011; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013 Forthcoming). Contra the tragedy of the commons thesis, no particular property regime is essentially better in producing a commons (Hardt and Negri, 2009) and indeed we continuously see the failure of private property relations in the way they have ‘cared for’ commons (Harvey, 2012). Commons can exist on private land in the form of producer cooperatives or public land in the form of community gardens that occupy government property, or in other property arrangements such as community land trusts that refigure the nature of property ownership (Eizenberg, 2011; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013 Forthcoming). For example, the work of Eizenberg (2011) explores community gardens in New York as commons that are produced by material spaces, collective knowledges and meanings. Eizenberg (2011: 779) describes how:

> community gardens as actually existing commons offer a glimpse of the kind of social relations and social practices and values that can bring back the commons to our everyday urban life. They facilitate a
cooperating and participating community, gathered around non-commodified activities, collectively producing space according to their needs and visions.

In this way, the discourse of the distinctly urban commons encapsulate much of the re-thinking and re-imagining work that some urban theorists have been preoccupied with.

Thus in the political project of making commons visible it is important not to restrict or close down the sites where commons might be present from the outset, but instead to be open to their presence in unexpected places in order to reveal their possibility. For example, in his book *Nowtopia*, Carlsson (2008: 4) explains that ‘our contemporary commons takes the shape of discarded bicycles and leftover deep fryer vegetable oil, of vacant lots and open bandwidth’ in that each of these could become an element of a political movement. Commons can be present in unexpected places and are often seen as resources that are waiting to be used to assist a progressive politics. De Angelis (2003: 6) radically argues that ‘the opportunities to build communities on the basis of commons are everywhere, whether within the bellies of transnational corporations or outside, in fields or in the streets of our cities’. They are not restricted to places or ownership regimes but constituted through practices that can be progressive, or regressive.

The three political projects of growing commons, resisting enclosure and making commons visible are, of course, interconnected. You cannot grow commons without resisting their enclosure or making them visible. Yet what this discussion of urban commons and commons more generally has pointed to is the role of everyday practices of commoning in growing other ways of doing/being/thinking the urban while at the same time emphasising the presence of alternatives in the here and now if we develop the eyes to see them. I position myself as engaging in each of these political projects here. But in particular, I do this whilst simultaneously mobilising the practice of situated knowledges and weak theorising, looking beyond the dominant narratives and theories that shape understandings of the city and thinking about the role of everyday life as a site for progressive intervention.

I do this through adopting a number of theoretical and epistemological practices that help bring commons into view as previously mentioned. In the following section I want
to focus on how the practice of ‘reading for difference rather than dominance’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxi) provides a possible means to help bring urban commons into view. In making commons visible, and in growing them through participation and research practice and writing, I am open to the possibility that the city reveals other ways of doing/thinking/being urban life. This project allows an openness to the presence of ‘actually existing commons’, a term coined by Eizenberg (2011), in the here and now. Importantly though, I am interested in looking for forms of progressive commons in the urban, forms that reflect care-full urban justice. The tool of reading for difference rather than dominance provides an epistemological starting point to begin questioning how we go about making commons visible and grow the commons in the everyday of the urban.

2.3.1 Bringing commons into view: reading for difference

The key to understanding economic production today is the common, both as a productive force and as the form in which wealth is produced. But private property has made us stupid, as Marx says, so stupid we are blind to the common (Hardt and Negri, 2009: 280).

The political project of bringing commons into view can be facilitated through the practice of ‘reading for difference rather than dominance’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxi). This practice has been advocated by Gibson-Graham (2008: 623) as a way of ‘uncover[ing] and excavat[ing] the possible’. They argue that the practice of reading for difference, which stems from feminist and queer theory, opens up political and theoretical space that could otherwise be colonised by hegemonic or strong theory. Harris (2009) adopts the practice of reading for difference in his approach to alternative food networks (AFN). He emphasises the way in which ‘our academic analyses do not stand as ‘outside’ as we might like, and they too contribute to the (re)production of a neoliberal reality, even when adopting a critical stance’ (Harris, 2009: 60). Reading for difference is particularly helpful for attempting to identify urban commons in areas where it would be easier to focus on the more dominant framing of the area as a site of injustice, such as in gentrifying areas. It is a critical practice that enables weak theorising.

For example, McGuirk and Dowling (2007) engage with this practice to look for the more-than-neoliberal practices that are being carried out within master planned residential estates (MPREs). Instead of focussing on neoliberalism they look for:
the diverse projects, drivers and practices at work within these putatively neoliberal spaces, and, in so doing, open up new possibilities for understanding the potential of MPREs to yield progressive outcomes (McGuirk and Dowling, 2009b: 121).

I adopt a similar approach in order to look beyond the surface and beyond the dominance of injustice in the inner city, in order to observe the complexity and depth of comings-and-goings, encounters, interactions, forms of association, activities and presences in places that constitute the practices of care and justice in urban space.

Reading for difference rather than dominance makes space for commons to come into view through research practice. Gibson-Graham (2008: 615) argues that '[t]he strategy of making difference visible does not automatically produce new ways forward, but it can generate new possibilities and different strategies'. By focussing on beneficial forms of commons, we give power to those processes. McGuirk and Dowling (2009b: 177) explain, that:

the starting point is close empirical investigation of the fine-grain of practice with the aim of building process-oriented accounts of the multiplicities, complexities and contradictions at work.

The type of commons potentially present in the urban are diverse and are constituted through a variety of practices including ‘urban gardening or subvertising and adbusting, to more mundane everyday acts of kindness, social care, and togetherness’ (Chatterton, 2010: 627). These practices of commoning can be overlooked or undervalued in a way similar to the undervaluing of less dominant practices that produce the urban. But these stories and ways of experiencing the city might shed light on how we might bring more just and caring cities into being in the here and now. They might help inform new ways of being/thinking/doing urban life that reflect care-full urban justice and shift ordinary habits and routines from reproducing injustice/carelessness. The practice of reading for difference rather than dominance can assist in making commons visible in cities where the dominant story is one of injustice. The practice may also assist us in discerning the nature of progressive commons. Reading for difference potentially allows us to locate sites of possibility in cities.

2.4 Performing possible cities

What do actually existing alternatives to the current injustice of the city look like? How might we recognise and grow other ways of being to challenge the injustices manifest in
the present through our research practice? By raising these questions I return to a series of inquiries posed by Carolan (2009: 396) who argues that:

> The issue is not simply how what is out there can be uncovered and brought to light, though this remains an important issue. It is also about what might be made in the relations of investigation, what might be brought into being. And, indeed, it is about what should be brought into being. We want to insist that this is not a matter of wish fulfilment. The relations of the world will put up greater or lesser resistances to most of the realities that might be created. Even so, once we start to imagine methods in this way we enter the realm of an ‘ontological politics’. If methods help to make the realities they describe, then we are faced with the question: which realities might we try to enact?

By situating myself as a world-maker I begin to question the types of cities I wish to help bring into being. What thinking/being/doing practices do I wish make visible through this research? I have been encouraged by a performative ontological politics, weak theory and situated knowledges, to think about the way research is practised, what theories do, how activism and research are interconnected and how sometimes what is needed to change our world is as much a shift in thinking as it is a shift in research practice (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008).

The practice of growing and making progressive commons visible in the here and now has resulted in commons becoming an important entry-point for thinking through some of these questions. For example, how might we recognise the practices that constitute and grow progressive forms of urban commons? What ethics would shape progressive commons? How do we go about practising grounded theory whilst holding in tension the situated nature of knowledge production and the need for context-specific engagements and responses to injustice/carelessness? How do we practice a research politics that reveals the political nature of everyday practices without romanticising the everyday? These questions are dealt with in later chapters which provide insights into the context-dependent nature of some of the answers to these questions as well as insights into how I have fashioned a research methodology that is about participating in the everyday. This is a hopeful project, but it is one that aims to keep the concerns of justice, activism, care and change in tension with this hopefulness so as to not restrict the ordinary and mundane nature of the practices studied.
I begin the following chapter with an exploration of urban justice-thinking and the need for care-thinking to inform what we vision cities could be and are. These ethics provide a starting point for recognising ways that beneficial commons or progressive commons might be recognised and grown in cities. The ethics of justice and care inform utopian thought and thus, through their imaginings, they are reflected in everyday practices that constitute the urban. They provide a place to begin thinking through how one might bring utopian dreamings into being through research and how progressive commons might be made visible and grown through participation in the everyday spaces of the city. As actually existing commons are relics of ideal commons (Eizenberg, 2011), so too are the everyday practices of care and justice reflections of the broader ethics of care and justice without being mirror images of the full transformative potential of these ethics. Yet it is to the ideal dreamings of the ethics of justice and care that I now turn.
Chapter Three
Assembling theories of care-full urban justice
Chapter Three: Assembling theories of care-full urban justice

3.1 Introduction

In political philosophy, the ethics of care and justice have been problematically positioned as a binary (see Clement, 1996; Engster, 2007; Held, 1995; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Care has been conceived as a feminine ethic and justice as masculine, and this binary construction has played a key role in the initial development of care ethics by Carol Gilligan in 1982 (Clement, 1996; Held, 2006: 9; Philips, 2007: 82). Care was positioned as a particular, emotional and embodied ethic. Justice, on the other hand, was seen as universal, rational, exterior to self and consequently more appropriate for guiding moral decisions in the public sphere (see Clement, 1996; Engster, 2007; Held, 1995; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Whilst seemingly useful for attempting to distinguish an ethic of care from an ethic of justice, this binary reinforced unhelpful essentialisms and problematic assumptions about care as being confined to the domestic sphere (Clement, 1996; Held, 2006; Popke, 2006).

The restriction of care and justice to particular spheres has been re-theorised, critiqued and contested (see Clement, 1996; Held, 2006; Popke, 2006; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Smith, 2005; Staeheli and Brown, 2003; Tronto, 1993). Over time, care and justice have been considered alongside each other as interdependent but distinct ethics that both contribute to the work of repairing and improving our worlds (Clement, 1996; Held, 2006; Lawson, 2007). The political aim of this chapter is to find common ground between these two equally important ethics, in order to show how care-thinking can enhance urban justice-thinking in urban theory and visa-versa. I do this by exploring the ways in which justice has been theorised in urban theory and by arguing for the inclusion of a grounded ethic of care in the search for the just (and caring) city. Care strengthens conceptualisations of justice in urban theory by placing political importance upon the ‘small acts’ and ‘implicit activisms’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) that constitute the urban and bring urban commons into view. Care is a transformative ethic with the potential to place responsibility and interconnectedness at the forefront of our theorising, our academic work and, I argue, our approach to the city (Conradson, 2011; Lawson, 2007). Care-thinking directly challenges the dominance of competition and individualism in our world (Conradson, 2011: 465; Lawson, 2007: 3). Placing care in the frame of urban justice-thinking, and reconfiguring and re-theorising the possibility
of the city, open up new sites for our understanding of social change. In doing so, the everyday practices that constitute the ordinary are seen as moments for political intervention (Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2003). An ethic of care strengthens conceptualisations of urban justice (Till, 2012) and helps reveal how alternative futures for cities might and are being brought about in urban neighbourhoods, particularly within radical sites such as urban commons.

But why is an ethic of care largely absent from conceptualisations of what the just city could be? In the first section of this chapter, I explore how current justice-thinking in urban theory has focused on an abstract understanding of justice. Some debates in urban theory over the concept of justice have often been framed by questions on how to find the just city, and arguments about how all cities fall short of this ideal (Fainstein, 2010). Whilst urban theory has focussed on uncovering the existence of injustice in our cities, there is also a need for work that extends the focus beyond this (Fincher and Iveson, 2012) to develop a grounded understanding of justice that imagines what cities could be and the sites of justice existent in the here and now. What is needed for this to occur is an account of how actually existing justice is practised in order for us to understand the possibility of the urban to be a site of more-than-injustice. The urban planning literature and its focus on the logics of redistribution, recognition and encounter provides a framework for thinking through what this justice might look like and how it might be planned for in the urban (Fincher and Iveson, 2008). I turn to this in Section 3.2.2.

Part of the reason for the absence of examples of actually existing justice in urban theory is that the everyday has gone largely unnoticed in urban justice-thinking. In Section 3.2.3 I explore the absence of examples of justice as an everyday, situated and practised ethic in urban theories of justice. My purpose is to develop the argument that urban justice-thinking needs to make space for the messy and incomplete ways justice might be practised ‘on the ground’ (Fincher and Iveson, 2012; Olson and Sayer, 2009) in the everyday, as a varied reflection of the ideal of justice espoused in urban theory. Such thinking could be greatly enhanced by considering an ethic of care alongside the ideal of justice as interdependent ethics that offer new ways of theorising what cities are and can be.
An ethic of care frames people as relational agents rather than individuals and is founded on ideas of solidarity and responsibility moving away from the individualised understanding of rights that permeates urban justice-thinking (Barnes, 2006; Held, 2006: 72; Lawson, 2007). Care-thinking also provides an emphasis on the everyday ways care is practised as political. In Section 3.3 I introduce an ethics of care to urban justice-thinking, explaining that it is a transformative ethic, as it calls to account the care-lessness of particular economies and practices (Cox, 2010). But how can more just (and caring) cities be brought into being? What is the role of the everyday as a site for social change? And how might urban justice-thinking be strengthened by attention to the ‘implicit activisms’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) and grounded understandings of justice and care that are manifest in the here and now? In Section 3.4 of this chapter I argue that the concept of care-full urban justice, which I have developed, can assist in addressing some of these questions by developing a grounded framework that is contextually-sensitive to actually existing manifestations of injustice/justice and carelessness/care in the here and now.

Like actually existing commons which are not the essence of the ideal, the forms of care and justice practised are incomplete and always unfolding (Eizenberg, 2011). But the everyday expressions of care and justice uncovered by a care-full urban justice framing provide insights into how these ethics are messily and tentatively reflected in the here and now, and offer a space for us to develop knowledge sets of justice and care practice that have been developed from ‘on the ground’ that can be built upon to enhance urban theory. Care-full urban justice accounts for the interweaving of care and justice in the everyday and uncovers the possibility of urban commons in revealing other ways of doing/being/thinking the city, fusing utopian dreams with practice in place.

In the final section of this chapter, Section 3.5, I explore how urban commons become an entry point for thinking through how care-full urban justice might be manifest in the here and now in the spaces of the city. We know from literature on encounter that micro-publics are sites that make it possible for justice to be manifest (Amin, 2002; Valentine, 2003). We also know from understandings of spaces of care that landscapes of care are performed into being through the practising of care (Conradson, 2003c; Milligan and Wiles, 2010). In closing, I argue that micro-publics and spaces of care are
useful entry points for locating urban commons, and practices of care and justice, in place.

3.2 Representations of justice in urban theory: in need of care?

Most urban justice literature has emerged from Western liberal political philosophies such as utilitarianism, social contract theory and the capabilities approach (Connolly and Steil, 2009). Liberal political philosophers such as Socrates, John Locke, John Stuart Mill and John Rawls each developed theories of justice and the just city by proposing a set of abstract norms that they argue govern our understanding of justice as fairness and equity (Connolly and Steil, 2009). The work of these theorists and others including Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2000), have been critiqued for failing to provide detailed normative frameworks for justice that can be connected to everyday life (Connolly and Steil, 2009: 3).

As highlighted by feminist philosophers, liberal political philosophy is often reliant upon a problematic understanding of the ‘political subject’ (Engster, 2007: 7; Held, 2006). The understandings contained within these notions of justice:

… take the political subject to be an atomized and rational individual who is the bearer of rights; these rights are universal, in the sense that they should apply equally to all citizens and in all contexts (Staeheli and Brown, 2003: 773).

This vocabulary of an ethic of justice frames humans as rational, independent individuals, albeit at times a set of individuals who work collectively (Clement, 1996; Gleeson and Kearns, 2001; Held, 2006: 72; Staeheli and Brown, 2003: 773). However, we know from feminist philosophy that humans are relational, connected and situated beings who make decisions in response to relationships, an important point I return to in Section 3.3 (Gleeson and Kearns, 2001: 75; Staeheli and Brown, 2003: 773).

But first in Section 3.2.1 I explore how, from the philosophical lineage described above, urban justice-thinking has provided abstract framings of justice and how this has been related to an uneasiness in naming justice norms (Fincher and Iveson, 2012). I discuss how recent conceptualisations of the Just City and the rights to the city movements contain utopian elements that speak to urban theory, but these elements continue to work with abstract framings of justice in need of grounding in everyday examples.
Secondly in Section 3.2.2, I explore how three social logics within the urban planning literatures—redistribution, recognition and encounter—provide a more grounded understanding of what justice might look like (Fincher and Iveson, 2008). And finally in Section 3.2.3, I make a case for including mundane, everyday and ordinary ways justice can be practised in order to bring actually existing justice into view. My central argument is that urban justice-thinking requires placing the examination and critique of existing injustice and its causes *alongside* a greater focus on the potential spaces of social change that are concerned with bringing justice into being in the here and now. As Mitchell (2003: 235) puts it, ‘utopia is impossible, but the ongoing struggle towards it is not’.

### 3.2.1 Finding utopian cities

Urban justice-thinking has developed out of a particular reading of the city as a site of injustice, and an understanding that the role of academics is to expose and critique the causes and producers of this injustice (McFarlane, 2011; Newman, 2009). Indeed, this knowledge practice in urban theory can also be seen within radical geography more broadly (Smith, 2009: 206). The framing of cities has produced very valuable critiques of the present state of cities and the suffering that exists within them. However, by being fixed in our mode of critique and our search for injustice, we have restricted our understanding of what justice looks like to understandings of processes that produce injustice, rather than concrete engagements with ways in which justice and injustice have been practised (Fincher and Iveson, 2012: 10).

The responses to instances of injustice found in urban theory are often the formulations of abstract solutions that are difficult to relate to everyday life (Connolly and Steil, 2009: 3). For example, Fainstein (2010) provides a critique of existing cities’ attempts at achieving justice through policy frameworks and planning, but does not provide examples of how or where this could happen or is happening (Fincher and Iveson, 2012: 5). For Fainstein (2010: 20) justice is conceptualised as equity, democracy and diversity and the just city would be one that is socially inclusive and accepting of difference. Abstract understandings of how justice can come about are reflected in her provision of guiding principles that are to be applied universally to Western cities at a local level (Fainstein, 2010). These principles are used to judge how equitable, democratic or diverse a city might be. Following Fincher and Iveson (2012: 6) I argue that Fainstein’s
‘top down’ formulation and application of justice norms are unable to address context-specific manifestations of injustice in a particular place, not to mention the difficulty of reconciling tensions between the equal valuing of equity, diversity and democracy in practice. Despite much contestation over the components of the just city in the philosophical development of justice-thinking, what is missing in such urban theory is an understanding of what justice looks like when it is practised ‘on the ground’ (Fincher and Iveson, 2012; Olson and Sayer, 2009). Moreover there is a need for the just city to be understood, not only in a way that operates within current social processes and ways of being, but also in alternative ways, as a ‘dialectical utopianism’ akin to Lefebvre’s right to the city (Harvey and Potter, 2009: 47).

The concept of the right to the city reveals hopeful, yet at times frustrated, dreamings of what cities could become, whilst at the same time it exposes the injustices of particular actions or situations. Purcell (2002: 101) argues that adopting Lefebvre’s right to the city idea has radical implications for urban politics, explaining that:

Lefebvre’s rights to the city is an argument for profoundly reworking both the social relations of capitalism and the current structure of liberal-democratic citizenship. His right to the city idea is not a suggestion for reform, nor does it envision a fragmented, tactical, or piecemeal resistance. His idea is instead a call for a radical restructuring of social, political, and economic relations, both in the city and beyond.

For Purcell (2002), Lefebvre’s vision is about urban politics and how decisions are made, and who is able to occupy the spaces of the city and decide on how they are transformed. Within the right to the city discourse, justice is perceived to be manifest through the ability of people to transform and participate in the transformation of the city by being present, by living in the city and by re-making it (Harvey, 2004, 2012; Harvey and Potter, 2009; Mitchell, 2003; Sandercock, 2006: 48). The right to the city is a radical utopian re-visioning of the way society could operate outside of existing forms or ways of doing the city. But, while grounded in the urban scale, it is also an abstract vision (Fainstein, 2009; Harvey and Potter, 2009; Purcell, 2002).

The exact meaning of Lefebvre’s right to the city idea, on which the discourses of the right to the city is based, has been contested (Purcell, 2002). Lefebvre’s abstract vision has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Some theorists, such as Fincher and Iveson (2012: 9) and Yiftachel (2009), celebrate its ‘malleable’ framing because it is seen as a
useful mobilising discourse from which understandings of justice in the here and now can be built. In order to strengthen utopian and urban justice-thinking, both critique and engagement with actually existing injustice and justice in the urban are required. But to do this the abstract framings of justice that have been developed from studies of injustice need to be re-worked in order to hold dreams of justice in tension with how justice might be manifest in the here and now. Justice should not be framed in reaction to injustice alone. How we devise grounded engagements of justice-thinking whilst keeping broader utopian dreams in mind needs to be explored more fully.

3.2.2 Grounded urban-justice thinking: re-thinking the abstract and universal

The provision of abstract definitions of justice could be connected to a fear of pinning down justice by naming justice norms (Fincher and Iveson, 2012). In this section I follow Fincher and Iveson (2012) who argue that urban justice-thinking has been afraid that by naming justice, the diversity of ways justice might be manifest may be closed down. This fear, Fincher and Iveson (2012) believe, has led to a concern that unhelpful essentialisms such as the prescriptive norms of utopian form might be reproduced. However, there is nothing essentially wrong with the naming of norms, particularly those that are circulating and manifest in everyday life (Fincher and Iveson, 2012: 10; Smith, 2009). According to Fincher and Iveson (2012: 6) the problem associated with naming norms is the process of how we do the naming. For them, the key question is whether or not these norms have been imposed ‘top down’ rather than gathered from a specific context or situation. I argue for situating understandings of justice in context through the development of grounded understandings of justice practice that are theory-informed and drawn from ‘on the ground’ (Olson and Sayer, 2009).

Instead of avoiding norms, the ways norms are theorised need to be re-worked because ‘the most useful norms are those that have been interpreted ‘on the ground’, providing a view of what justice does actually look like.’ (Fincher and Iveson, 2012: 10). By approaching the search for justice ‘on the ground’, we are able to make space for the theorisation of justice away from abstract understandings and an exclusive focus on the provision of examples of injustice. I take this one step further by supporting Smith (2009: 208 emphasis in original) who argues that ‘the best hope for a way of going on [in radical geography] which is critical, radical and normative may be to work with a situational ethics of care’. I return to this idea in Section 3.3, after I explore how urban
theory has engaged with more grounded understandings of justice practice in the urban planning literature in order to think through the possibility of what Sevenhuijsen (1998: 64) calls ‘weaker forms of epistemic universalism’.

The exploration of grounded justice practices comes from the justice-thinking contained in the urban planning literature, and its focus on redistribution, recognition and encounter (Fincher and Iveson, 2008). These ‘social logics’ as Fincher and Iveson (2008) term them, guide understandings of how justice can be practised in the urban and are seen as interdependent in the work they do in potentially bringing justice into being. I explore each of these in turn to show how the complex understandings of these logics reveal ongoing debates around how justice might come into being in the urban and how theorists have begun to make connections between these logics and an ethics of care. I begin with the logic of redistribution, which was arguably the catalyst for discussions of urban justice in urban theory.

Although redistribution is an abstract value, it seeks to address the uneven distribution of wealth and resources caused by the concentration of power and money in the hands of a few or as the ‘maldistributions of benefits and burdens’ (Waterstone, 2009: 425). Stemming from political economy literature, Marxism, and David Harvey’s highly influential Social Justice and the City (1973), the value of redistribution is seen as a way to address spatial injustice caused by the manifestation of injustice (Connolly and Steil, 2009). Redistribution has most often been practised with varying degrees of success by national governments through policies of taxation and welfare provision. The ability of states to truly enact a paradigm of progressive redistribution is limited and it remains difficult to find instances of national governments who have succeeded in reducing urban disadvantage (Fincher and Iveson, 2008: 27). Indeed, Fainstein (2010) finds all three cities she studies in her analysis of the just city—London, New York and Amsterdam—as lacking in their achievement of a truly fair and equitable society. However, Fincher and Iveson (2008) have begun the work of locating redistribution in the work of public libraries and child care centres. In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I explore the benefits of further exploration of what redistribution might look like when practised in the everyday.
In a similar way, recognition has been identified as an important value that addresses forms of injustice due to ‘cultural domination and impositions of dominant culture as the norm’ (Waterstone, 2009: 425) such as race, gender, sexuality, lifestyle choice, age and mobility. Recognition is also more than a ‘politics of identity’ (Honneth, 2001); it involves understanding that all people have the right ‘to be heard, to be counted and represented’ (Yiftachel et al., 2009: 123). Recognition can be practised in a way that is both affirmative and/or transformative. Nancy Fraser has been central in arguing for recognition to be seen as a justice value (Fraser, 2003). Alex Honneth goes further, saying recognition is an even more fundamental justice value than the value of redistribution (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Recognition requires planners and other city-makers to acknowledge and address the diverse needs of various interest groups as a way to enact a politics of difference (Fincher, 2007: 41). It is shaped by the value of inclusion and is often practised at a procedural level to ensure that diverse groups are able to participate in decision-making processes (Yiftachel et al., 2009: 124). However, like redistribution, recognition is not always practised in a way that brings about justice or just ends and there is therefore a rich knowledge set of problematic applications of recognition (Yiftachel et al., 2009: 121).

Unlike redistribution, connections have been made between the logic of recognition and the practice of an ethic of care. The connection between the recognition of human rights and global justice and the role of care in enabling justice through recognition has been made by Carmalt (2010) and also by Gould (2008: 91) who explains that:

> a focus on care and solidarity points to an important mode of attending to relevant differences among individuals or groups insofar as it draws attention to people’s particular needs and vulnerabilities.

Care here is seen as being dependent on how recognition is practised, a point I return to in Section 3.3. As with recognition, there are also links between an ethic of care and the logic of encounter.

Recent urban justice-thinking on encounter moves closer to theorising how justice might be practised in the urban. In this way of thinking, justice is made possible via encounter through forms of meaningful contact that take place within cities (Amin, 2002; Fincher and Iveson, 2008; Sandercock, 2006; Valentine, 2003). The logic of encounter seeks to draw together ideas surrounding the possibility of the city as a site
where meaningful contact between diverse people takes place in ways that enable justice to come into being through a being-togetherness in the city (Fincher and Iveson, 2008; Young, 1995: 252). Encounter is an ‘everyday right to the city’ (Fincher, 2007: 41). Valentine (2008: 325) explains that meaningful contact can be understood as ‘contact that actually changes values and translates beyond the specifics of the individual moment into a more general positive respect for rather than merely tolerance of others’. At the same time, Valentine (2008) is sceptical about the ability of encounters to enable this level of transformation.

The logic of encounter is important to urban theorists and is seen as one of the ways the city can be a site of justice in that, according to Fincher and Iveson (2008), encounter, redistribution and recognition are all connected and interdependent in practice. Apart from Amin (2010) who has explored care for strangers within the urban, the connection between care and encounter has been less explicitly explored than the connection between care and recognition. But encounter, like care, does not necessarily involve physical presence. Rather, as I elaborate in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, encounter may be mediated by various forms of technology or media such as library noticeboards (Fincher and Iveson, 2008: 193) or even books.

This everyday framing of justice through the logic of encounter moves justice-thinking away from more abstract framings to understanding justice as practised in place, between bodies, at particular moments. The logics of redistribution and recognition also broaden our understandings of how justice might be practised in the here and now. Fincher and Iveson’s (2008) work in particular provides grounded understandings of how, through these three logics, justice might be practised in the ordinary spaces of cities, such as drop-in centres, public libraries, child care centres and at festivals. However, more work is needed in urban theory to move justice-thinking beyond the abstract conceptions of justice, which are inherent in the very framing of the concept of justice in philosophy, in order to re-think how social change might take place. This would assist us to make space for accounts of injustice, the negotiation of utopian dreamings and accounts of actually existing expressions of justice and care.
3.2.3 Moving justice-thinking into the mundane and uncovering possibility

Current urban justice-thinking can be limited by a particular framing of what justice looks like and what social change looks like. There is a need to move justice-thinking into the mundane in order to redress this concern. Till (2012: 13) has argued that there has been an imbalance in urban theory, particularly in scholarship coming from North America, which has focused on political change that is brought about through ‘class-based revolution’. This, according to Till (2012: 13) ‘is not enough. We also need love and play’. We need to make space in how we think about social change to take account of play, creativity, fun, acts of creating something new, instead of understanding social change as resulting exclusively from acts of resistance. Resistance is not always radical or progressive (Staeheli, 2008a). The urban is equally constituted by assemblages of ‘major’ politics of spectacular urban protests and the ‘minor’ politics of the everyday (Amin and Thrift, 2004: 232; Connolly and Steil, 2009: 5). The everyday gaps and moments for intervention need to be made visible alongside the times where the need for care and justice and the existence of care and justice leap out from the banal experiences of the city (Woodward et al., 2010).

Our everyday practices, habits and routines make cities and bring the urban into being both individually and collectively (Harvey, 2003: 939; Till, 2012: 6). These everyday interventions in the world are important moments to be uncovered in order for us to understand how justice and injustice are practised. Yet our conceptions of activism are restricted to what Horton and Kraftl (2009) term spectacular or totemic forms of activism often waged against an oppressive force. They explain that everyday banal forms of activism are often missed in favour of more dramatic, spectacular protest movements or forms of political action that adhere to a certain type of contestation (Horton and Kraftl, 2009: 16-17). I argue that our conceptions of social change and thus justice, which are often at the forefront of social change efforts, also suffer from this restriction. For example, Harvey and Potter (2009: 49) argue that the right to the city ‘has to be seized by political movement’ and they cite demonstrations, conflicts and struggles on the streets as actions that may achieve this right. This understanding of the right to the city operates through the mode of resistance. Yet everyday forms of activism, and arguably justice practices that are also about growing and creating other ways of being/doing/thinking urban life, are important parts of the urban and important
moments of social change. Do we have the eyes to see and document these forms of activism as well?

The ordinary, sometimes even boring actions that are part of justice activism, such as showing solidarity through sharing a meal, are placed outside definitions of activist moments (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). Using the example of a Sure Start centre in the UK, Horton and Kraftl (2009: 21) argue that everyday practices can be forms of ‘implicit activations’, ‘small acts’ or ‘kind words’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) and that they are also part of how activism is practised and can contribute to social change efforts. What might be possible if this mundane framing of activism could be extended to the urban in order to understand how actually existing justice is practised beyond modes of resistance alone? Perhaps understanding justice as practised through the mundane might enable us to see justice in the here and now. This is a particularly pertinent question as we hope to understand the transformative potential of an ethic of care.

The tendency of urban justice-thinking to restrict understandings of justice to universal or abstract ideas and to critiques of injustices, limits our view of how social change and the just city might be realised. Urban theory can be strengthened by engaging with grounded everyday examples of justice and understanding and interpreting how actually existing justice might be manifest alongside the spectacular understandings of political protest. The everyday moments of the urban are important parts of how cities are brought into being, how justice might come about and how injustice is reproduced. If justice and justice movements are seen only in their spectacular form, we miss pivotal moments and sites of justice practice in the city that take place through incremental interventions, moments of play, care, fun and creativity. The values of redistribution, recognition, and particularly encounter, provide a basis for conceptualisations of how justice might be practised in everyday sites of cities and they show a way forward for urban justice-thinking to be enhanced by grounded engagements of how these logics are practised (Fincher and Iveson, 2012).

However, developing a theory of justice that politicises the everyday and makes space for the recognition of justice values through an engagement with the utopian dreamings of justice-theorists, will only get us so far. Any ontological politics that is based on an understanding that all agents/actors are rational and independent is incomplete. Urban
justice-thinking could be greatly enhanced by engaging with the transformative potential of an ethic of care which opens up new sites of political and social critique, possibility and creativity. In order to rework how we theorise the individual, in order to develop more grounded theorisations and politicise the everyday in a way that makes space for justice to be present in the here and now in ordinary moments, outside the mode of resistance, we need a relational ethic of care.

3.3 Introducing an ethics of care to urban justice-thinking

Care is a practised and situated ethic that focuses on how it is needed in the here and now in order to bring more caring and just worlds into being (Askew, 2009; Lawson, 2007: 3; Smith, 2009: 208). Tronto (1993: 113) has conceptualised an ethic of care (citing her work with Fisher) as:

a ‘species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible’. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

Care ethics are developed in response to particular situations, practices and people that are in need of care and an ethic of care is therefore not an abstract framework that is insensitive to grounded particularities (Lawson, 2007: 3). Care ethics offer justice-thinking a situated engagement with the multiple and complex circumstances producing the need for care (and justice) but they also offer an explanation of how people are operating in the urban to ‘repair our world’ (Tronto, 1993: 113). The lessons learnt about how care can be and is taking place offer urban theory a way to begin to think through the possibility of the just and caring city.

In this section I introduce the ethic of care and trace how it has been theorised in urban theory and geography more broadly in order to develop a foundation for bridging the absence of care-thinking in urban justice-thinking through the concept of care-full urban justice, which I explore in Section 3.4. I focus on how an ethic of care is based on a relational ontology and has been theorised from actually existing understandings and experiences of the ideal/best practice of care. An ethic of care is very much grounded in the belief that social change (and the reproduction of injustice/carelessness) occurs in the everyday, through relationships and connections made between people. Coupled
with urban justice-thinking, an ethic of care can strengthen how we understand what
cities could become and what is needed to radically repair our world.

The term ‘ethic of care’ was first coined by Carol Gilligan in 1982 (Held, 2006: 9) and
since this time has been largely utilised in feminist philosophy (see for example
Clement, 1996; Engster, 2007; Held, 1995; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Tronto, 1993) as well
as in human geography (see for example Amin, 2010; Askew, 2009; Conradson, 2011;
Lawson, 2007; McDowell, 2004; Mee, 2009; Milligan et al., 2007; Popke, 2006; Smith,
2005; Staeheli and Brown, 2003). As a moral theory, the ethic of care has stemmed
from an understanding of the propensity of humans to care for those who are proximate
(Barnett and Land, 2007: 1066; Smith, 1997: 30). However it is no longer restricted by
this initial framing, as care has been theorised as something which can be practised
across distance through mediated relations of consumption, through housing markets
and through universal human rights (Carmalt, 2010; Conradson, 2011; Cox, 2010;
Milligan and Wiles, 2010; Popke, 2006). This change in meaning is due to an
understanding that there is no site that will always produce caring practice and there are
no guarantees that care is present in some relationships and not others (Barnett and
Land, 2007: 1067). Care ethics have been applied to practical sites and experiments in
geography and beyond, particularly in recent work on ethical consumption and housing
markets (for example Popke, 2006; Smith, 2005) and state institutions (Askew, 2009).
In urban theory, care has been studied in the context of the home, health-care settings
and community drop-in centres or welfare services (Conradson, 2003c, 2011; Evans,
2012; Johnsen et al., 2005a; Milligan et al., 2007; Milligan and Wiles, 2010). The
specifically urban nature of care and forms of care that are manifest in the urban due to
their spatial context has been made less explicit.

Part of the political project of proponents of care ethics is to broaden our understanding
of care in order to bring caring practice into view; to re-work problematic notions of
care and care-giving; and to continue to value caring practices in a way that challenges
the inequalities that are part of who does the work of care and who does not (Cox,
2010). Scholars who mobilise care ethics link ‘the personal and political in the
geographical webs of connections that easily transcend borders’ (Mitchell, 2007: 6).
This link is made possible through a relational ontology (Mitchell, 2007).
One of the strengths of care ethics is its basis in a *relational social ontology* (Barnes, 2006: 149; Lawson, 2007: 3–4) which:

recognises that individuals can only exist because they are members of networks of care and responsibility and this has implications for the way in which we think about obligations to others (Barnes, 2006: 149).

Rather than having to operate within the bounds of liberal political philosophy on which justice-thinking depends, care ethics are formed by an understanding of responsibility for the other and self (Cox, 2010: 7). This position challenges the idea of the autonomous independent individual, replacing it with an understanding of people as dependent on others and as having a responsibility to others due to that dependence (Barnes, 2006: 156; Held, 2006: 13; Lawson, 2007: 5). Using an ethic of care we recognise that ‘dependency is part of life; we are all vulnerable and at some point in our lives will need care’ (Philips, 2007: 169). The relational formation of care ethics help us think through responsibility for ‘the well-being of those least mobile and most vulnerable, not as discursive subject-positions but as kindred mortals, such as the hungry, the sick and the abused’ (Whatmore, 2002: 155). Moreover, within an ethic of care we are all *interdependent* which could have radical implications for how societies function if properly valued (Held, 2006: 19; Lawson, 2007).

Like the justice literature, work has been done on the ethic of care as a utopian dream of how society might be organised through relationships of responsibility and solidarity (Conradson, 2011; Lawson, 2007). An ethic of care is seen as:

… a transformative ethic in and for a globalizing world, whether at the level of our everyday encounters with strangers or as an alternative to the competitive individualism that characterises so many interactions in market-oriented societies (Conradson, 2011: 465).

A particular focus of care ethic theorists has been the undervaluing of care work and activities in particular places, societies, policies and institutions (Barnes, 2006; Cox, 2010). At the same time, an ethic of care is seen as a way to challenge these inequalities, which take place at all scales, in order to re-work the responsibility for care and the responsibility to care in order to refashion relationships of power (Conradson, 2011; Lawson, 2007).

As explored in the previous section, my central claim is that urban justice-thinking could be enhanced by an understanding of the political nature of everyday moments and
by paying greater attention to actually existing practices of justice along with the development of grounded conceptualisations of justice. Care ethics bring the importance of everyday practices into view. Care ethics are situated in practice and therefore cannot be (problematically) theorised from the top down, but instead have to be understood on the ground (Lawson, 2007). The grounding of care ethics in everyday moments and places holds abstract normative values in tension with the particular and suggests a ‘different ways of theorizing politics’ (Lawson, 2007: 3).

An ethic of care is very much an ethic practised on a daily level in the lives of ordinary people in the urban and is seen as ‘endemic to (potentially) all social relations that matter’ (Lawson, 2007: 3). This can be seen in the four key logics or values of an ethic of care that reflect how care is practised (Philips, 2007: 83). These values, identified by Tronto (1993) and explored by many others, reflect the different approach theorists have taken to care in contrast to the approach taken for justice, in that it is based on an understanding of how care takes place in everyday lives (see for example Barnes, 2006; Held, 2006; Milligan and Wiles, 2010; Philips, 2007; Popke, 2006; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Drawing on her work with Fisher, Tronto (1993: 127) articulates the four values or logics that compose an ethic of care as:

- caring about, noticing the need to care in the first place;
- taking care of, assuming responsibility for care;
- care-giving [/caring for], the actual work of care that needs to be done;
- and care-receiving, the response of that which is cared for to the care.

Caring practice is constituted through the interrelationships between these four logics (Barnett and Land, 2007: 1067). Till (2012: 11) extends our understanding of these logics as practised towards others, to show how they might also be practised to care for place in everyday ways. Connecting the ethics of care with the everyday makes it easier to envision how care can be transformative (Lawson, 2007). Arguably, caring practice plays a role in all positive encounters between strangers, in considerate engagements with friends and family (Lawson, 2007: 3) and in recovering and acknowledging trauma (Till, 2012). Founding theorisations of the composition of an ethic of care upon actually existing examples and recollections of the best and ideal practices of care has meant that the four values of care can be connected to everyday life instead of remaining abstract concepts rarely uncovered in the urban. In making these connections with everyday life it is important to focus on the possibility of an ethic of care rather than ‘reduce the ethic
of care to the distorted ways it is often practiced’ (Clement, 1996: 6). The practice of care and an ethic of care are different, just as justice and the justice system are different.

Unlike present imaginaries of the competitive and economically-driven city, an ethic of care sheds light on the everyday practices or ‘concrete utopias’ that contribute to bringing utopian dreamings such as the right to the city or a caring city into view. An ethic of care is based on a relational social ontology that reformulates understandings of the responsibility we have for others, continuing to politicise the personal and develop a ‘grounded politics of everyday life’ (Mitchell, 2007: 7). Care ethics have the capacity to ‘alter social relations in progressive ways’ and ‘foster new ways of being together’ (Conradson, 2011: 466) in the here and now. It is a hopeful ethic, the strength of which lies in the understanding that social change and transformative everyday practice are enacted through connections and relationships. It is an ethic that recognises the role of healing and transformative practices of care for self and other in the process of repairing worlds impacted daily or historically by violence and suffering (Till, 2012).

Much would be possible through connecting the grounded, everyday relational and radical focus of care-thinking with the rich history of justice-thinking in urban theory. This moves me to make the claim that care and justice are interdependent ethics (Clement, 1996) and an ethic of care radically enhances our utopian dreamings and normative theories of the just city. Care needs justice to ensure that care is not unjust and that particular people do not bear the majority of the caring burden due to unjust social and cultural constructs, expectations or political-economic forces. Justice needs care so that systems of redistribution and practices of recognition meet the needs of people in a way that is contextually appropriate and based upon an understanding of people as interdependent and connected.

In the next section I introduce the idea of care-full urban justice, a concept that brings together theories of justice with an ethic of care, which builds on the consideration of their interdependence already explored above. Both justice and care ground how we conceptualise social change, how we recognise moments of creativity/contestation and how we reveal the possibility for other ways of doing/being/thinking that are present in the here and now.
3.4 Care-full urban justice

I have developed the concept of care-full urban justice, in order to bring together the ethics of care and justice in urban theory and shape an understanding of the just and caring city based on a relational social ontology and a conception of social change as something which can be practised in everyday spaces and moments. Engaging the concept of care-full urban justice enables us to re-think what cities can be, to imagine them to be care-full and just places and to reveal times and places where this is the case. By revealing this possibility, moments for political intervention and progressive commons can be propped up, supported and grown.

Theorists such as Gould (2008) have made connections between an ethic of care and the justice practices of recognition and redistribution on a global scale. Carmalt (2010) has used an ethic of care to rework conceptualisations of human rights. More recently, Till (2012) has begun to develop connections between the right to the city and a place-based ethic of care in the context of what she terms ‘wounded cities’. The connection between care and justice is thus not new. The approach I take in advocating for the two to be considered as interdependent follows feminist political philosophers such as Clement (1996) and Held (2006) who make the case for care to be considered as equal to justice and argue for the importance of including both in our understandings of moral theory. I propose we bring care into view in urban theory to put care-full or compassionate cities (Milligan and Wiles, 2010) on the map. It is not enough for care to be considered part of justice in urban theory, as the act of subsuming care into a theory of justice does not adequately reflect the complexity of how care is practised and the role care plays (Held, 2006: 17). There are many instances of care that operate without justice, such as within the family, but it is difficult to uncover instances of real justice that take place without care (Held, 2006: 17). This is why care and justice are reliant upon each other in practice.

I have developed the term care-full urban justice to encapsulate the potential relationship between care and justice in practice and to value both ethics equally, as an important part of what cities could be and how just and caring futures might be brought into being in everyday practice within urban commons. When we unite care-thinking with justice-thinking, we see how justice is practised every day in the city, we have a vocabulary to talk about responsibility to others due to an inherent focus on
relationality, and we have enlarged our understanding of activism and social change. Thus, we are not only potentially equipped with a vocabulary to talk about more-than-injustice and contestation in the urban, we are able to uncover examples of creativity, joy, play, love and the growing of urban commons that are part of how care-full urban justice is revealed in the here and now in partial and messy practices that involve tentative intersections between care and justice that are always unfolding and never fixed.

Care-full urban justice as a concept is reliant upon four premises which I have developed: firstly care and justice are approached through a relational social ontology, rather than through abstract universal conceptions of individual rights and freedoms if we are to grow worlds that are founded on values of collective responsibility and solidarity that enhance mutual wellbeing (Barnes, 2006; Clement, 1996; Lawson, 2007; Milligan and Wiles, 2010). These connections necessitate an element of responsibility for others because I am/we are ultimately dependent upon others and others upon me/us, which radically undercuts ideologies of competitive individualism. Secondly, care and justice are distinct yet interdependent practices that (could) bring the just and caring city into being. For the ideals of justice—fairness and equity—to be practised, the ideal of an ethic of care—mutual wellbeing—also needs to be practised (Clement, 1996; Held, 2006). Thirdly, care-full urban justice necessitates that care and justice be practised and understood in contextually dependent ways. These ethics should not be theorised from above, but should instead take account of situated needs for, and manifestations of, care and justice (Lawson, 2007; Till, 2012). And finally, care and justice can be practised in everyday spaces and through mediated encounters and relationships. Just as injustice and carelessness can be practised across distance, so can care and justice (Popke, 2006; Silk, 1998, 2004).

Each of these premises shape how we understand the ‘I’, the ‘we’, and the ‘our’ of urban theory, who participates in the right to the city, who is the subject of recognition and who benefits (or does not benefit) from redistribution. The frame of care-full urban justice recognises everyday practices, major politics, minor politics, relationships and connections as political and as moments for progressive intervention enabling progressive urban commons to be made visible and grown. A care-full urban justice perspective is a way of rethinking what cities can become and a way of rethinking
where actually existing care and justice might be manifest. In what follows I briefly expand and develop each premise, exploring the connections between justice values, practices and care.

(i) Care and justice are approached through a relational social ontology
The search for both justice and care in the urban can be approached through a relational social ontology, an understanding of all beings as connected and interdependent upon others for their own wellbeing (Clement, 1996; Lawson, 2007). It is possible to recognise the ways in which people are relational beings that can be reasoned, emotional, partial, rational and objective depending on the moment in which they are making decisions (Barnett and Land, 2007: 1071). These ‘modes’ of being are not mutually exclusive; rather, they operate simultaneously and change from moment to moment. Ethical decision-making is thus a negotiation that takes place in relation to others and self through various modes of ‘altruism’ and ‘prudence’ (Barnett and Land, 2007: 1071). More than a theory of the just city or right to the city movements, an ethic of care requires a radical re-imagining of urban life from its present situation. By adopting a relational social ontology we are more able to recognise our responsibility and ‘being-in-common’ (Popke, 2009: 442) in a way that still enables the important work of care for self.

As such there are two interconnected ways of thinking that are enabled when a relational social ontology is part of urban justice-care-thinking. Firstly, when we look for care-full urban justice in the here and now while understanding justice and care as relationally practised and grown, we are able to see the role that care and justice play in repairing our world (Staeheli and Brown, 2003: 772). It is important to understand the role of relationships in bringing into being care/carelessness and justice/injustice and therefore how spaces and cities are relationally connected and made (Massey, 2004, 2005). Responsibility for injustices caused, for example, through sweatshop labour, lies with multiple actors participating in the exploitation and suffering of others through the control of the means of production, not just the individuals buying the output of clothing products (Young, 2003). Responsibility is thus multi-faceted when understood relationally, being both collective and individual (Barnett et al., 2011). From this understanding we then theorise ways of doing the city that address injustice and carelessness.
However, knowledge of our responsibility for ensuring another’s wellbeing, or knowledge of the complicity in harm towards the other will not necessarily translate into an action of care (Barnett and Land, 2007: 1069). Rather, care or concern for the other can be enabled through meaningful contact or encounters (Barnett and Land, 2007: 1069). Barnett and Land (2007: 1073) argue that ‘other-regarding actions are ordinary and everyday’. Thus, secondly, we can locate the sites that allow caring and justice practice to take place as being sites of connection, either physical or mediated. Collective sites such as urban commons might provide insights into how care and justice are practised in the here and now, as they are collective sites of encounter. Care theory understands people as interdependent and as having responsibility for the wellbeing of others because of their mutual ‘being-in-common’ (Popke, 2009: 442).

The idea of being-in-common stems from the work of Jean-Luc Nancy and his theorisations on sociality and commons (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Popke, 2009). Popke (2009: 442) explains that ‘[f]or Nancy, the essence of Being should be regarded as ‘being-with’, the sharing of being with co-present others in space and time’ (Popke, 2009: 442). Accordingly all people are understood as relational and interdependent beings. The commons in this context is a potential site of ethical transformation, the realm of which is extended to encompass an enlarged sense of responsibility and community (Popke, 2009: 442). These ontological framings echo those proposed by many care ethicists. Popke (2009: 442) advocates an exploration and understanding of in-common spaces in order to radically enlarge and broaden our understanding of the social and the sites of collective responsibility. By understanding people as relational and connected we re-think our understanding of responsibility and the sites where social change towards care-full urban justice might be taking place.

(ii) Care and justice are distinct yet interdependent practices that (could) bring the just and caring city into being

By providing part of the context of justice-thinking and care-thinking, we see how these valuable ethics are dependent upon one another for realising their aims (Clement, 1996; Engster, 2007; Held, 2006; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Part of my political project of developing the concept of care-full urban justice is to bring caring practice into view alongside justice in urban theory. By doing so care is valued as a distinct and vital ethic,
contributing to an understanding of the possibility of the urban. Clement (1996: 117) describes how care and justice are interdependent, arguing that:

It seems that there are two senses in which each of the two ethics provides foundation for the other. In the first sense, a certain minimal level of that ethic is necessary for the very possibility of the other ethic. An ethic of justice, in which persons are treated as autonomous individuals, presupposes an ethic of care, in which dependent individuals are nurtured to autonomy. It could also be argued that in a state of complete injustice, in which one is under attack, it would be difficult if not impossible to devote the attention to others required of an ethic of care. Thus the mere existence of each of the two ethics presupposes certain basic social conditions provided by the other ethic.

The transformative potential of the ethic of care is made possible through its coupling with an ethic of justice. Given that care is not always just and justice is not always caring, it is particularly important that both are considered together in framing what the urban could be (Clement, 1996). This is due to both care and justice being practised in the here and now in ways that are distorted from their philosophical foundations and ethical ideals (Clement, 1996: 6). When talking about care-full urban justice present in the here and now, I acknowledge the incomplete ways it may be manifest through invoking the phrase ‘actually existing’. By keeping both ethics in view when visioning what cities could be, we are able to see the interconnecting of these ethics in how they are practised, or how the practice of justice without care exposes the limits of what justice can do and vice versa.

In thinking through the nature of care-full urban justice, justice and care ‘should not be seen as competitors, but as allies indispensable to one another in our attempts to create a world more conducive of human [and I would add non-human] well-being’ (Smith, 1998: 34-35). For example, justice that is care-full would be attentive to the needs of another, take responsibility for achieving fairness, recognise differences and be attuned to the relational types of political, historical, cultural and economic factors that produce injustices. Caring that is just would be practised in a way that considers both the givers and receivers of care, accounting for inequalities that surround who is cared for and by whom, and the potentially oppressive nature of caring practice.

By recognising the distinct yet interdependent natures of care and justice, particular facets of injustice and carelessness that do not come into view when the ethics of justice
or care are considered alone are addressed. For example, the stereotypically uncaring nature of judicial systems or practices of redistribution are brought to light and new spaces of political critique are opened up and because of this, as Brown (2003: 835) puts it:

[C]are is political precisely because it embodies issues typical of politics in a democracy; questions over the allocation of public resources as well as agonistic relations wherein equity, justice, obligation, and rights are lived.

With care considered alongside justice, we are able to acknowledge the role of practices such as nurturing, listening and support in repairing worlds, which are often undervalued and we are able to make visible the ‘implicit activisms’ and everyday practices that contribute to care/carelessness and justice/injustice. Understanding care and justice as interdependent ethics enhances our ability to critique and explore what the urban could be and is, yet this must only be done in context.

(iii) Care-full urban justice necessitates that care and justice be practised and understood in contextually dependent ways

As previously argued, care-full urban justice needs to be developed from an understanding of practices ‘on the ground’ rather than being imposed ‘top down’ (Fincher and Iveson, 2012: 10). Abstract theories provide a starting point, a guiding set of understandings from agreed upon moral philosophies that can be enhanced by an understanding of actually existing care and justice. The tendency of urban justice-thinking to operate in a way that sets out universal principles can work in tandem with the ‘context-based approaches’ of an ethic of care (Carmalt, 2010: 316). This working can be done through mobilising a general understanding of injustices and carelessness and responding to the actual manifestation of these in contextually appropriate ways, as encouraged by an ethic of care (Carmalt, 2010: 316). Moreover, it also allows us a way to situate actually existing practices of care and justice in a wider context in order to understand how they are being practised. This in turn allows the development of more grounded theories and a connection can be made here with the notion of situated knowledges.

Urban theory can be strengthened and enhanced by knowledge about how care and justice come into being through practice in place as ‘community, care, and justice are
concepts without pre-given content: they are only given meaning through the practices and actions of the people who attempt to forge them’ (Staeheli, 2003: 816, drawing on Bachelor 1993). Care is practised through relationships at particular moments, and the contexts that ‘produce the need for care’ are important in defining how care is practised (Lawson, 2007: 3). Both care and justice need to be practised and understood in situ as the socio-political, economic, cultural and spatial contexts that produce particular forms of injustice and carelessness will shape the suitability of responses. For example, Carmalt (2010: 314) attempts to situate the universal human right value of equity whilst arguing that international human rights law ‘requires that the universal norm of equality look to contextual differences for its implementation’ and that human rights need to be made and understood relationally. In a similar vein, the justice logic of redistribution needs to be practised in a way that responds to the specific forms of oppression, disadvantage, marginalisation and exploitation that are manifest in a particular context. By doing so we understand not only what inequalities exist, but also how they came into being and are reproduced. We are then able to prevent their continued reproduction (Carmalt, 2010: 311). At the same time, by understanding how actually existing justice and care are practised, we see how they came into being, are performed, and can consequently encourage their continued reproduction. Situating care and justice is an important step towards forming grounded theories that take account of local specificities, both every day and in mediated relationships.

(iv) Care and justice can be practised in everyday spaces and through mediated encounters and relationships

This final premise of care-full urban justice speaks both to the traditional theoretical confinement of care to the domestic sphere in everyday mundane practice and to the collective blindness toward everyday practices of justice. Sites of justice/injustice and care/carelessness are not confined to particular spheres or relationships; rather, the possibilities for both are boundless. Like justice, care can be practised across distances and like care, justice can take place in one-on-one relationships and connections. I explore both of these assertions in turn. We need to broaden our understanding of both care and justice to account for the political nature of practices and habits that reproduce inequality through both direct personal relationships and more distanced relationships. By doing so, we might challenge and refashion the injustices manifest through lifestyle, culture, relationships and economic conditions.
Firstly, care can be practised at-a-distance and is not bound by domestic, proximate relationships (Milligan and Wiles, 2010; Silk, 1998, 2004). One consistent example of care as able to be practised at-a-distance is expressed through care-full consumption. People can care for others through a mediated interaction such as that performed by aid agencies on behalf of donors (Silk, 1998, 2004). This practice of care-at-a-distance has also been explored in regards to the role of consumption in caring for and about distant others (Cox, 2010; Popke, 2006). The practice is reliant on reworked understandings of proximity and distance in geography that depend on emotional closeness rather than physical closeness (Milligan and Wiles, 2010; Tronto, 1993: 107). We are able to be emotionally proximate to distant others and therefore we are able to care for them (Milligan and Wiles, 2010: 741-742). Therefore proximity and distance are not barriers to how care can and is being practised (Barnett and Land, 2007).

Care-full urban justice holds ideas of proximity and distance in tension. Although not a new claim for urban theory, the concept of care-full urban justice plays a role in explaining how people are attuning themselves to the needs of others in the urban through sustainable practices or other trans-local connections that have arisen from globalisations. Slocum (2004: 413) argues that ‘daily life is always already rooted in some place and linked to larger-scale processes, but this is not necessarily acknowledged’. Connections are a central part of the ways in which worlds are relationally made. Understanding care and justice as practised through relationships, direct, indirect and mediated, assist in growing a relational understanding of how justice is performed.

Secondly, it seems logical that if injustice is reproduced on an everyday level through ordinary relationships and actions, then actions for addressing injustice, can be practised in a similar way. It is difficult to fashion an understanding of justice when it is conceptualised as a collection of abstract values of redistribution, recognition and encounter that cannot encapsulate the complexity of how justice is practised in one-on-one relationships. This is because, like with care, the everyday moments of injustice can be ephemeral, fluid and messy. I argue that everyday justice practices do not necessarily reflect the big ideals of justice; rather they are echoes of justice in the mundane. For example in a context where information is difficult to come by, providing access for women to information on services for victims of sexual assault can be understood as an
act of justice (and care) as it helps to redress the harm of gender-based violence (see Chapter 5). But this form of ‘justice’ is not covered by abstract notions of recognition or redistribution or encounter. Moreover, providing people who cannot read or write with help to complete forms to help them access redistribution payment schemes (see Chapter 6) can redress many injustices that may have contributed to their illiteracy (e.g. lack of access to education, history of abuse, neglect, socio-economic disadvantage). Yet, the ordinariness of this proximate, one-on-one act of assistance is often forgotten in the justice picture. My concept of a care-full urban justice brings these ordinary acts back into view through a conceptualisation of the multi-scalar practising of justice and care that values the ‘small acts’ or ‘implicit activisms’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) that constitute forms of actually existing justice and care in cities.

I have explored how care and justice have been conceptualised as interdependent, contextually dependent, able to be practised at a distance and enhanced by a relational social ontology. In laying the foundation for a conceptualisation of care-full urban justice that informs urban theory, both where and how we see care and justice being practised in the here and now is revealed. In Chapter 2 I explored the nature of urban commons as being collective sites with the potential to reveal other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 expand these arguments by providing ethnographic explorations of how material practices and connections constitute urban commons through everyday practices and implicit acts of care-full urban justice in three community-based organisations. The role of each organisation is to respond to injustice or carelessness in some form and bring a more just and caring world into being. In closing I return to the potential of urban commons and draw upon work on micro-publics and space of care as physical entry points to situate practices of care and justice in the city.

3.5 Seeking care-full urban justice in urban commons

In searching for sites where actually existing care-full urban justice is practised in the city, I turn to understandings of urban commons as discussed in Chapter 2 in order to make connections between urban commons and the concepts that locate care and justice in place: micro-publics and spaces of care. Urban commons are potentially radical sites that are held collectively and performed into being through practices of commoning that sustain the commons (Eizenberg, 2011). Whilst micro-publics and spaces of care can
differ in their purpose, they each reveal specific insights about how care and justice are practised in collective sites and provide an entry-point for understanding care-full urban justice in process ‘on the ground’ to inform situated theorisations.

As previously explained, it is often as difficult to see and name urban commons as it is difficult to name justice. We are often blind to the common which in turn restricts our ability to recognise, reproduce and grow alternatives to dominant ways of doing/thinking/being our cities. However, research has been done on actually existing commons (Eizenberg, 2011) as diverse sites, such as community gardens. Micro-publics and spaces of care could also be forms of urban commons with potential to reveal situated practices of care-full urban justice. Urban commons are constituted through practices that could be understood as types of ‘implicit activisms’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009).

Drawing on an understanding of the role of encounter in enabling justice in cities, micro-publics have been cited as potentially transformative sites where people might engage in practices of meaningful contact to overcome divisive differences, specifically ethnic difference (Amin, 2002; Sandercock, 2006). Coined by Ash Amin (2002), the term ‘micro-publics’ refers to collective sites of being-in-common in the city. Micro-publics are sites of association: they are the clubs, community groups, music groups, community gardens, schools, community centres, colleges, neighbourhood regeneration projects and other organised gatherings that bring people together in the city (Sandercock, 2006: 45; Valentine, 2008: 331). Micro-publics provide the opportunity for people to form relationships and connections with people they would not necessarily have encountered at work or home. It is within these micro-publics that social justice has the potential to be practised through an agonistic—and I would argue care-full—politics (Amin, 2002; Sandercock, 2006).

Micro-publics are sites that are more than merely about proximity to the other; they are potentially sites where the practice of care-full urban justice might be explored. In particular these sites may be shaped by a shared goal to engender social justice, to empower the marginalised, and to serve as places where interactions between diverse groups can take place (Sandercock, 2006). They potentially provide the space for people to transform perceptions, understandings or stereotypes of different people because
people are taken out of their usual spaces of interaction to engage in sites where they encounter strangers (Amin, 2002: 970). Such spaces can be founded in progressive politics that empower people and recognise the complex power dynamics that are present within them (Sandercock, 2006: 45).

The political potentials of micro-publics need to be intentionally fostered through contextually-specific policies that create safe and respectful places of interaction that encourage difference (Amin, 2002). I explore this specifically in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 where I describe how each urban commons attempts to make a safe space for members and volunteers through intentional practices that reveal forms of actually existing care-full urban justice. Whilst this can happen spontaneously depending on who is present or involved in the micro-public, most often safe spaces that nurture difference need to be consistently worked at and agonised over (see Chapter 5). In that case, the potential for justice to be manifest in micro-publics has much to do with the care-full orientation and performances of the people involved. Spaces of care exhibit similar characteristics to micro-publics, and have also been theorised as sites that are constituted through acts of care.

There are many potential landscapes of care, as caring practice takes place in the home, hospitals, places of work, community organisations, and other therapeutic sites (Milligan and Wiles, 2010: 738). Practising care in a particular space will transform how that space is understood and experienced (Milligan and Wiles, 2010). We know from Conradson (2003c: 508) that:

[a] space of care can … be understood as a socio-spatial field disclosed through the practices of care that take place between individuals. Given the inextricably relational nature of care (Thomas 1993), the emergence and endurance of such spaces depends upon the willingness of some individuals to move towards others and, amongst those being engaged in this way, upon a receptivity to such initiatives.

Spaces of care can be temporal or fixed, they are performed into being at particular moments when care is practised in unexpected sites such as within public spaces and through encounters with strangers (Milligan and Wiles, 2010: 741-742). Spaces of care involve embodied encounters between persons. They comprised complex practices of taking care of and being attentive to the needs of others (Cooper, 2007b). Different people have different perceptions of any particular space of care (Johnsen et al., 2005b: 65)
While some people find these sites oppressive, others may find the same space to be therapeutic (Johnsen et al., 2005b: 327). How one experiences the care one receives is a personal perception and affective reaction and as such more formal spaces of care such as hospitals may not in fact be caring or meet the needs of the care receivers (Johnsen et al., 2005b: 327). Consequently labelling a site as a space of care or justice is subjective and complex.

In Cooper’s (2007b) study of a women’s bathhouse in Toronto, Canada, she explores the way in which caring practice is performed by the management committee, attendees and volunteers at the bathhouse which she labels as a space of care. In choosing a somewhat atypical case study site to illustrate the performance of care she shows how care can be practised in messy and diverse ways in unexpected places (Cooper, 2007b). This points to the diversity of places where spaces of care can be identified and how care is not necessarily dependent upon a specific site. The examples of a women’s library (Chapter 5), a drop-in centre (Chapter 6) and a food cooperative (Chapter 7) reveal how it is the caring orientation of members, volunteers and staff and their everyday practices of commoning that transform these commons into spaces of care at particular times. Like commons, care is brought into being through practice and care-full policies, procedures and approaches. In light of the literature on spaces of care and micro-publics, we see how urban commons are able to contain elements of both of these sites and reveal ways in which care-full urban justice is practised in the here and now.

Urban commons are brought into being through practices of commoning (De Angelis, 2010: 955), practices that open up or close down other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life. They may be spaces of care and/or micro-publics that are performed into being through everyday practices of care and justice. Naming and growing commons in the here and now is part of a political project connected to commons as it is a way to uncover spaces of hope, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Blomley, 2008: 322). It is within urban commons that the transformative and radical vision of care-full urban justice might be revealed as collective sites where people are constituting more just and caring cities every day. The connection between urban commons and the framework provided by care-full urban justice enhances what theorisations of justice in urban theory can do. Having grounded the utopian dream of what cities could be, urban theorists are provided a way to distinguish and learn from progressive/beneficial urban commons. As
we know from Hardt and Negri (2009: 160), commons are not essentially progressive. Rather, commons are brought into being through practices of commoning, or ways of ‘(re)producing in common’ (De Angelis, 2010: 955). Thus the practices, routines, policies, procedures, connections and habits that reproduce a common may be care-full and just, as explored in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I am interested in uncovering what practices of commoning exist and how care-full urban justice might be brought about in the collective sites of the here and now within sites of connection in the city. By focussing in this thesis on the material practices and connections that bring three diverse urban commons into being in unique ways, I reveal how ordinary people are attempting to fashion caring and just spaces.

The framework of urban commons provides a way of recognising the sites of connection present in the urban and allows us to recognise the possibility for our cities to be sites of more-than-injustice. As Eizenberg (2010: 955) explains:

> Actually existing commons are live relics of the ideal of the commons; they are never complete and perfect and may even have components that contradict the ideal type. Nevertheless, even in the face of pervasive neoliberal ideology and practices, ‘alternatives do exist’ and they pave the road to new politics and another possible world.

Similarly, the ways in which care and justice are practised in the here and now are never perfect, but they reveal how other ways of doing/being/thinking the city might be possible. This is true for the practices of commoning discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, which take place in a moment in history and are practised by particular actors. They echo care-full urban justice rather than being the full incarnation of the ideal due to the context in which they are practising and the resources they have to respond to forms of carelessness and injustice. It is in urban commons, as potential micro-publics and spaces of care, that I uncover actually existing care-full urban justice.

### 3.6 Conclusions

As a site of possibility, the urban is a complex milieu of practices, people, dreams and imaginings. It is a site of the spectacular, the ordinary, of joy, sorrow, contestation, creativity and play. This thesis is a starting point for theorisations on how care-full urban justice plays out in cities and informs what cities could become. My purpose is to build theorisations that allow us to think through the role that care-full urban justice might have in constituting urban commons and the importance of collective spaces of
being-in-common in urban neighbourhoods. Though ethnographic detail we are able to see how actually existing care-full urban justice is practised ‘on the ground’ in instances where urban commons are being grown.

In this chapter I have made a case for why care is an important ethic in urban theory and shown why it should be valued as an ethic that enhances theorisations of the just city and urban justice more broadly. Current justice-thinking and its focus on injustice is limited in the extent to which it can advance our understanding of what cities could be. By valuing care alongside justice in urban theory we can develop a grounded framework that values ‘implicit activisms’ and politicises everyday practices so that the sites of solidarity and the practising of actually existing justice and care come into view and can be learnt from and explored. By understanding care and justice as relational, interdependent, contextually specific, everyday and mediated, we can see the multiple, messy and contingent ways care-full urban justice comes into being in the city. By examining actually existing care and justice, we learn from and imagine other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life.

The justice logics of redistribution, recognition and encounter, and the care logics of taking care of, caring about, caring for/care giving and care receiving, inform my analysis of actually existing care-full urban justice on the ground. These logics provide a starting point from which I develop connections between the theorisations of care and justice and my observations of how actually existing care-full urban justice is practised. The grounded insights gained can then be interpreted to inform understandings of care and justice as relational, interdependent, contextually-specific, everyday and mediated practices. Moreover, I reveal the possibility of the city as a site of more-than-injustice.

In the next chapter I present the three urban commons where, arguably, care-full urban justice is being practised in micro-publics and spaces of care. I focus on how studying care-full urban justice in urban commons calls for an ethnographic case study approach to uncover everyday practice and the context in which these practices are taking place. Focusing on the contextually-specific emergences of care-full urban justice practices within three community organisations in Newtown and Enmore, in Sydney’s inner west, enabled me to uncover the interconnected, messy and ordinary ways justice and care are expressed through implicit activism and practices of commoning.
Chapter Four
Research practice and performance: situating practices of actually existing care-full urban justice in urban commons
Chapter Four: Research practice and performance: situating practices of actually existing care-full urban justice in urban commons

4.1 Introduction
The tragedy of the commons is our inability to recognise, name and uncover sites of possibility rather than the actual absence of commons from the city (Blomley, 2008). Dominant narratives that shape how we view the types of transformations taking place in the inner city include gentrification, polarisation, social exclusion, globalisation and mass consumption (Latham, 2003). These discourses often make assumptions about the forces shaping the inner city and these assumptions can obscure sites where actually existing care-full urban justice might be manifest. It is difficult to name sites of possibility not only because they are hard to see, but also because the practices of commoning and the places where commoning occurs may seem to be mundane, banal, ordinary, un-political or co-opted by the state/capital. Community gardens are one example. They have been studied as sites that reproduce neoliberalism and neoliberal subjects (Pudup, 2008) or as actually existing commons and sites of possibility that enhance our understanding of the work commons are doing in our midst (Eizenberg, 2011; Harvey, 2012: 74). Our research politics and orientation will shape how we characterise and view a particular commons, activity or neighbourhood. In Chapter 2 I presented an overview of my research politics. The present chapter describes how I went about performing this politics by growing and uncovering progressive urban commons and actually existing practices of care-full urban justice.

As I explained in Chapter 2, in order to locate urban commons and study them as sites of possibility where actually existing care-full urban justice might be manifest, a particular mode of doing research and viewing cities is required. This way of doing research involves reading for difference rather than dominance (Gibson-Graham, 2006). It involves practising a research politics attuned to moments in which actually existing care-full urban justice might be manifest amongst social processes, discourses and moments of injustice and exclusion. It involves accepting the imperfect ways these ideal values may be practised on the ground. It also recognises the ordinary and everyday activisms that might constitute sites that can be positioned as urban commons that are responding to everyday or banal and spectacular forms of injustice/carelessness. It involves a hope in the not-yet-become (Anderson, 2006) and the here and now: spaces
that echo possibilities of other ways of doing/being/thinking the city that inform grounded theorisations and can be grown and encouraged in order to challenge injustices.

In the Section 4.2 I situate the research in the neighbourhoods of Newtown and Enmore, neighbourhoods that have been characterised as gentrifying and also as diverse (Bridge and Dowling, 2001; Fasche, 2006). Within these neighbourhoods I locate three urban commons that may be imperfect ‘relics of the ideal’ (Eizenberg 2011) but may become spaces of care and micro-publics through the practices of commoning, the ethical orientation of the commoners, and the reproduction of an organisational ethos shaped by the ethics of justice and care. Because commons and spaces of care are performed into being through practice, it was important to be present to observe and participate in the reproduction and constitution of these commons in order to be alert to moments of care-full urban justice. In Section 4.3, I present how I went about participating in growing and reproducing three urban commons through researcher volunteering and observation of everyday practice, coupled with conducting semi-structured interviews with fellow volunteers and staff. The ethnographic detail gained as a researcher actively participating in these commons enabled deep insights into the implicit activisms that take place in the inner city. In thinking through where actually existing care-full urban justice might be manifest in the here and now, spaces of intervention can be located and moments of possibility prised open.

4.2 Reading for difference rather than dominance in the neighbourhoods of Newtown and Enmore

In Chapter 2 I discussed reading for difference rather than dominance and argued that it was a useful tool for uncovering urban commons and practices of care-full urban justice within the city. As both actually existing care-full urban justice and urban commons are brought into being through practice, being alert to moments where these may be constituted required being present in the city. In adopting a politics of possibility and focussing on other ways of being/doing/thinking urban life through urban commons, I approach these cities as ordinary places (following Robinson, 2006) that contain the possibility for care-full urban justice to be present. I look to the neighbourhoods I worked in (Newtown and Enmore) as ordinary, everyday neighbourhoods where a variety of politics and values shape differing practices and activities that constitute their
various contested meanings and identities. These identities are never fixed, but constantly undergoing negotiation and transformation (Wirth and Freestone, 2003).

Newtown and Enmore are located five kilometres from Sydney’s central business district (CBD). Figure 4.1 locates these neighbourhoods and my three case study organisations—the urban commons—which I discuss in Section 4.3.

**Figure 4.1 Newtown and Enmore in relation to Sydney CBD**

(Source: Rey-Lescure, 2012, used with permission)
Sydney itself is undergoing a number of changes including de-industrialisation, an increase in service sector jobs, and growth in the information economy (Bounds and Morris, 2006: 104; Connell, 2000). In the 1990s housing in inner Sydney was becoming increasingly expensive (Darcy, 2000). The neighbourhoods of Newtown and Enmore are part of the inner west of Sydney and have often been characterised as alternative, creative and bohemian, in the same way as many places on the cusp of gentrifying. To situate the practices I study, I introduce two ways these neighbourhoods have been characterised: (i) gentrifying and (ii) diverse. It is these characterisations of Newtown and Enmore that led me to uncover the urban commons present in these neighbourhoods. These characterisations can be read in multiple ways.

(i) Newtown and Enmore as gentrifying
Studies that have been conducted about Newtown have discussed how the neighbourhood is gentrifying, with few projects focussing on Enmore specifically (Bridge and Dowling, 2001; Dawson et al., 1987; Fasche, 2006; Wirth and Freestone, 2003). In the physical fabric of the city the neighbourhoods of Enmore and Newtown merge into each other. They are however slightly different in terms of their socio-demographic composition as shown in Figure 4.2. Newtown is experiencing an ongoing transformation of its retail practices and consumption options, primarily along King Street in the high concentration of retail outlets present there (Bridge and Dowling, 2001; Fasche, 2006). A 1987 study on south King Street argued that the area was undergoing a revitalisation and characterised it as gentrifying (Dawson et al., 1987). The retail precinct of Newtown has experienced ongoing changes as new shops and cafés/restaurants have come and gone (Fasche, 2006). In referring to Newtown, Bridge and Dowling (2001: 103) argue that, ‘the ambience of these retail-scapes suggests a younger set of consumers in Newtown in the trendy ‘communication professions’, especially the media, advertising, PR, computing, design, performing arts’. Also present in both Newtown and Enmore is a diversity of restaurants and cafés exhibiting ‘culinary multiculturalism’ (Bridge and Dowling, 2001: 102). Data from the 2006 and 2011 censuses show that the neighbourhoods are changing, giving a statistical underpinning to some of these interpretations.
Figure 4.2 Socio-demographic snapshot of Enmore and Newtown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total persons</td>
<td>3362</td>
<td>3572</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13550</td>
<td>14148</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6549175</td>
<td>6917658</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent rental housing</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median rent</td>
<td>$265</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>$310</td>
<td>$425</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly mortgage repayments</td>
<td>$2000</td>
<td>$2600</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>$2128</td>
<td>$2600</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>$1517</td>
<td>$1993</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in Australia</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median personal weekly income</td>
<td>$674</td>
<td>$892</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>$742</td>
<td>$933</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>$461</td>
<td>$561</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012)

Whilst Newtown and Enmore are similar socio-demographically, Newtown has a much larger total population and occupies a larger geographical area than Enmore. The cost of housing in both areas has been increasing, as has the median personal weekly income. Moreover, the amount of rental housing as a percentage of total housing has been increasing. Newtown has a number of late Georgian, early Victorian, Italianate, Gothic and Federation style homes (Whitaker, 2006). Both Newtown and Enmore are full of Victorian terraces and semi-detached cottages which are positioned as the archetypal forms of a housing stock that is ripe for gentrification (Lees et al., 2008) (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3 Terraces, Georgina Street, Newtown

(Source: Author, taken 9 June 2012)
According to Fasche (2006: 149) creative industries are contributing to the gentrification of Newtown because the sensitivity of ‘creatives’ towards the aesthetics of the area shapes the ‘gradual economic colonisation of the cultural realm’. This, Fasche asserts, is revealed in changes to housing stock through the renovation of Victorian terraces and federation-style semi-detached homes. These changes are connected to the articulation of multiple identities that are seen as part of Newtown, characterised as a ‘green-left-wing’, ‘tolerant’ and ‘funky’ neighbourhood (Fasche, 2006).

Property prices in the area have been steadily rising since the 1970s and according to Wirth and Freestone (2003: 6) ‘from the 1990s Newtown began losing its tag as an affordable suburb’. Contestation over this changing demographic erupted in the 1990s when, according to Carroll and Connell (2000: 145):

Newtown experienced rapid gentrification, amidst much local concern at the ‘loss of community’ and the emergence of a ‘dual city’, provoking headlines in the inner-city street newspaper City Hub such as ‘Class warfare in South Newtown (25th July 1996), and a street party in opposition to ‘yuppification’.

The unaffordability of rental properties in Newtown was raised in a number of interviews in the present study. One interview with a volunteer at the Women’s Library in particular stood out as an indication of some of the problematic changes occurring:

Well my rent has just gone up. They gave me notice a couple of weeks ago. They have to give you I think about eight weeks’ notice, and it’s going up $40. From I think $240 to $280. And Miriam it’s a room…It’s just a room. It’s big enough for me. It’s got a tiny little kitchen and a tiny little bathroom in it. And it’s going to be $280! (Elise, WL volunteer)

The injustice raised by Elise reveals that there are broader processes in play within this context that are affecting the people that inhabit the area. It is in this context that I situate this research project. And it is in this context that I look for moments of actually existing care-full urban justice that are responding to injustices, such as those caused by the unaffordability of housing. Or perhaps responses to injustice practiced in Newtown and Enmore are operating through the mode of contestation, such as the posters that appeared in Newtown and Enmore in early 2010 suggest. The poster in Figure 4.4 reveals that gentrification is a current concern for some groups in Newtown and shows that the contested identities of these neighbourhoods are constantly negotiated by their
inhabitants (Wirth and Freestone, 2003). Forms of contestation could also be read as contributing to performing Newtown and Enmore as diverse neighbourhoods.

**Figure 4.4 Photo of ‘Hands off Newtown’ poster on Enmore Road, Enmore**

![Poster](source: Author, taken 5 August 2010)

(ii) Newtown and Enmore as diverse

In the context of the diversity of Sydney’s suburbs, the localities of Newtown and Enmore conjure up multiple and varied images of bohemia, of artists, goths, punks, hippies, socialists, lefties, musicians and sexually diverse subcultures. These suburbs are seen as creative thriving hubs with left-wing political activity, art galleries, fetish stores and community activism. Wirth and Freestone (2003) argue that Newtown’s cultural diversity has been capitalised upon in problematic ways by the state as the neighbourhood struggles with undesirable forms of diversity—homelessness and poverty. Yet the bohemian image of Newtown in particular has long been celebrated by both its inhabitants and the tourism industry, as government-led tourist bodies such as Tourism NSW and Sydney Tourism have sought to capitalise on the alternative image Newtown presents as a haven for difference and the consumption of difference in terms of food and dress (Wirth and Freestone, 2003). Examples of types of play (see Figure 4.5) are dotted throughout the built landscape in Newtown and Enmore in the form of posters, the appearance of knitted pole coverings (see Figure 4.6) and other visual symbols in public spaces. The visual presence of gothic fetish stores, anarchist
bookshops, button shops, quirky yarn shops, new designer fashion boutiques, vintage clothes and furniture shops, and galleries conjures up impressions of creativity and fashionable diversity as you walk through the neighbourhoods streets.

**Figure 4.5 ‘Play’ on Australia Street, Newtown**

(Source: Author, taken 9 June, 2012)

**Figure 4.6 Knitted pole on Wilford Street, Enmore**

(Source: Author, taken 9 June, 2012)

Newtown has been known as a hub of sexual diversity and has been termed the ‘new Oxford Street’, and marketed as the alternative Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgendered-Intersex (GLBTI) night-life venue to the traditional suburb of Darlinghurst, another suburb close to the Sydney CBD (Gorman-Murray, 2006). Many gay and lesbian communities have strong presences in Newtown, as the neighbourhood has fast become
‘the GLBTI capital of Sydney’ (Marrickville City Council, 2004). Newtown and Enmore are marketed by Marrickville City Council (2012) as being inclusive neighbourhoods that embrace diversity:

You’ll find every tribe imaginable represented here, living in harmony. Newtownites, as the locals call themselves, take pride in their acceptance of everyone. Enmore, the suburb next to Newtown, is characterised by eclectic Enmore Road which has a good variety of cafes, inexpensive restaurants serving major ethnic cuisines, several pubs and the famed Enmore Theatre.

These neighbourhoods are also ethnically diverse, reflected superficially at least in the diversity of food outlets evident along King Street which houses Indian, Thai, Nepalese, African, Italian, Greek, Peruvian, Chinese, Spanish, Lebanese, Turkish and other cuisines (Bridge and Dowling, 2001). Yet Fasche’s (2006) interviews revealed a decrease in inexpensive food options in the area. According to Wirth and Freestone ‘Newtown is distinctly less diverse (and politically more conservative) that it was a decade ago. Census statistics reveal an inexorable increase in the socio-economic status and a decline in cultural diversity’ (Wirth and Freestone, 2003: 8). The identities of these neighbourhoods are multiple and contested and the stories that can be told about them are manifold.

These two characterisations have revealed the complexity of contextualising research that takes place in sites with contested identities and where the dominant narrative is one of gentrification or diversity, as these characterisations can be read in multiple ways. As Latham (2003) reports of Auckland, New Zealand, so much more is happening in suburbs that can be classified as gentrifying, since new identities, new solidarities and activisms can come into being alongside the moments of injustice and carelessness. These activisms and solidarities are the focus of the stories I tell of Newtown and Enmore. Yet stories of injustice in Newtown, Enmore and more broadly do emerge because they are connected to the actually existing forms of care-full urban justice that are practised in these neighbourhoods. In reading for difference rather than dominance I make visible practices of commoning and actually existing care-full urban justice that are simultaneously taking place alongside broader transformations but cannot be accurately viewed through a focus on injustice alone. A consideration of the contexts in which these practices are taking place is vital for understanding the emergence of moments of possibility and for understanding how the urban commons
studied here have come into being. It is to the research entry-point and the selection of progressive/beneficial urban commons that I now turn.

4.3 Uncovering actually existing care-full urban justice in urban commons: case study selection

As explained in Chapter 3, spaces of care and micro-publics have been identified as potential sites of actually existing care-full urban justice. They provide a starting point to look for commons that might be progressive or beneficial. However spaces of care, like commons, can be performed into being; they are constituted through practice, and this makes it important to be present in these sites in order to study them adequately (Conradson, 2003c). Ethnography is *people writing* and therefore provides a means through which to uncover people’s everyday practice. Ethnography ‘treats people as knowledgeable, situated agents from whom researchers can learn a great deal about how the world is lived’ (Cloke et al., 2004: 169). Ethnographic research relies on participation and an embodied experience in the field that enables researchers to understand and document diverse practices that constitute everyday life (Herbert, 2000; Rudge, 1996). In this section I discuss my ethnographic approach to research practice, which is largely connected to the way in which I have engaged with the politics and practice of situated knowledges discussed in Chapter 2. Herbert (2000: 551) argues that ‘ethnography explores the tissue of everyday life to reveal the processes and meanings which undergird social action, and which enable order to be reproduced and sometimes challenged’. In this thesis I have selected purposive or critical case studies in order to explore the emergence of care and justice practice in everyday life. Purposive or critical case study selection allowed for the selection of cases that have ‘strategic importance in relation to the general problem’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 78). In other words, I strategically selected case study organisations that had an ethos that reflected care-full urban justice or could be considered progressive/beneficial forms of commons.

As such, wanting to participate both in growing and uncovering beneficial/progressive forms of urban commons meant that I made a value judgements about the various urban commons present in the neighbourhoods of Newtown and Enmore in order to select critical cases that were deemed appropriate. This process is in line with qualitative research design that takes into consideration the theories that have shaped the research question and the selection of examples by other researchers doing similar work.
(Bradshaw and Stratford, 2005). For example, having read the work of Conradson (2003a, 2003c) and Jupp (2007, 2008), I was aware of the importance of sites of social connection and the insights that could be gained from being present and participating in organisational spaces. The work of Gibson-Graham, Cameron and various members of the Community Economy Collective furthered my awareness of the work community economies and community enterprises were doing in bringing more just and ethical economies into being, while at the same time being sites of connection (Gibson-Graham, 2005, 2006; Gibson-Graham and Cameron, 2007; The Community Economies Collective, 2001). Moreover, the work of Amin (2002) and Fincher and Iveson (2008) pointed to micro-publics and other spaces of encounter in the city such as libraries and drop-in centres that could contain the interdependent practising of redistribution, recognition and encounter.

I wanted my case study sites to be places where people were able to connect and build relationships. Due to the importance of a relational social ontology to the conceptualisation of care-full urban justice, I wanted to provide a snapshot of the diverse practices of care and justice that constituted these spaces due to an understanding that organisations are dynamic and that they are ‘performed’ or ‘emerge through social practices’ (Conradson, 2003a: 1975). I wanted to uncover diverse forms of commons in the hope that the complex elements which comprise them would provide situated insights on how actually existing care-full urban justice might be practised on the ground. Thus I selected community-based organisations as the entry-point through which I would locate commons.

Community-based organisations have been analysed through a number of different lenses. For example, some community and voluntary organisations have been approached as organisations co-opted to do the work of the state (Adams and Hess, 2001; Everingham, 2001, 2003; Fyfe and Milligan, 2003a; Rule, 2005). In the context of Australian politics in particular, a dominant narrative has been the way in which, from the 1970s onwards, the discourse of community has been co-opted by the state as a solution to poverty (Adams and Hess, 2001; Everingham, 2003; Rule, 2005). Community-based organisations are characterised as being governed by the state through legal and funding regimes that have transformed these once ‘radical’ sites into professionalised service-delivery organisations (Adams and Hess, 2001; Everingham,
2003; Rule, 2005). However, there are a multiplicity of stories that can be heard in relation to this process, as Rule (2005) reminds us. In discussing inner city Sydney neighbourhood centres he argues that:

there is no linear story of community work as being about co-option and control, nor is there a straightforward trajectory of community empowerment and participation that arises from various forms of activism (Rule, 2005: 150).

This case is echoed by Askew (2009) who argues that even within service providers who are characterised as being governed through a neoliberal framework, an ethic of care can be, and is being, practised.

Alert to these projects, and to broader theoretical discussions around reading for difference, my first step in selecting case study organisations involved scoping the urban commons present in Newtown and Enmore. This involved internet-based searches of local council websites and community organisation directories, and moving to Enmore from Newcastle (168 kilometres away) in order to immerse myself in the field. I uncovered a number of diverse community groups, as shown in Figure 4.7 below.

**Figure 4.7 Community-based organisations in Enmore and Newtown (case study commons highlighted)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP NAME</th>
<th>TYPE/ AIM</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alfalfa House</td>
<td>Not-for-profit organic food cooperative</td>
<td>Enmore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel Street Community Garden</td>
<td>Permaculture community garden</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackrose Books</td>
<td>Anarchist bookshop</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Welfare Centre</td>
<td>Community welfare service run by the Greek Orthodox Church serving free lunches</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Q</td>
<td>A radical queer space</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newtown Community Garden</td>
<td>Community garden</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newtown Mission</td>
<td>Drop-in centre for meals</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newtown Neighbourhood Centre</td>
<td>Community service centre for marginalised populations running classes and groups</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Place Support Centre</td>
<td>Drop-in centre for meals and service access</td>
<td>Enmore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The People’s Kitchen</td>
<td>Free food made by the community for the community weekly at Blackrose books.</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Foster Community Centre</td>
<td>Community service day care space for the aged</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watershed</td>
<td>Government funded and community run Environmental resource organisation</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Women’s Library</td>
<td>Books by women authors and women’s space</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I initially selected two case study organisations. One of them was Alfalfa House food cooperative (AH). Alfalfa House provided me with a regular opportunity to volunteer and observe everyday practice. The second organisation did not provide a regular space for people to connect and build relationships outside of formal ‘programs’. Thus, I searched for more open spaces where members of the organisations had greater collective ownership and autonomy, and where the organisation was sustained by the community, rather than by government grants alone. It was through conversations with friends I knew and met in Newtown that I was made aware of the existence of The Women’s Library (WL) and Our Place Support Centre (OP). According to Bradshaw and Stratford (2005) it is quite common to find case study organisations in this way or, rather, for cases to find the researcher.

Importantly, the organisations I chose needed to provide an opportunity for participant observation via researcher volunteering and access to people and relations to observe and interview. Researcher volunteering has been used by a number of scholars to uncover the diverse practices of care, participation and potentially transformative moments (Cloke et al., 2007; Conradson, 2003c; Jupp, 2007, 2008). I discuss the use of this method in more detail in Section 4.4. But in order to gain a perspective broader than my own experience as a volunteer, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 36 volunteers and staff at each urban commons (see Section 4.5). Volunteers have been studied by a number of researchers who have focused on the diverse motivations, roles and politics shaping why and how volunteers volunteer (Cloke et al., 2007; Fyfe and Milligan, 2003b). Community organisations have been viewed through both hopeful and critical lenses, and so have the people who work in them as volunteers (Cloke et al., 2007; Milligan, 2007; Milligan and Fyfe, 2005). Volunteers play a role in constituting the organisations they are a part of through their participation and affective orientations. For practical and ethical reasons my focus in each of the case study organisations was on volunteers and staff. These people are actively constituting and reproducing each commons. A focus on the practices, opinions and motivations of volunteers and staff yielded insights into the role they saw the organisations having in the neighbourhoods and their everyday practices.

To uncover commons or sites of the city that are becoming more inclusive or where actually existing care-full urban justice might be manifest meant not only being
immersed in a neighbourhood, but also being able to participate in growing and sustaining these commons. Being alert to how care-full urban justice might be part of the practices that constitute these organisations, or how they might help shape the organisational ethos and the emergence of care-full urban justice at particular moments was important. In Conradson’s (2003a: 1978) study of Ellesmere House, a drop-in centre run by volunteers, he notes that the everyday practices of volunteers ‘are shaped by a faith-based ethic of social care … an organisational environment with a particular sociability and experiential texture emerges’. Becoming a part of the organisations through being a volunteer was a suitable entry-point for uncovering the ways in which ethics were shaping practice. Moreover volunteering enables an embodied experience, an understanding of being present in the spaces studied and the intermingling of people, spaces, practices and objects (Conradson, 2003a).

I practised participant observation via researcher volunteering in order to be present in the city and to be alert to the daily rhythms, routines, practices and extra-ordinary moments where actually existing care-full urban justice might be brought into being. I explore the practice of participant observation via researcher volunteering more fully in Section 4.4, but first I will introduce the three case study ‘commons’ I selected to situate the research and the insights gained in these organisational contexts. They are: (i) The Women’s Library, Newtown, (ii) Our Place Support Centre, Enmore and (iii) Alfalfa House, Enmore.

(i) The Women’s Library (WL)
The Women’s Library (WL) is a women’s space unique to the Newtown area. The WL is a social commons for women that is collectively managed and run by volunteers six days a week. As the WL constitution explains, it opened in 1994 with the aim of comprising:

… a lending library, a reference library and an information exchange. The Women's Library will house print and non-print material for and about women, in particular lesbians and feminist women, such as:

I. texts that are required reading for courses offered at tertiary institutions in Sydney addressing the status of lesbians and Women;
II. published and unpublished papers and theses;
III. published and unpublished works of non-fiction. Particular attention will be paid to collecting in areas of special interest to lesbians and feminists;
IV. journals, with particular emphasis on journals produced by Australian lesbians and feminists;  
V. newspaper cuttings;  
VI. oral herstory recordings: and  
VII. photographs, letters, diaries, posters.  
The Women's Library will be a safe and supportive space where Lesbians and Women can relax, read, study and exchange information. The Women's Library will be a resource particularly for students enrolled in courses addressing the status of lesbians and Women, and research workers. The Association will raise funds through donations, grants and activities of a commercial nature to maintain The Women's Library (The Women's Library, n.d.).

The library is a social commons, an information commons and a space of care at particular moments. The organisational ethos and connection of the WL to the feminist movement first attracted me to the library as it was clear that everyday practices of justice in particular could possibly be evident here. By volunteering and learning more about the history and role of the organisation as a space of encounter and ‘implicit activisms’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009), I was able to observe the practices of actually existing care-full urban justice emerging at particular moments. And through this observation, the WL’s organisational ethos became evident.

The WL began when women in the local community found an appropriate space in Alexandria Town Hall to house feminist and lesbian literature and provide a meeting place for women, particularly lesbians (The Women's Library, 2008). They moved into their existing property at the back of Newtown Library in May 1997 with the support of South Sydney Council (The Women's Library, 2008). The library has approximately 120 members, although this number fluctuates with yearly membership sign-ups. The WL holds a unique collection of fiction and non-fiction texts by women authors including rare lesbian and feminist texts. The WL plays an important role as a meeting place for a number of local groups.

A management committee and a number of volunteers are responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the library. Volunteers reproduce the common through accounting, organising membership, accessioning books, cleaning, training others, selling second hand books, and organising groups and events. As I discuss in Chapter 5, the library becomes a space of care for both members and strangers who drop in.
I volunteered at the WL for 14 months. I often worked there alone. The role I performed as a volunteer involved opening up the library, selling second hand books, talking with members, adding books to the catalogue, chatting with strangers who came into the library, providing assistance or referrals to other organisations, loaning books and cleaning. These were not grand practices but I became alert to the importance of providing a safe place for women to drop in, in the city. Volunteers play an important role in keeping the library open as a safe space for women in Newtown, which is at the heart of how this urban commons is transformed into a space of care and justice at particular moments.

(ii) Our Place
A number of different drop-in centres have been studied as spaces of care that are made caring at particular moments through the practice of volunteers and the organisational ethos (Cloke et al., 2005; Conradson, 2003c; Johnsen et al., 2005a). Here, I wish to overview the organisational ethos, location and practices of volunteers who shape and reproduce the urban commons of Our Place (Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8 Excerpt from Our Place Newsletter

| Our Place is a support centre for homeless and disadvantaged people, located in Enmore in Sydney’s inner west. We operate a day centre, open 3 days per week providing meals, (around 13,000 per calendar year) counselling, welfare, referral, advocacy and legal services to nearly 1000 people every month. All services are provided free of charge. Almost 100% of our clients are on some type of government pension and live with a complex set of problems including mental illness; substance abuse and addiction; acquired brain injury; abusive and violent family backgrounds; sexual and physical victimisation; lack of literacy and education; intellectual disability and legal problems. Our role is to assist them with many different kinds of practical and emotional support, as well as creating a sense of community where no one is judged. We aim to provide a safe, dignified and nurturing environment where all are welcome. Our service is personal and we know every single client’s name. |

(Source: Our Place, 2009: 1)

Our Place (OP) is an independent community-run drop-in centre for homeless and disadvantaged people in Enmore. OP is located on Stanmore Road and operates out of the hall of St Luke’s Anglican Church (Figure 4.9). The location was chosen due to its proximity to public transport and the suitability of the hall. In Chapter 6 I explore the politics and justification for choosing a drop-in centre as a form of urban commons exhibiting practices of care-full urban justice, but here I want to emphasise that actually
existing care-full urban justice is particularly manifest here through the role of OP as a commons and as a site of everyday redistribution and a place for people to hang out and be in the city.

**Figure 4.9 St Luke’s, Enmore**

![Image of St Luke's, Enmore](Source: Author, taken 9th June 2012)

As shown in Figure 4.7, there are three drop-in centres that cater for people who need material support in the Newtown and Enmore region, but OP is unique in that it has no ties to government or faith-based organisations. The vision of OP is:

> [t]o provide a community care model for intellectually, financially and socially disadvantaged people who may suffer from harassment and victimisation: A centre that can be run at minimal cost, relying wholly on private funding and voluntary staffing, and the free provision of professional and institutional services as required, by co-operative individuals and organisations (both public and private). (Our Place, 2010c)

OP began operating in 2006, serving breakfast and lunch to community members three days a week. The centre was set up by four founding partners who visioned a different way of providing welfare that was focussed on the needs of community members that could be replicated elsewhere (Our Place, 2010c). The founding partners worked together at another large charitable foundation in the inner west of Sydney and wished to start an organisation that provided support and a space for community in the Marrickville Local Government Area (LGA). OP becomes a social commons and a space care-full urban justice through the organisational ethos and the affective orientation of volunteers – the practices that transform OP into a space of care (Conradson, 2003c).
The founding partners were also making a tailored and situated response to needs in this neighbourhood. According to Nicole (OP, management), ‘anyone who lives in a boarding house is considered to be technically homeless … because there is such a large cluster of those kind of inadequate, sub-standard housing models here’. OP was located in the Marrickville local government area as a response to the high concentration of boarding houses.

OP is reliant upon a community of supporters to sustain this commons. OP has a pool of approximately 40 volunteers that run the organisation. As the OP (2009:1) newsletter explains:

apart from our salaried Welfare Manager (a clinician with Drug & Alcohol and mental health qualifications), Our Place is completely staffed by a committed and caring team of over 40 volunteers. Many goods and services are supplied to us free of charge by our supporters. We have no political or religious affiliations and are a registered charity. All funding comes from private individuals and corporations. Our Place is run on a ‘no frills’ basis, maintaining very low overheads and recurrent costs, ensuring that our operating budget stays modest, and monies received go directly to benefit our clients.

There are three main types of volunteers: management volunteers, hall volunteers and kitchen volunteers with some cross over between the types. Management volunteers are those that oversee the functioning of the organisation. Kitchen volunteers serve meals, clean and prepare food, and socialise with people in the hall when they are free. Hall volunteers move about the common space, sitting and talking with people and are also responsible for the welfare practices of the organisation.

As part of my involvement with OP I volunteered as a hall volunteer for 13 months. During this time my main role was to sit and hang out with the different people who came into the centre. I played a lot of cards and scrabble, made phone calls, participated in the weekly art class and helped out with daily activities such as taking people to the chemist or op shop, or listening as people told me their stories. My focus during this time was on the practices of volunteers and staff as it was deemed inappropriate by the management for me to study or interview community members for confidentiality and legal reasons. The mundane practices observed that constitute OP revealed numerous insights about how a drop-in centre became an urban commons at various moments, and the role this commons played in people’s lives and in the broader community.
(iii) Alfalfa House

As I was attuned from prior experience to the role of food cooperatives as social hubs and spaces where diverse groups explore questions of ethics around food and consumption, it seemed probable to me that a food cooperative could be a space where care-full urban justice was manifest. In particular, from literature on care and consumption, it seemed likely that this type of organisation could reveal diverse insights into how people were negotiating their sense of being-in-common with diverse human and non-human others (Cox, 2010; Popke, 2006). Moreover, as a community enterprise the ways in which the neighbourhood is sustaining and reproducing a different form of food economy was of particular interest in relation to the role of economy in bringing actually existing care-full urban justice into being.

Alfalfa House (AH) is a community owned and run food cooperative that sells local, organic, minimally packaged groceries and produce in Enmore seven days a week. It has approximately 3,000 members and has been operating as a registered cooperative for 24 years. Growing out of a rent strike in Erskineville in 1981 where residents banded together to buy bulk organic food supplies from their rent money, AH has been located in Enmore since 1987 and has become a significant part of the food cooperative movement in Australia (Alfalfa House, 2011a). The objectives of AH are:

A to provide a retail source of wholefoods so that members may have some control over the sources of their food supply; B to provide information on and promote the use of low-cost, ethically-produced and packaged wholefoods, cruelty-free foods, vegetarian foods, vegan foods, organic foods and genetically modified-free foods; C to run an ethical, not-for-profit business; D to minimise resource wastage and, hence, encourage reuse and recycling; E to support other cooperatives whose objects are similar or related to the objects of the cooperative; and F to stimulate community development, foster community spirit and promote sustainable living. (Alfalfa House, 2011c)

AH moved to Enmore to be co-located with a permaculture centre (Figure 4.10). Over time the co-op has seen a large number of changes to how it operates and how the organisation is run.
AH is collectively owned, and managed by an elected management committee that meets once a month. The management committee are all volunteers and oversee the employment of co-op staff, of which AH has approximately 12. The staff are responsible for the day-to-day running of the store and perform tasks such as ordering produce, developing relationships with suppliers, serving people at the till, answering questions, cleaning, replenishing stock and managing volunteers. Volunteers help out with the day-to-day running of the store and are vital for the continuation of the co-op. There are approximately 50 regular volunteers per month. Volunteer roles occur both in and out of the shop, and they vary from doing weekly laundry, taking boxes to the recycling, to refilling bulk bins, cleaning and setting up the vegetable display. Volunteers play a vital role is sustaining and reproducing the cooperative.

As part of my research I regularly volunteered at AH each week for approximately 18 months as part of the research (and I continue to do so). My role has involved helping with setting up the shop each day and produce deliveries, making tea and coffee, cleaning, setting out vegetables and fruit, doing research on Fair Trade, delivering pamphlets, attending renovation days, replenishing stock, packing boxes and generally supporting staff. Volunteers play diverse roles in the cooperative and in more recent
times, have begun running workshops and classes for the AH community as Alfalfa’s role as a social commons expands. I interviewed both volunteers and staff who were reproducing this commons through their active participation. The acts that reproduce AH as an urban commons are once again banal and ordinary, yet the broader role of the organisation is not.

The Women’s Library, Our Place and Alfalfa House provided different ways in which actually existing care-full urban justice are made manifest. Each one plays a different role in the neighbourhood and is bringing actually existing care-full urban justice into being in creative ways through practice. Moreover, they are responding to different needs or injustices such as lack of food, lack of support, gender inequality, and lack of community control over food in their own ways. In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 I explore the roles of volunteers in reproducing and constituting these organisations through practice and reveal how their affective stances shape how actually existing care-full urban justice is practised at particular moments. By reflecting on my own experience as a volunteer and observing the everyday practices, routines and goings-on of each organisation I was able to gain an embodied experience of how these commons are grown. In the following section I discuss researcher volunteering and the insights into care-full urban justice that can be gained by being immersed in the field as a researcher-volunteer.

### 4.4 Participating and reflecting on worlds: participant observation via researcher volunteering

There are different ways in which ethnography may be practised, although all types of ethnography are reliant upon the practice of participant observation (Herbert, 2000: 551). Ethnography is an ‘immersive’ methodology that provides a means to observe and understand everyday life (Cloke et al., 2004; Herbert, 2000). It is not objective observation; rather it is about participating in the everyday life and goings on of a group (Herbert, 2000; Laurier, 2003). According to Laurier (2003: 135) ‘the best participant observation is generally done by those who have been involved in and tried to do and/or be a part of the things they are observing’. In order to uncover and recognise potential moments of transformation I adopted the methodology of participant observation via researcher volunteering in order to be present in the spaces of these urban commons and participate in reproducing these commons.
Participant observation through volunteering has been used in multiple ways in urban research. As an ethnographic method, it provides embodied insights into the unfolding and real life experiences of people involved in particular communities or settings (Cloke et al., 2004: 169). Researcher volunteering has been practised by a number of scholars interested in sites such as community groups, drop-in centres and neighbourhood houses (see for example Cloke et al., 2010; Conradson, 2003c; Evans, 2012; Jupp, 2007, 2008; Permezel, 2001; Permezel and Duffy, 2007). In particular, volunteering has been used as a way to observe everyday practice, community participation and spaces of care. For instance Conradson (2003c) spent four months volunteering in order to research care in community drop-in centres in Bristol. As caring practice is an emotive practice, and involves some form of labour and giving of the self, observing and participating in caring labour over time can reveal new insights (Held, 2006). In this section I reflect on my experience as a researcher volunteering, discussing how other researchers have used this method and my experience of uncovering everyday practices of care-full urban justice through participant observation in urban commons. Figure 4.11 shows the total number of months and average number of hours per week or fortnight that I spent volunteering at each organisation. In total the time I spent volunteering amounted to hundreds of hours.

**Figure 4.11 Time spent volunteering at the Women’s Library, Our Place and Alfalfa House**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Length of time</th>
<th>Average hours per week/fortnight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Women’s Library</td>
<td>14-15 months</td>
<td>4 per fortnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Place</td>
<td>14-15 months</td>
<td>6.5 per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfalfa House</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>3 per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researcher volunteering enables an understanding and identification of the multiple possibilities of everyday and mundane practices that are observed and participated in. Jupp’s (2008) UK-based research on community participation involved her volunteering or ‘hanging out’ with participants in two community groups for 15 months. She highlighted that the everyday social spaces created by participation in social settings contained the most ‘meaningful’ forms of participation in the politics of the city and explains how:
although I began with observing ‘meetings’ and other explicitly ‘political’ occasions. I found that it was during the essentially everyday and ordinary activities and modes of socialising, that seemed to have the potential for distinctive and powerful effects (Jupp, 2008: 335).

It is these powerful effects that have the potential to tell us more about how we create more socially just and caring cities in the here and now of the everyday. Volunteering permits participation in, and continued observation of, the ordinary spaces and potentially transformative practices that constitute and reproduce urban commons.

Participant observation via researcher volunteering is useful as it provides a way to reflect on the sometimes boring and repetitive tasks that are required to reproduce a commons. I recorded observations during the time I spent at each of the three organisations in a field diary. These field diary notes became partial interpretations of my own experience as a volunteer and also of the practices of others as these notes were interpretations from my situated position (c.f. Gobo, 2008). The thick descriptions of everyday practices or forms of commoning, shape Chapters 5, 6 and 7. My experience as a volunteer researcher meant that throughout my time volunteering I was reflecting on how each commons is reproduced, sustained by the commoners and imbued with practices of care and justice. In my field diaries I reflected on the hundreds of hours I spent volunteering at each commons. I recorded what I did, when and where, along with reflections on my experiences and the practices of others. The diaries contain theoretical reflections on what I saw as I sought to interpret the ordinary activities and connect them to understandings of care and justice practices of redistribution, recognition, encounter, caring about, caring for/care giving, taking care of and care receiving (Gobo, 2008; Hughes, 1996). Important to the study of actually existing care-full urban justice as a situated phenomenon, volunteering and reflection through writing about events in a field diary enables a contextual understanding of practice.

By volunteering week after week, I experienced momentous or extra-ordinary events in the life of people and the responses or practices that surround these events have something to say about how care and justice are practised. One particular event involving a member of the Our Place community dying comes to mind. I experienced firsthand the reactions of the community to the tragic loss of a friend, the way volunteers cared for community members and each other, and the meaning of the
practices involved. Other life events such as marriages (including my own!), the coming and going of volunteers, Christmas, birthdays, births and the passing of time and seasons revealed ways in which care and justice were interwoven into the fabric of everyday practice and experience, rendering these occurrences more or less important to how practices of care and justice are understood.

At times the banality and ordinariness of volunteering can make it difficult to discern how everyday practices reflect actually existing care-full urban justice because the researcher can become ‘lost in the data’ (Hughes, 1996: 39). Entrenched in the everyday of the organisations as a volunteer, daily routines and habits become taken for granted. Yet as a researcher I became attentive to the role of everyday material practices in constituting and reproducing the organisation and consequently the ways these commons were performed into being. I began to notice how it is banal practices that make the commons, and they are part of how volunteers and members are enrolled in the organisation as commoners, through practices of commoning. For example, I began to see how the routine practices of composting, recycling and reuse enable Alfalfa House to fulfil its objective to minimise waste. I saw the importance of keeping the WL open as a space so that women could drop in. The materials, bodies, connections, and objects that make the city become ‘active participant[s] in how the experience of urban space is made meaningful. This meaning is lived and negotiated through material practice’ (Latham et al., 2009: 66). From this insight I have structured my discussions in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 around everyday material practices and connections in order to structure my analysis of the ways in which actually existing care-full urban justice is manifest.

At times being a volunteer was variously boring, difficult, tiring, stressful, scary, fun, sad or exciting because it was everyday. The mundane nature of my volunteering meant that there were days when I was tired, when I had a cold or when I was anxious, uncomfortable, relaxed or joyful. There were also times when I was very sick and this shaped my experience of research. The people at each organisation would have felt and experienced similar changes in emotions and health at particular points that colour and shape practices and perceptions. Herbert (2000: 553) explains that ethnography involves the experience of all human emotions. Herbert (2000: 553) argues that, ‘the ethnographer is a fully human scientist, whose own self and relationships with subjects
have become important factors in evaluating [her] observations’. This makes the process of stepping back and reflecting on practice through the field diary even more important.

The field diary becomes a way to tell stories of the everyday and to capture events and moments that can be reflected on in the future to inform theorisations about actually existing care-full urban justice that shape the mundane. The process of re-telling these events, stories and embodied experiences offers up unique insights into what goes on every day in these sites. The field diary is also a limited research engagement in that it contains the reflections of the researcher (Gobo, 2008: 202). In my own diary I was more confident about telling the story of my own practice, as this was the position from which I experienced the organisations. By being a volunteer my body was engaged as a volunteer and so this was the position from which I viewed the practice of others. At times all I could reflect on was my own practice, what I did, how I did it and what I saw from my own vantage point because of the nature of the work I was doing. My reflections were shaped by what time of day I volunteered, who I volunteered with, what I did and didn’t do and who I encountered. For example, at the Women’s Library I most often volunteered alone and so I was unable to observe the practice of other volunteers. Nonetheless I did have the opportunity to engage with the members who visited the library. Whilst at Alfalfa House the people I volunteered with varied depending on what shift I worked on and so it was difficult to inform each volunteer about my role as researcher, and because of this I was less comfortable closely observing others’ practice. By comparison my involvement with other volunteers at Our Place was long term and I primarily volunteered with the same people throughout my engagement with the organisation. My experiences as a volunteer reflected the specificity of each organisation. Coupling interviews with researcher volunteering offered a means for me to explore the practice of others as they reflected on their own embodied experiences and practices in a way that I could often empathise with as a fellow volunteer.

The relationships built through the practice of volunteering were also a vital part of the research experience and of understanding care and justice practice in the organisations. Relationships built with people through ethnographic fieldwork are an important part of the research practice (Hall, 2009). Moreover, the relationships between volunteers, staff,
and members, and connections with the broader neighbourhood, revealed how care-full urban justice played a role in shaping these urban commons. Throughout my time volunteering I was invited to birthday parties, trivia nights and picnics, and I became a part of the ‘community’ at the organisations. In particular, meaningful friendships grew out of the time spent as a volunteer that unsettles conventional understandings of researcher and researched. By being a part of the communities in each of the organisations, I gained insights into the meaning of each site as a social commons, as a space of care and as a site of implicit activism.

Through volunteering I was alert to the importance of relationships with other groups and the role of connections in sustaining the commons. For example, at Our Place I became aware of many of the practices of generosity of particular businesses and community members who contributed food, bus tickets, toiletries and clothing and other support on a regular basis. The role of connection thus became a key analytical frame from which to analyse how care-full urban justice was expressed in contextually specific, everyday ways, including through relationships.

Nevertheless, researching and volunteering in tandem raises important questions around what to emphasise, what is not within the bounds of the research and what is. Gauging what is important, what stories are told and what stories are excluded relies upon the ethics of the researcher. The researcher’s own ethics play a major role in guiding what worlds are performed, what stories are shared, what stories are silenced and how respectfully and ethically the research subjects are treated. England (1994: 86-87) best explains this process using the notion of ‘betweeness’, arguing that:

> [w]e do not conduct fieldwork on the unmediated world of the researched, but on the world between ourselves and the researched. At the same time this ‘betweeness’ is shaped by the researchers’ biography, which filters the ‘data’ and our perceptions and interpretations of the fieldwork experience.

Part of my research approach has been to openly and actively research the potential for everyday practices of actually existing care-full urban justice to grow progressive urban commons. Researcher volunteering provides insight into the ways in which actually existing care-full urban justice is manifest on the ground as a situated response to injustice/carelessness or as moments of hope, creativity and play. The practice of
interviewing furthered these insights and granted a greater opportunity to understand practice from the point of another.

4.5 Learning from others and reflecting on everyday practice in semi-structured interviews

As a researcher volunteer I was placed at a particular vantage point which enabled me to observe everyday practice. Interviewing volunteers and staff at the three commons provided insights into the material practices of these people along with their understandings of the role of the organisation and roles they performed. These insights complemented my own partial insights into the embodied practice of a volunteer as I was made aware of other people’s experiences and perspectives. There is a very important reason that interviewing is one of the most common forms of qualitative research methodology used (Longhurst, 2003). Interviews grant insights into practices and opinions in a way that is different to researcher volunteering (Dunn, 2005). In total I interviewed 36 staff and volunteers from each of the urban commons. A breakdown of these interviews and who they were with is provided in Figure 4.12.

Figure 4.12 Interview breakdown by organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Number of volunteer interviewees</th>
<th>Number of staff or management committee interviewees</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alfalfa House</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Place</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Women’s Library</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview as a site for research engagement provided a vital avenue for exploring what the organisation meant to those involved and gave them an opportunity to reflect on their practice. The process of recruitment for interviews was an important way I could make my presence as a researcher more widely known, although this was not always possible or necessary. I recruited for interviews by sending direct letters to staff and management committee members, by emailing volunteer and membership lists and by placing recruitment posters on notice boards in two of the organisations.

The subjects for discussion during the interviews were nearly identical across the commons as I sought to gain insight into how people understood their practice and the role of the commons in the city. I had two different sets of guiding questions for people involved in management/staff and volunteers. Questions for management committee
and staff focused on the organisational history, policies and procedures, values and goals, their role in the organisation, their experiences and challenges, the role of the organisation in the neighbourhood, and their connections to other groups. The volunteer questions focused on: motivations for volunteering, everyday practices, experiences and challenges, the role the organisation played in the community, the changing inner-city context of the organisation, and the role of care and justice.

In both sets of interviews I asked interviewees how, or whether, in their opinion, care and justice was practised through the work of the organisation and in their own work as volunteer/staff. The process of directly asking about care and justice came after questions about the broader role of these organisations in the community and the role of specific interviewees in relation to that role. This was an important methodological choice to leave space for people to provide their own interpretations without my theoretical interpretation and labelling of these practices as care or as justice. The directed questions on care and justice were vital for strategically gathering reflections on the ethics of care and justice and everyday practice from the perspective of the people involved on the ground. The strategic use of categories in this way has been important throughout the research process, but it was not without its flaws.

At times people struggled to articulate or understand what I meant by the broad terms of ‘care’ and ‘justice’. The focus on everyday practices as ways in which justice is practised was an inappropriate frame for some people who saw the administration of justice as the role of government and the justice system. Two responses serve to illustrate this difficulty. One interviewee said ‘no I wouldn’t use that word’ when asked if she thought care was part of her role and preferred ‘sympathy’ as a term. In the same interview she reflected that the particular organisation she was involved with would like to think it promoted social justice but that they were too small to be involved at a policy level advocating for change. On another occasion an interviewee wanted to know how I defined social justice before offering her own reflections on what she understood by social justice. I think these responses reflect the ambiguity of the terms, or perhaps the subjective nature of how we understand these ethics. Perhaps the resolution of these issues comes down to who we see as responsible for doing justice and doing care and the interdependency or manifestation of care and justice in an organisational ethos or material practices constituting the commons.
The practice of combining participant observation/researcher volunteering with interviewing was helpful in that the practice of volunteering provided a means to build relationships with some interviewees before the interviews. Knowing people before the interviews meant that the interviews were more conversational in tone. We reflected on mutual experiences and these interviews were often more open than those I shared with people I had not previously met or developed a rapport with. Fraser and Weninger (2008: 1441) argue that ‘the research interview becomes a site where mutually constructed stories about urban existence emerge rather than a unidirectional articulation of performed thoughts from participant to researcher’. With all research participants, my relationship with the people I interviewed changed after the interview because of the connection made during the interview. An example of this was the ongoing questions about the research that I received whilst volunteering after interviews. Questions included; What had I found out? How was it going? For one participant this became part of our weekly greeting. Shifts in connection such as this highlight what can emerge from interviews and the importance of recognising the interview as a site of reflection and sharing that has the potential to shift thinking and practice.

4.6 Conclusions
The research methods we use ultimately affect what it is we are able to know. But they also affect what it is we are able to offer the people we journey with in the research process. By actively growing these urban commons, I enacted a politics of possibility through my thinking, writing and research practice. As I write this project into being through text, I bring urban commons into being, both by being physically present and involved as a volunteer and also through the understandings of others obtained through interviewing. This way of doing research offers embodied insights into how actually existing care-full urban justice might be practised and I unpack this in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

By undertaking research as a performative act, I acknowledge my subjective presence shaping the research project and politics, and also the role that dominant narratives often play in reproducing injustice. In describing the two characterisations of the neighbourhood of Enmore and Newtown I provide perspective and context while at the same time offering another reading of these neighbourhoods as more-than gentrifying
and diverse. Focusing on the everyday practices that reproduce and bring urban commons into being within a neighbourhood considered to be both diverse and gentrifying is an act of hope in the here and now—an act of hope that exposes ways that actually existing care-full urban justice is manifest. In actively seeking care-full justice within the urban, I selected organisations that can be classed as micro-publics and/or spaces of care, sites that have been explored as containing the possibility for care and justice to be present.

This chapter is about being reflexive and situating my own work through discussions of the research context, and the choice of case study organisations and research methods. These factors shape what my project is and what I have come to know about actually existing care-full urban justice through them. In the following chapter I explore how care-full urban justice is manifest in the Women’s Library. I focus on the everyday material practices and connections that bring this commons into being. Following the Women’s Library, I explore aspects of a care-full urban justice within Our Place and Alfalfa House. Each chapter has been structured around the two themes of everyday material practices and connections that grow, reproduce and constitute each organisation as a commons imbued with care-full urban justice.

The analytical categories I use have been shaped by experience on the ground in participating in the commons. They are also shaped by knowledge of spaces as performed, knowledge of organisations as performed and knowledge of spaces of care as grown through the performance of caring practice (Conradson, 2003a, 2003c; Gregson and Rose, 2000; Milligan and Wiles, 2010). Knowledge about actually existing care-full urban justice can be gained from grounded insights rather than abstract framings. By being present in the everyday of each commons I was able to participate in, observe, and reflect upon the performance of care and justice as situated responses to injustice or as other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life. The two analytical categories of material practices and connections open up a way to talk about how urban commons are reproduced and grown, and how care-full urban justice is manifest in situated and relational contexts.
Chapter Five
A different type of library: the Women’s library
Newtown
Chapter 5: A different type of library: the Women’s Library, Newtown

5.1 Introduction
What if actually existing care-full urban justice was practised through the presence of particular objects in place? What if books, posters, artworks, magazines and signs mediated not only forms of encounter, but also practices of recognition and care? What if actually existing care-full urban justice was practised as a situated response to injustice through providing information on support services to survivors of sexual assault? Can this be considered a practice of the ethic of justice, or care, or a combination of both? In this chapter I unpack how actually existing care-full urban justice manifests not only through the organisational ethos and interactions that take place between people in the Women’s Library, Newtown at particular moments, but also through the physical materials present in this collectively owned and managed commons.

The Women’s Library is an urban commons for a specific yet diverse group—women. At different points in history feminists have grown community sites or groups in a number of different ways (Weiss, 1995: 12). The Women’s Library (WL) is an example of a women’s-only space aiming to ‘provide a safe and supportive place for women’ (Jennifer, WL volunteer). It has been deemed necessary by the women involved to create a critically exclusive commons. Following Hubbard (2001: 66) I use the term critically exclusive to refer to the way the WL is serving ‘as a protected space … where people can take the risk of exploring different ways of ‘being together with strangers’ with relative safety from attack and abuse’ (Iveson, 2007: 204). It is an example of a space where men are able to be members, but are not involved in the management or volunteering at the library. Particular socio-cultural and political contexts of patriarchy and inequality have meant that a form of exclusion has been deemed necessary (Browne, 2009: 542). For Selina (WL volunteer) the library is ‘a reminder that … we [as a society] have come a long way but there’s still a long way left to go’. The WL can be approached through the perspective of a politics of possibility (Gibson-Graham, 2006) in order to excavate the potentialities for care-full urban justice that are manifest in the here and now.
As explored in Chapter 3, the concept of care-full urban justice is based on four premises: that care and justice are interdependent; that care-full urban justice is founded on a relational social ontology; that care-full urban justice needs to be practised in context-specific and situated ways; and that care-full urban justice can be practised through both everyday and mediated modes. I draw upon the three justice logics—redistribution, recognition and encounter (Fincher and Iveson, 2008)—and the four values of an ethic of care—taking care of, caring about, care giving/caring for and care receiving (Tronto, 1993)—to inform my interpretations of actually existing care-full urban justice by making connections between these care and justice values and logics and the grounded practices of volunteers. In this chapter I explore how the interdependencies of care and justice are revealed in the messy ways that actually existing care-full urban justice is practised through the material space and organisational ethos of the WL. In the first section I discuss how the Women’s Library is an urban commons akin to a social commons understood to be:

- organised around access by users to social resources created by specific kinds of human labor: caring for the sick, the elderly, and children; educating children; maintaining households; finding or creating pure water; removing waste; even policing (Nonini, 2007: 6).

The WL is seeking to conserve women’s history and provide a safe space for women to be present in the city (Section 5.2). It is a site where women acknowledge collective histories of strength, violence, inequality, resilience and capacity, and attempt to care for each other and strangers who come into the library who may be seeking help or connection to a community group.

The WL is a common resource, a place that houses material memories of the feminist movement, the lesbian rights movement and books by women authors. Here the materials are enrolled in enabling care-full urban justice, especially through recognition. In Section 5.2.1 I look at the spatiality of the library, the types of books that it contains and the organisational ethos that shapes the material practices that take place within its walls as the organisation is performed into being as a site of everyday care and justice. At the WL, justice is not practised in spectacular ways. Rather, it is practised through what Horton and Kraftl (2009) term ‘implicit activisms’ that intermingle with practices of care. This space is intentionally created through particular practices attuned to taking care of members and strangers who drop in, read, or develop connections with each
other (Tronto, 1993). In Section 5.2.2 I explore how material objects are enrolled in the practice of caring for women in contextually dependent ways. Recognition, redistribution and encounter are revealed in how the WL becomes a safe space for women to occupy in the city. Lounges, chairs, posters, brochures and other objects are enrolled in mediating care-full urban justice as contextually-sensitive responses to injustice.

Actually existing care-full urban justice manifests in many different ways through the practices of the WL. The messy way care and justice infuse the everyday practices of commoning show the imperfect yet interdependent way these ethics are discernible in the everyday of the ordinary city. The WL is a site of connection, where women meet and connect over common interests via books. In Section 5.3 I focus on how connections are made between the people involved as volunteers and members at the WL. In this example, everyday practices of care-full redistribution or skill sharing take place as everyday practices of commoning. Members express a sense of being-in-common or responsibility for each other via their participation in broader feminist and queer justice movements that connect the everyday implicit activisms to more spectacular forms of activism taking place within the city (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). The space of the library is also shared at times as the WL becomes a meeting place for a number of different groups during the week. The interactions that take place in the WL and via the other groups transform the library into a space of care at particular moments. The library is a library due to the intentional arrangement of objects, yet it becomes a space of care-full urban justice through the caring and affective orientation of volunteers who reproduce and are part of this progressive urban commons.

5.2 Everyday material practices: reproducing a library commons

The everyday material practices that constitute the WL reveal the different ways care and justice are practised in ordinary ways or through implicit activisms. These practices are not spectacular acts; rather, they are ‘politicised, affirmative and potentially transformative but … are modest, quotidian, and proceed with little fanfare’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009: 21). They involve volunteers reproducing the common by gifting their time and labour to perform what can seem to be banal practices. But it is these acts that keep the library open and they are acts of care for strangers and friends who might come into or regularly use the library. The library becomes a space of justice, a site where
redistribution, recognition and encounter are performed every day. Different forms of contextually dependent care and justice are enabled just through this library being open as a place for people to be.

In this section I begin by focussing on the broader aims of the organisation and how everyday redistribution and care-full recognition is practised and embodied in the presence of particular books, art, magazines, brochures and other objects that occupy the library space (Section 5.2.1). I draw on the example of the art space to reveal how materials can be enrolled in the practice of care-full recognition and redistribution. In Section 5.2.2 I discuss the role of the materiality of the lounge area and intentional practices of volunteers which show how caring about can be practised in the making of material spaces. The library becomes a safe place, due to a critical politics of exclusion (Iveson, 2007) and intentional practices of taking care of, providing a place for women to drop in. And in closing this section, I discuss the role of volunteers in reproducing the commons in banal and ordinary ways that enable the practice of care-full urban justice to be revealed in the work of the library as a whole. It is the everyday material practices of volunteers that reproduce and constitute the commons and thus make space for care and justice to emerge. Rachel (WL, volunteer) points out how

it’s providing a place for people to drop in. It’s another reason for the Women’s Library to be there, is that, that lounge is actually really important. Not only for people who drop in, but also for the groups that are run there.

The materiality of the library is my entry point to unpacking the broader organisational aims of the WL and the everyday practices of actually existing care-full urban justice by making a place for women in the city.

5.2.1 Books, lounges and art: materials mediating actually existing care-full urban justice

Extending Fincher and Iveson’s (2008: 193) claim that library noticeboards can mediate encounters between people and other ways of doing/being/thinking the urban, I argue that materials can be enrolled in mediating and facilitating actually existing care-full urban justice. In this section I discuss the role of materials in negotiating how care-full urban justice is manifest in whilst also constituting the commons. I understand care-full recognition, encounter and redistribution to be diverse, contextually specific practices seeking to acknowledge and enact a politics of difference in a way that allows people to
meet their needs. The WL has been care-fully and intentionally set up in order to care for and about women. Materials are enrolled in the practice of actually existing care-full urban justice in two ways: firstly, through the book and journal collection; and secondly through the art space.

Firstly, the WL plays a role in conserving women’s history, promoting the voices of women and providing a space for women, particularly lesbian women, to meet and hang out. The aims of the WL and associated objectives reflect a desire to create a specific form of urban commons for women, especially lesbians. As the WL information brochure puts it:

- To provide a comfortable and accessible space for borrowing, reading and relaxing.
- To provide a welcoming space for groups and meetings.
- To house a collection relevant to all women including Lesbians and women from non-English speaking backgrounds (The Women's Library, 2011c).

Jennifer (WL volunteer) expands on these aims from her own perspective:

overall we want to provide a safe and supportive place for women. We want to provide information around issues relating to women and women’s history. We want to provide referral to people who need support you know, that have the ability to do that. And I suppose in some ways we want to be a central place for the things that get lost. Like, journals, magazines, books, that kind of disappear. We want to sort of retain that. So a lot of it for me, is around women’s history … but also about providing a supportive space for women.

Care-full recognition is expressed in the physical collection of books that the WL houses. The WL collection exclusively comprised books written by women (although some books are co-authored by men). One of the regular volunteers, Selina (WL volunteer) describes how:

I think we believe that we need to support women and we also need to support women’s knowledge as well. So every book that we keep there is by a woman. I guess it’s kind of about countering the amount of male knowledge that’s out there and … also celebrating the achievements of women … both as writers and academics … yeah women in general. I guess some of the goals [are] basically to provide a women’s space but also to provide a women’s space that has … books for women and written by women and about women.

Thinking beyond framings of redistribution as solely an economic practice, the presence of large volumes of work by women authors in the library could be seen as an act of
care-full justice with redistributive and recognition elements. In this urban commons, redistribution can be understood as more-than-material. For example, the library was initially set up to cater for the lesbian and feminist communities in Sydney and it continues to play a significant role in offering women access to lesbian fiction and feminist texts. The collection contains other rare works that are not commonly available such as literature on sexual assault, rape, incest and books, fondly termed the ovarian texts, which are foundational feminist texts. The library provides a space for women to access information pertaining to themselves, life issues and celebrates the work of women writers and personalities in the form of fiction and autobiographies. The diversity of books present in the WL collection and the physical layout of the library space are shown in Figure 5.1

**Figure 5.1 Snap-shot of the Women’s Library book collections**

![Image of the Women's Library book collections]

(Source: Author, taken 19 July, 2010)

As Figures 5.1 shows, the WL contains a diverse collection of books, magazines and materials that are accessible to members of the library including plays, poetry and
works written in languages other than English. According to Jennifer (WL volunteer) these books are important in facilitating the practice of care and recognition because:

when someone comes in here and say walks up the back and realises that we’ve got a whole lot of books about child sexual assault, we’ve got a whole lot of books about sexuality, we’ve got a whole lot of books by women authors … one of the nice experiences I’ve had is with a young Arabic woman who volunteered with us for a while and I was telling her that all the books were by women and she said ‘do you know that when I was at uni in Pakistan, I said I wanted to write a book and my teacher said to me ‘women don’t write books’, and she said ‘and now I’m standing here and all these books are by women’.

Jennifer captures the contextually specific importance of providing books on critical topics such as sexuality that have been written by women for women. Recognising the prevalence of sexual abuse and providing resources for people who have been survivors of abuse enabled through physical/material objects, such as books and by other means, is a way the library is attempting to take care of the women who might inhabit the library (Tronto, 1993). Taking care of is one of the four values of an ethic of care that:

[i]nvolves assuming some responsibility for the identified need and determining how to respond to it. Rather than simply focusing on the need of the other person, taking care of involves the recognition that one can act to address these unmet needs (Tronto, 1993: 106).

In this example materials are enrolled in the practice of taking care of. Additionally volunteers and the materials in the library are involved in this process which is connected to an understanding of responsibility for others.

The library collection holds a particular meaning for the women involved, often as a material expression of recognition and caring about, which is connected to broader activist movements. The library becomes a site of activism, both spectacular (see Section 5.3) and implicit, as the space of the library is enrolled in recognition, redistribution, encounter and care. Practices of volunteers in the library are strongly connected to the values of recognition and encounter as illustrated in a comment made by Jennifer (WL, volunteer) who describes how:

Jennifer: … [justice] comes very strongly into here and I think that the whole fight for women’s rights is a fight for social justice and we are integrally a part of that … and we consistently have been. I mean, a small part sometimes, but we’re part of that.

Miriam: … how do you see that playing out? What types of things work towards that?
**Jennifer:** Well for one thing we have the journal room … and women can come here and access women’s history. Everything we do is about women. Activities we have, we have marched at International Women’s Day. We usually participate in Reclaim the Night as a service. The fact that we have all those shelves of autobiographies and biographies of women, and the fact that the discourse can happen here, the conversation can happen here, I think that’s hugely important as well … I think the recent stuff about having women authors come and speak and draw people together, that’s already lead to some really interesting conversations (Jennifer, WL Volunteer).

Jennifer describes the role she feels the library collection plays in contributing to justice in the broader context of the marginalisation of women’s voices and the broader context of the activism of the women involved. The implicit activisms that are reflected in the everyday practices of volunteers and the day-to-day running of the library are therefore connected to more spectacular forms of activism practised at particular moments (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). The WL conserves women’s history and provides a space where women can come and access memorabilia from the women’s and queer rights movements. These material objects are playing a role in facilitating the practice of care-full urban justice through their presence in place as they also constitute the library and its meaning. Library volunteers are simultaneously reproducing the commons every day and providing a space for contestation and activism to take place: creating a progressive/beneficial urban commons.

Secondly, the Off the Wall Art space is an example of how materials can be enrolled in the practice of care-full urban justice. Yet the effects of this art space are more-than-material. The art wall, located in the lounge area, provides a space for women artists to exhibit and sell their work and potentially provides moments of transformative encounter for people who enter the library. This plays out in a number of different ways. In general the art wall is understood as:

a way of sort of encouraging women artists to exhibit. Because one of the inequities in the system has always been that it’s very hard for women artists to often get seen and heard and related to. So I guess it’s part, another part of the way we try to encourage women in the community to, you know, use their skills (Jennifer, WL volunteer).

Women’s contributions to creativity are celebrated through the art space that exhibits and encourages women to explore their talents as a way to give voice to women. Power
is connected to the idea of being heard and sharing this voice (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 440). The WL has held a number of exhibitions since 1999.

A number of the art exhibitions came out of broader projects that are potentially part of wider campaigns and efforts to address various forms of injustice through the practice of recognition. An example of this is an art exhibition called ‘Silent No More’ where recognition of injustices and violence against women and children is practised very strongly. Here, the practice of giving voice or being heard and no longer being silent is seen as an act of power, or an activist practice. Below is an excerpt from the WL website that tells the story of this exhibition which was held in 2007:

Silent No More gave women time and space to witness each other’s lives, to acknowledge the reality of abuse and the impact of abuse and to affirm their resilience and survival. Women found a voice for their experiences and a way to tell their stories that moves from an abuse dominated view of themselves to a view which acknowledges how they have resisted and overcome the impacts of abuse on their lives. The name Silent No More came from women who spoke about being silenced, both as children and as adults, about the experience of sexual abuse in their lives. In conversation, this theme of being silenced, about abuse, about domestic violence and other abuse in their lives, about mental health issues, about drug and alcohol, about parenting, emerged as an ongoing theme. The name has been powerful in informing conversation about silencing and secrecy and about breaking that silence. The art work here is a small part of larger exhibition that was held in Campbelltown in 2007 (The Women's Library, 2011b).

This exhibition, present in place, can be considered a care-full act of everyday redistribution, recognition, encounter or perhaps more broadly as an act of actually existing care-full urban justice. It potentially facilitated the simultaneous practice of care, creativity and contestation. Recognition is connected to the practice of having voice or voicing as an act of performance. The art exhibition is an act of recognition for the women who participated in the group by no longer being ‘silent’ or by providing participants with a means to make their voices heard because having a voice and voicing a story is seen as political (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 440). Importantly though, the practice of making art in a supportive group is a situated response to a specific set of experiences. In this example the symbolic power of artworks present in places is one of the ways in which care-full urban justice is practised through materials/objects.
The materiality of books and artworks present in the library, and the meanings that surround the broader collection, facilitate actually existing care-full urban justice in a very context-specific way. These objects hold symbolic meanings and links to past, present and future that mediate care-full justice through the practicing of recognition, redistribution and encounter. Moreover, the library space itself enables women to gather around a common or diverse set of interests and exhibit the work of women, which can potentially facilitate transformative encounters for strangers who occupy the library at particular moments. The library becomes a place for conversation, for political action and for participation in broader struggles and movements. It becomes a space of care when the practices that take place within it create a safe space for women, both strangers and members.

5.2.2 Making a safe place: materials and practices mediating actually existing care-full urban justice

One of the objectives of the WL is to ‘be a safe and supportive space where Lesbians and women can relax, read, study and exchange information’ (The Women's Library, n.d.). The notion of safe space has been ‘historically used in feminist discourse to refer to the physical and metaphorical safety of separatist female spaces and cultures’ (Hunter, 2008: 7). Safe spaces can be physical places; spaces performed into being safe through practice; spaces that are familiar and therefore safe; and spaces that are experimental performance spaces made safe through a set of constructed rules or risks (Hunter, 2008: 7). The WL is a combination of a physically safe place that is performed into being as safe through practice (Hunter, 2008: 7). It is not always safe, but the material arrangement of the library and some of the objects present, attempt to facilitate a sense of safety and comfort for members and strangers. Strangers have held an important place in theorisations of encounter in urban theory and the type of care afforded to strangers in the city are varied (Fincher and Iveson, 2008). The WL is intentionally trying to create a safe space for women in the city (strangers) through the provision of a drop-in style set-up akin to a space of care which is grown through practices that take place between people (Conradson, 2003c: 508). It does not exist prior to the moment of performance that brings it into being.

In this section I explore how care-full urban justice is practised through the provision of materials and the physical arrangement of a place along with a number of affective
movements that are generated towards the other which assist in performing the WL into being as a safe space (Conradson, 2003c: 508). Here we see the WL taking care of strangers in the city by gathering together resources that enable caring for or care giving, practices that transform the WL into a space of care (Tronto, 1993: 107). In this practice a sense of interdependence is shown which reflects a relational social ontology.

We also see the justice practices of recognition, redistribution and encounter shaping how this safe space is created in a number of contextually specific ways. Firstly, it plays out by being a critically exclusive space; secondly through the intentional placement and arrangement of objects; thirdly through the provision of a drop-in space for strangers; and finally through the provision of materials. These three contextually specific ways of creating a safe space are discussed in more detail below.

Firstly, the WL is attempting to create a safe place for women by being a critically exclusive space (Browne, 2009; Hunter, 2008: 7; Iveson, 2007: 187). Critical exclusion can facilitate the practising of justice (Staeheli, 2008a: 9). In this case the recognition of the need for an exclusive space for women has been made in order to redress gender-based discrimination and injustice. During my time volunteering it was rare for men to enter the library. The WL was effectively a women’s-only space that can be read as a site practising a politics of critical exclusion (Hubbard, 2001: 66). I use the term ‘critical exclusion’ in the same way that Iveson (2007) does to discuss a similar example in Sydney of a women’s-only space—the McIver’s Ladies baths in Coogee, approximately nine kilometres from Newtown. In his analysis of the politics of exclusion taking place at this site, he argues that women’s only spaces can show ‘how spatial exclusion serves to facilitate the development and practice of counterpublic forms of stranger sociability which are consistent with radical democratic understandings of a heterogeneous public sphere’ (Iveson, 2007: 187). Moreover, Browne (2009) reveals how a purposeful womyn’s-only music festival called Mitchfest becomes a safe place for the women involved in a similar way, through a critical politics of exclusion that redresses broader forms of injustice. These critically exclusive places are made safe through the politics that have shaped them and the practices that perform them into being.

The WL provides an opportunity for diverse groups of women to occupy the space and to feel welcomed and safe because it is a women’s-only site, an act of everyday
recognition. The way in which this critical exclusivity shapes Renae’s (WL volunteer) feeling of comfort at the WL is shown when she describes how:

it’s good to be around the library, it’s a worthwhile cause. You know like, it’s sort of a little community, you get to know a few … I find that men often dominate things and … a lot of … mental health consumer organisations are dominated by men so I like being here cause also it’s got the gay thing. Because not many, it feels like I don’t get accepted by many gay like, that’s what it feels like it to me or anyway, whether or not it’s a false impression … that’s what I’ve experienced …

For Renae, the WL is inclusive and safe because it is a women’s-only space that specifically cares for lesbians and this form of critical exclusion makes her feel comfortable.

Secondly, the WL attempts to make a safe place through the placement of specific material objects throughout the library. The WL has been intentionally laid out to be comfortable and welcoming for women in the community through the creation of a home-like space. Jennifer (WL volunteer) describes how ‘if you look here, we have a very comfortable seating area, that means that people can come in and relax and talk and you know, I think it’s a welcoming space’. The WL has a large lounge area that comprises a sizeable section of the library and is furnished as a space for individual women and groups to meet and sit (see Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2 The Women’s Library lounge area**

(Source: Author, taken 19 July, 2010)
In their discussion of the role of public libraries in facilitating encounter and redistribution, Fincher and Iveson (2008: 189) discuss how ‘libraries are identified as spaces where people might simply relax or socialize away from home but in a ‘homely’ environment which can support long and comfortable visits’. They go on to explain how these spaces in the city have been designed to be home-like spaces, in a similar yet different way to drop-in centres. Other sites such as the neighbourhood community houses in UK housing estates studied by Jupp (2008) also have this home-like quality, blurring the boundaries between public and private spaces. At the WL the home-like qualities of the space can be seen in not only in the lounge area, but also in the provision of free tea and coffee in the kitchenette area for members, volunteers, and others (see Figure 5.3). The comfort of this space facilitates an understanding of welcome. Moreover, by encouraging women to use the space, encounters between strangers can take place in the library, which is a significant aim of the politics of encounter.

Figure 5.3 The Women’s Library Kitchenette

(Source: Author, taken 19 July, 2010)

Thirdly, the WL attempts to create a safe place by making its facilities available to a number of groups, by providing a drop-in space for women in the community and by becoming a space of encounter. For example, Elise (WL volunteer) presents a story of a woman who regularly comes into the library to express milk:

there’s a woman who has been coming in. You’ve probably met her too, she comes in every day to express the milk for her baby … well she works locally and she’s got her baby in child care. And yeah so she uses the space … and it’s a nice non-threatening, relaxed place that she can come and express some milk because she hasn’t got her baby with her … and she’s a lovely woman, and if she’s got time we have a bit of a chat … but she comes in quite regularly.
For this woman, the WL is a welcoming place for her to express milk. Instances of this type of usage at the WL are not uncommon, and reveal the value of providing a critically exclusive space for women to occupy. Despite the WL being right next to the public library, this woman chooses to utilise the WL instead. The women’s-only nature of the WL potentially means that she feels comfortable expressing milk whereas she may not experience this in the Newtown public library. The lounge itself becomes a medium contributing to the library becoming a space of care at particular moments. Its provision can be seen as an act of taking care of women, assembling the necessary tools and skills to care for others or care for self (Tronto, 1993).

It is not unusual for a library to be used as a safe space of encounter for people to sit and be in the city. Indeed, different users negotiate libraries in different ways and the types of interactions people have can vary from long conversations to short conversations and moments of conviviality (Fincher and Iveson, 2008: 187). During my time as a volunteer I interacted with a number of different members and visitors to varying degrees. Often people would browse the bookstore, pick up the latest edition of *Lesbians On The Loose* (LOTL) monthly magazine, sit on the lounge and do work, or use the internet at the computer provided. Sometimes people would feel like talking, sometimes I would make them a cup of tea, other times they were less talkative and just sat and worked or read a book. The affective orientation of volunteers in seeking to make a space comfortable or safe is important because by doing so they perform a welcoming atmosphere.

Libraries have been studied as spaces of care where homeless people in particular can interact with others and simply be (Hodgetts et al., 2008). Increasingly the library is used as a safe site for women to access information on local services such as the Leichhardt Women’s Community Health Centre or emergency accommodation. The role of the WL has shifted over time as the needs of local women have changed and more homeless people have appeared. Jennifer (WL volunteer) mentions this point, describing how:

> we do have more homeless people and … we do have more people that are struggling with mental health, that have actually nowhere to go. Or don’t know where to go. And they tend to come here … It’s always been a very strong gay community in Newtown, and that hasn’t changed which is, is another thing that people come here for, they come here
looking for information or access to lesbian or gay services and so forth … probably the balance, I would say, even when I was first here the majority of people who came looking for information were lesbian women who were new to the area or were just coming out or whatever. Whereas now … we still get a fairly large percentage of, of those women but we also get … the homeless women and the women with mental health issues. Which, in my early days here, wasn’t as prevalent.

Due to a sense of responsibility to care for women, the WL is providing a service that has developed over time, for women with mental health or housing concerns. Libraries such as the WL potentially enable homeless people to feel included because they are most often public spaces that are not stigmatised in the same way as drop-in centres specifically catering to homeless people (Hodgetts et al., 2008).

Another group of women who often use the WL are women who suffer from mental health concerns. Selina (WL volunteer) explains how she has noticed this use increase and how volunteers play a role in making the library safe:

[I have] noticed just when I’ve worked there that there’s a few people who’ve come in who’ve had mental health issues … and who actually just feel safe just kind of sitting in there for a while and not being bothered … so I think that a goal is … a safe place for women.

Other volunteers discuss additional examples of women who regularly drop in to the library. For example, Kim (WL volunteer) makes the connection between people feeling comfortable and volunteers playing a role in making the library welcoming and safe:

There are women who come in regularly and some of them are just mums with babies who breastfeed, but other ones are semi-itinerant homeless people who know that it’s okay to come in here when it’s open and just sit, and that’s okay. And sometimes they are not engaged in any other way. Sometimes I won’t even know their name, I just recognise their face because they come often enough, but I think it’s nice that they can come here, the person at the desk smiles at them and doesn’t grunt at them when they walk through to the lounge.

Creating a safe place for women to encounter each other and be in the city is an important function of the WL as it allows women to feel comfortable enough to interact and hang out with each other in a non-threatening environment where they are not required to buy a coffee, or participate in an activity. Rather, they are able to be present. Of course all women will not experience this sense of the library, but the affective orientation of volunteers who attempt to make the library safe and welcoming through
their practice assists in caring for strangers. The library is a site where women are able to care for themselves and each other through accessing information and being referred on to other service providers.

Finally, in a similar way, the provision of important information on domestic violence and sexual assault services, in anticipation of the needs of women in the community, reveals how actually existing care-full justice can be practised intentionally through the materiality of a space provided or through brochures, posters, signs and books being made accessible. As previously discussed, the WL provides women with access to helpful information on incest, abuse, domestic violence, counselling and sexual assault. These materials are located in the back corner of the library to provide women with some privacy whilst they are reading or browsing through the materials as shown in Figure 5.4.

**Figure 5.4 Self-help section, brochures and cards at the Women’s Library**

![Self-help section, brochures and cards at the Women’s Library](Source: Author, taken 19 July, 2010)

The positioning of a chair and the placement of important phone numbers has been intentionally arranged because the:

space is really important. I mean, this came from one of the reasons why I set up the little back area with a chair and some whatever, was so people could access stuff that they might not want to sit on the lounge and read … and I do believe in comfortable spaces (Jennifer, WL volunteer).

The chair and space mentioned by Jennifer is shown in Figure 5.4 to illustrate how taking care of other can be practised materially in contextually-specific ways. Materials such as brochures and leaflets have been provided on the shelves near these books for
women to take with them in order to access service providers for help with domestic violence, health services and sexual assault.

These are not the only forms of information made available in the library and the provision of information can be seen as an everyday act of care and recognition as volunteers take responsibility to care for strangers. Other resources such as phone numbers for the NSW rape crisis centre, Lifeline (a phone counselling service) and other emergency service providers have been collected together and placed on the back of the toilet door to take care of strangers by being attentive to their perceived needs (Tronto, 1993: 127). It is evident here, that the volunteers and management of the WL are being attentive to the needs of strangers who might be present in the library. This is a context-specific attempt to take care of strangers in the city who may drop into the library and need help. It can also be understood as an actually existing way to redress the injustice of gender-based oppression and experiences of violence and assault and thus it becomes an everyday practice of care-full justice. Although this actually existing practice is not perfect, and for some it may not create a safe place, it is still a movement towards attempting to redress experiences of injustice in the here and now through small acts of taking care of strangers in the city. Thus we see how the practice of caring about is socially, culturally and politically contingent and is associated with the value of both responsibility and attentiveness to the needs of others known and unknown (Tronto, 1993).

Yet in terms of current understandings of justice, how does one define this very mundane and material act of providing information or offering a safe space to redress many injustices and provide the opportunity for women to access support services? It is not a grand protest movement, but a very practical everyday response to violence/injustice, a response that is attempting to care for strangers—un-named women who drop in to the library and potentially find help from a service provider listed or through reading a book that it is difficult to find elsewhere. This is a practice of everyday care-full urban justice reflecting understandings of our collective responsibility and the need for contextually sensitive everyday practices of care and justice.
In this instance the library can be understood as a common resource, a space that is attempting to care for others, redress injustice and sustain others through being a women’s-only safe space, by being welcoming and comfortable, and by providing resources and information in a very material way. It reveals a material way that taking care of can be practised and how the space, and volunteers, of the library are enrolled in the practice of taking care of. The practices of volunteers keep the library open to continue the possibility for transformative encounters for strangers who drop-in or for the many volunteers and members who regularly come to the library. Volunteers reproduce the commons through their everyday material practices that seem mundane, but are forms of ‘implicit activisms’ constituting a progressive urban commons.

5.2.3 Implicit activisms reproducing and sustaining the commons: keeping the library open

The everyday material practices of volunteers reproduce and sustain the WL, allowing it to become a site that takes care of women in the city. Following Horton and Kraftl (2009) I approach these banal and ordinary practices as forms of ‘implicit activisms’. Horton and Kraftl explain that these forms of banal activism are:

- politicised, affirmative and potentially transformative, but which are modest, quotidian, and proceed with little fanfare. They operate on the border not ontologically between activism and ‘non’-activism as identity or practice/praxis (Anderson, 2004) but on the border between what – epistemologically – comes to be called activism (Horton and Kraftl, 2009: 21).

I understand some of the everyday material practices of volunteers and staff at the WL, Our Place, and Alfalfa House to be ‘implicit activisms’, in that they reproduce and sustain each organisation as a progressive/beneficial urban commons. In the case of the WL the everyday material practices of volunteers that reproduce the library make it possible for a community space to be provided.

In this section I discuss the banal everyday material practices of volunteers in constituting the commons through ordinary acts. Not all acts of the organisation can be considered implicit activisms as many practices leave traces and reflect broader activist movements such as the participation of the organisation in International Women’s Day or Reclaim the Night, where the library is transformed into a site of activism connected to and part of broader protest movements (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). Yet a great
majority of the practices of volunteers are mundane or ordinary, like selling books. There were many times when I sat in the library as a volunteer and had very few interactions with others. However, it is through keeping the doors open and the selling and lending of books that all of the other activities that comprise the broader work of the library that are connected to larger-scale activisms are enabled. In particular, the practices of gifting and other systems that sustain the library are a way through which the library is mutually sustained by the community as a commons (Chatterton, 2010; De Angelis, 2003: 1). In fact, it is the practices of gifting that sustains the commons and the everyday material practices that reproduce it, enabling each of the other activities of the library to be achieved.

The WL has some government support, and this demonstrates how governments can be involved in helping sustain a commons. The WL receives a grant from City of Sydney which covers electricity and rent so it can continue to be housed in its Brown Street building. In addition the City of Sydney provides funding for a four-hour a fortnight project coordinator who maintains the library and coordinates some groups and projects. Other grants have been awarded from government for particular projects such as the creation of a newsletter or for equipment such as new computers. Outside of her paid capacity, the coordinator also volunteers regularly far beyond the four hours for which she is paid.

Other forms of support come from the community of supporters who sustain this commons through more-than-monetary means. People donate goods such as tea and coffee or equipment to the library. The various groups that use the building each week make gold coin donations. Members and visitors also place donations in the wishing well at the front entrance to the library. The WL has what they term a ‘Women’s Library Friends’ or ‘WoLF’ sponsorship, where individual women sponsor the library or leave bequests. A small commission is charged on art sales from the art exhibitions.

The WL receives a large number of books that are donated from the community and other sources. In 2009, 98 new books by women authors were donated from the Kibble Literary Awards which aim to:

- encourage Australian women writers to improve and advance literature for the benefit of our community. The awards recognise the works of
women writers of fiction or non-fiction classified as ‘life writing’ (Kibble Literary awards, 2012).

These books were added to the WL collection. Book donations also come from members of the community and Newtown library. These books are either added to the collection or sold in the second hand bookstore at $2 each (Figure 5.5). The library receives approximately $4000 from membership and book sales each year.

Figure 5.5 The Women’s Library second-hand bookstore

The caring ethos of the organisation is expressed through this act as it encourages women to participate and be part of the library. The WL has a number of different membership categories ranging from lounge and volunteer membership, to university students or full-time workers. Members are able to borrow books and access the internet for free at a member computer. The library remains open to any woman in the community to use informally, and non-members are charged a small fee to access internet and printing facilities ($1 per half hour). For many, access to the internet and use of a computer is an important service and act of everyday redistribution because people do not necessarily have the money to pay for access to these services at home.

To qualify for the volunteer membership category ($10 per year), members need to volunteer four hours a month, which is one standard volunteer shift. Because volunteers run the library, their labour and participation is essential for its operation. Thus they play a direct role in reproducing the commons and their library membership fee reflects this. The volunteer membership is more affordable for women who may not have the
money to pay larger amounts. Other scaled membership categories also cater for those who may not be able to afford a full membership payment. The WL receives various forms of monetary support, yet it is the more-than-material labour of volunteers that actually enables the library to remain open.

As a collectively run and owned space, the WL is dependent upon the involvement of volunteers to continue to keep the library open. The contribution made by volunteers in sustaining and running the organisation are vital for the WL model. Volunteers contribute to the library on a daily basis and reproduce the commons through their participation. Volunteer roles can be split into two groups: regular volunteers and management volunteers. The WL volunteers perform the important day-to-day operational tasks of the library. A snapshot of these is provided in Figure 5.6:

**Figure 5:6 Everyday practices of Women’s Library volunteers**

![Figure 5:6 Everyday practices of Women’s Library volunteers](image)

The WL has a group of approximately 27 regular volunteers whose contributions range from assisting once or twice a week to once every two months. The small tasks such as selling books, cataloguing, counting the money and opening up the library provide the basis for it to be open as a space for women in the city. Selina (WL volunteer) explains how:

> I think, without the volunteers we don’t have the organisation, so they, you know, for some people … they might not think they’re doing much by doing a four hour shift but that’s four hours when the place is open.
That’s four extra hours where … women can come in, so yeah the volunteers are kind of the heart of the organisation.

By volunteering women are keeping the library open; their presence is potentially transformative, in that by opening the library women are able to drop in and access the resources available. At the same time volunteers also access the resources of the library as people volunteer for varied reasons. Now a long-term member, Kim (WL volunteer) explains why she thinks other women volunteer:

Some volunteers really really love books. I think some volunteers are lonely, and so it’s a place for them to meet other people. I think some volunteers, like we’ve got, I mean there would have been no women here when I came ten years ago who lived in boarding houses, now I can think of three. So I think for them it’s a better place for them to be during the day then sitting in a room … and it doesn’t cost them any money. I think we’ve got better internet facilities so people do come for that, better computers, people studying come for that which is good, that’s fine.

For these people, the library is a common resource, a home-like place to hang out and connect with other people in the city. This point is further echoed by Kelly (WL volunteer):

the role for me was that it was a place that I could come and get books by women, about women, lots of lesbian books, those sorts of things and that sort of place and I valued that way of accessing books. And I also figured, meeting like-minded people … and I’ve always valued books and libraries and it just seemed like the good thing to support.

These volunteers reproduce the library and provide a meeting point for other groups and they also perform ordinary caring tasks. On a day-to-day basis the types of tasks performed by volunteers do not vary greatly, however they are dependent upon who inhabits the library at a particular time and which shift volunteers do. The role of library volunteer is often one that is about helping or caring for people in a way that is contextually dependent and responsive to the type of help/care they need, reflecting an ethic of care. For example, in various entries of my field diary I record how:

I was able to help a woman who is in her first year of nursing find some cheap books that might be helpful (Field diary excerpt, 13 August 2009).

One lady had spent some time sitting and reading in the library, using the space, didn’t interact much. Another said how glad she was the women’s library was here (after looking at books and sitting in the space) (Field diary excerpt, 15 March 2010).
The provision of a space for women as a resource provides room for the possibility of meaningful encounter, access to the resources previously explored and more significant relationships to be built. This space is grown and constituted by the volunteers and connected people who donate time and goods to reproduce the common.

In this section I have explored how the WL is constituted by everyday practices, materials and implicit activisms that transform the library into a space of care-full urban justice at particular moments and through the organisational ethos. Materials such as lounges, books, magazines, brochures, posters and art, and the practices that are performed alongside them, perform the library as a safe space, a welcoming space and a social commons for women in the city. These objects are enrolled in the practice of taking care of women in the city. The WL is a critically exclusive commons, and this exclusion makes it possible for some women to feel safe. Materials mediate everyday practices of care-full urban justice in contextually specific and interdependent ways. Materials are arranged in care-full ways to care for strangers in the city and it is these practices that reveal the importance of broadening our understanding of how actually existing justice can be practised through implicit activisms and everyday acts. It is these everyday material practices that reproduce and constitute the urban commons.

Volunteers are enrolled in providing a safe place for strangers in the city who are taken care of and cared about by volunteers through direct interactions or by letting people just ‘be’. The intermingling of implicit activisms with more traditional forms of activism becomes clearer in the next section, but the role of banal acts in reproducing the library and keeping it open as a space of care and micro-public is clear.

From this discussion the importance of volunteers in keeping the library open and the dynamic and multiple ways the library sustains itself through gifting, grants and volunteering are revealed. Connections made between members, between volunteers and between strangers hold the possibility for transformative moments of care-full urban justice. Connections with the broader feminist and queer rights movements that are formed through the library as an organisation transform the library into a space for more spectacular forms of activism. In the next section I reveal how spectacular and everyday moments of activism can be practiced simultaneously.
5.3 Connections mediating actually existing care-full urban justice

When we consider the importance of the relational social ontology and the context-specific development of the concept of care-full urban justice, it should not be surprising that relationships and connections play such a vital role in how care-full urban justice is practised on the ground in the example of the WL. The WL is a social commons, or meeting place, for women in the city that is reproduced through everyday material practices. The connections made between people are part of the way actually existing care-full urban justice is practised every day through the growing of an urban commons that is both a site of implicit activism and one that has connections to broader more spectacular protest movements (Horton and Kraftl, 2009).

In this section I discuss four different areas of connection that reveal the affective role of relationships between the WL and other groups, and between the WL and the city, that enable care, redistribution, recognition and encounter. Firstly, I consider how the affective orientation or movements that are made towards one another at the library, are part of the relations/connections grown between members and volunteers and how these connections transform the library into a space of care and support. The library is a care-full space of everyday redistribution enabling women who are constructed as marginalised to volunteer and participate. The library as an organisation can therefore care for women who need to gain work experience. Secondly, the library becomes a site of spectacular activism due to the caring connections that are grown with broader social movements that are focused on justice. The library plays a role as a space of spontaneous conversation and activism that perform it as a counterpublic (Iveson, 2007) at particular moments. Thirdly, the library is a site of mediated encounter, as it becomes a connecting point for people in the neighbourhood. And finally, the library becomes a meeting place for other forms of commons. The space of the library is shared with other groups who regularly meet in the lounge. These groups also sustain the WL through donating spare change each week they meet. Hence we see the reciprocal way the library as a commons is ‘created and sustained by communities, i.e. social networks of mutual aid, solidarity’ (De Angelis, 2003: 5). Caring about women’s issues, women’s rights and women’s wellbeing is infused throughout the ethos of the organisation that manifests itself in a variety of ways and care-full urban justice is revealed in the connections that are made through the library.
(i) A space of support and connection

The WL is a site of relationship, a space of care and support for volunteers and members due to the way volunteers and management make it a caring and supportive place for women. The library becomes a site where care can happen through the affective orientation of other members and volunteers expressed through interpersonal relationships. For Kim (WL volunteer) the library was a very supportive space that enabled her to connect with women, particularly lesbians when she was in a difficult point on her life journey:

**Kim:** … when I left my husband … I was looking for a connecting point and I was coming out. And I saw the library advertised somewhere and I came along.

**Miriam:** So what motivated you to be a part of it, was it trying to find a connecting?...

**Kim:** I think trying to find a connecting point was part of it, but it felt safe and was women-focused, which is actually harder than you think to do. So …

**Miriam:** Isn’t that interesting. Because you’d expect in a big city like this…

**Kim:** Yeah you would, but there’s not. I guess I wanted something that wasn’t too structured. I didn’t want an organisation, I didn’t want … like most of the other organisations are counselling or support focussed. But that’s not what I wanted.

**Miriam:** Yeah, so what is it about, was it more just a way to connect with different people?

**Kim:** It was. When I first came here, I was pretty messy and the women were very kind and supportive so, yeah. And that seems to be a pattern for a lot of the people who’ve come here.

The library becomes a space of support for women at particular moments in their lives. An important aspect of this is the role of members and volunteers in being ‘kind and supportive’ (Kim, WL volunteer). The affective orientation and practices of care transform the library into a space of care when people care for each other or are attentive to their needs (Conradson, 2003c). Care is practised through the way the library is attentive to the needs of women needing to gain skills and work experience, which can also be read as a form of redistribution.

The library becomes a site where care can happen through the redistributive role it plays for women who have either been out of work for a while or those who experience mental health issues. It becomes a place for women to connect with a caring organisation that provides training opportunities. I see the provision of volunteering
opportunities at the WL as an act of actually existing care-full justice, a way to care-
fully support women by providing them with the opportunity to obtain diverse skill sets
by participating in this commons. The library plays a training role by encouraging
women and equipping them with work experience skills that further their ability to
access employment. Selina (WL volunteer) explains how:

some women have come in there because it’s kind of like, they may have
been out of work for a while whether it be through raising kids or mental
health problems and it’s a way for them to kind of be more integrated
into the community or to, like a friend of mine who volunteers there.
She’s been a mum, a full-time mother for five years but she’s studying
… she’s doing a diploma in librarianship … so this is kind of like a
stepping-stone for her.

The experience of volunteering can help women gain a sense of confidence in their
ability if they have been out of the workforce for a while or if they have mental health
issues. WL also cares for women in a way that enables them to gain access to skills
training and work experience. Renae (WL volunteer) discusses how:

well, just by accepting, you know because it’s volunteer, they don’t
exclude people because they maybe look a bit different or something or
are a bit older or, you know, they know I’ve got a mental illness and I
don’t think they really, they don’t exclude ’cause of that.

The importance of these urban commons is revealed in what it means to the people
involved. Volunteers practise a politics of recognition and care for women who are
‘different’. The WL cares for and encourages women in the community by providing a
space for them to volunteer in a supportive environment and by growing a supportive
environment by individual volunteers supporting one another.

(ii) A counterpublic connected to the feminist movement

In a second kind of connection the WL connects with broader social movements such as
the feminist movement. In this example we see how ordinary spaces of implicit activism
can be connected to broader activism. Spectacular forms of activism are practised at
particular moments within the library, transforming the space into what Iveson terms a
counterpublic (Iveson, 2007) at the same time as being a site of more mundane forms of
implicit activisms that may be part of the everyday reproduction of the library as an
urban commons. Being a commons, the WL is already in the between space of being
both public and private (Eizenberg, 2011), but it is the practices that connect the WL to
broader movements that move the WL into the counterpublic space: private spaces
made public when people discuss issues and organise movements (Iveson, 2007: 188). The potential for the WL to become a radical space that is a site of contestation or creativity is grown by who occupies the library at particular times and the connections that are grown between the library and broader justice movements.

The WL is both symbolically and directly connected to the feminist movement in Australia. Different women are enrolled in the practice of making connections with the feminist movement to greater or lesser degrees. However, by playing an active role in conserving women’s history and memorabilia, the WL becomes a space that facilitates particular types of discussions which are important to the cause of recognition and thus the justice movement more broadly. For example the library is materially connected to the feminist movement through the conversations that take place in the library space. As Kim (WL volunteer) explains:

we have very interesting conversations at management and some of the groups we’ve had here and I’ve always amazed at listening to some of the older women who come to some of the groups. You know what they’ve done, it must have been so scary in the sixties and seventies to march out and protest like at Pine Gap and stuff and be locked up by the police. We’ve had it so easy in comparison … I think that they can feel minimised so I think we can care for them too. You know, it’s, it’s almost like, this is all the feminist sort of stuff that we should, there seemed to me to be a period where we weren’t supposed to care too much. So if we want to get our demands met we have to become more like men. And I just don’t agree with that, I think talking to some of the older feminists, it wasn’t actually about joining patriarchy it was about changing it. And I think that’s what we lost sight of, and I think that’s the conversations that are happening a lot at the moment … around the library. These aren’t necessarily organised groups. It just might be that you’re on shift and someone pops in and then a conversation starts, people come and it’s almost like they feel able to enter the conversation. It’s unplanned things where I, I think, yeah.

The WL becomes a site for spontaneous conversations, akin to the notion of spontaneous learning developed by Eizenberg (2011). The WL becomes a space of possibility for other ways of being/doing/thinking the city to come about through people being present in space together. The provision of a space for these types of spontaneous conversations is important even though they are unplanned and the outcomes difficult to measure. Jupp (2008: 337) describes observations of community houses in the UK:

Whilst interactions may seem banal or trivial, such everyday sociability clearly formed an important basis for connecting with other residents. Over time this might lead to generating new forms of collective action …
Spontaneous conversations occur at the WL in a way that addresses many of the contextual injustices and the carelessness that the women involved at the WL have experienced in their lives and it provides a space for planning forms of collective response. In sharing, women support one another through caring connections and the WL provides a space for these caring connections to take place.

The library itself is a means for women to practise their care for women in the broader community and to broader social movements exhibiting a relational social ontology and sense of responsibility for others. The library is symbolically connected to the feminist movement and volunteers who care about the feminist or lesbian rights movements see their roles as volunteers at the library as also actively contributing to growing sites for action. Rachel (WL volunteer) describes how she has:

> a feeling that I’m actually contributing to, to keeping the library open. And that I’m, in some, though a very small way you know contributing to … the local women … and because it’s lesbian, transgender too, all of though sort of groups as well, because it’s a safe place. So yeah, that’s basically what I feel that I get out of it. But I also feel that I get a lot more out of it from sometimes from the interaction with people…

As previously explored, the material presence of books, posters or brochures from historical feminist and lesbian rights movements is part of how the WL is practicing care-full recognition. The library itself is a site where conversations about these movements can take place and the herstory of these movements is depicted in posters, memorabilia and souvenirs that act as a reminder of the past. Figure 5.7 show some of these pieces that are permanently displayed at the library.

**Figure 5.7 Permanent herstory display at the Women’s Library**

(Source: Author, taken 15 July, 2010)
The posters, artworks and flyers are visual reminders of the feminist movement and herstories of the women’s and lesbian rights movements in Australia. These stories are concerned with movements against injustice and carelessness. The WL collection as a whole plays this role of recognition and memory of past and current rights movements.

Members of the WL are actively practising recognition, calling for redistribution and campaigning for rights through their connections to a number of different forms of collective action and feminist events that are held each year. Connections are made to broader movements by participation in and hosting of events such as the International Women’s Day (IWD). In 2010 the WL held a stall at the IWD march at Sydney Town Hall and hosted an afternoon tea at the library in aid of IWD. As a collective, the WL ‘fights for women’s rights’ (Jennifer, WL volunteer) by participating in these city-wide events and contributing to the broader feminist movement. Selina (WL volunteer) explains how she sees this as one of the ways she expresses her politics:

I am quite a strong feminist and I feel like I’m the last remaining young feminist and I feel like you know, so we marched at International Women’s Day and I feel like it’s a forum where I can … I guess express some of my political views and … I guess have a more positive outlet for it, rather than kind of sitting at the pub being rather cynical about life.

Marching at IWD is an outlet for Selina to practise her politics and attempt to positively participate in the women’s rights movement. By connecting with broader networks, and participating in broader feminist conversations through the spontaneous conversations that take place at the library, the WL plays a role in the broader justice movements that concern women locally, nationally and internationally. Connections are made physically by transforming the WL into a political site of activism, and through markers in place that mediate the connections to broader movements such as posters or flyers or memorabilia of past actions. Women unfamiliar with the histories of collective action encounter them through visual markers in the WL space, revealing the possibility of both the collection and art space contributing towards justice and care through what Fincher and Iveson (2008: 193) term mediated encounter.

(iii) Connecting through encounter

In a third form of connection, the library becomes a connecting point for people in the neighbourhood by providing sources of information on local groups and events.
According to Fincher and Iveson (2008: 193) noticeboards play a role connecting different people. They discuss how:

in particular library noticeboards are also windows onto the world, displaying a wide range of activities that are conducted in the library itself and in the community outside. In some cases, participation in the activities advertised on library noticeboards might result in future face-to-face encounters with others. But even if users never take part in any of these activities, the mere fact that their attention is drawn to the existence of such activities constitutes a form of mediated encounter which is significant in demonstrating the diversity of interests held by those who share the library space over time (Fincher and Iveson, 2008: 193).

Mediated encounters take place in a number of different ways through the physical space of the library. Firstly this occurs through the feminist posters, *Lesbians On The Loose* magazines, memorabilia and art works which facilitate encounters between ideas and the women who come into the library and may be unaware of feminist and queer rights struggles. Secondly, women may also notice the existence of particular services or groups through the presence of flyers and brochures in the library. For example, information on domestic violence or sexual assault is provided, as is discussed in Section 5.2.2, and other types of information are made available on a brochure stand that is located next to the kitchenette as shown in Figure 5.8. Thirdly, the library noticeboards (Figure 5.8) act as materials mediating encounters between women and the city in that the noticeboards provide a material meeting place for women to access services and information about events or groups (Fincher and Iveson, 2008).

**Figure 5.8 Brochure and noticeboard display at the Women’s Library**

(Source: Author, taken 19 July, 2010)
The library and the noticeboards it provides act as connecting points for women in the community. These noticeboards contain a collection of different types of information from individual women advertising businesses, such as massage or yoga classes, to government information targeting people in the local neighbourhood. The provision of these noticeboards is seen as an act of care by Rachel (WL volunteer) who explains how:

the fact that it provides you know resources for domestic violence, that sort of thing … and also all the material that’s displayed there. The material that’s displayed there comes from everything from you know, ACON to Alcoholics Anonymous to … the local masseuse … Buddhist meditation, yeah everything … so it provides a place also to, and which is a problem pertinent to a previous question, it also provides you know a place to disseminate pertinent information for the local area as well. So that it provides that service not only to people who are members but also to, and a lot of those you know are women who are self-employed you know running their own little businesses, that’s important as well … So that’s generally supportive of women … in a multiplicity of ways. Because sometimes and it often is and, women just need support in simple ways, be it the space, as I said before, you know, or just someone advertising for free, services that they need to earn some money.

Rachel describes how she approaches providing a space for women to advertise or access information on services for free as a form of care or support. The material objects of the noticeboards, posters and flyers connect the WL to the broader city and other community groups, services and commons.

(iv) A connecting place for groups
A final way in which the WL forms connections is through developing connections with different groups that are run through the library. These groups potentially take care of, care for and care about the women who come to them. The groups are either run as WL groups, or as groups that use the space. Both of these types of groups were highlighted as playing roles in how justice is practised through the community space made available at the library. It was also highlighted that supporting these groups is one of the goals of the library:

**Miriam:** … so can you talk to me a little bit about what you see as the goals and values [of] the women’s library?  
**Kim:** I think the, it’s interesting isn’t it. I guess the [goal] would be to maintain the space, and collection being part of the space. I think for the current committee it’s not just about the collection, which it used to be, it’s [that] the space is used and it’s a lot more about the groups that come in and pay a group membership to use the space. And we ask for a gold
coin donation for people that attend groups. But, people aren’t turned away if they don’t have money.

Whilst not necessarily running the groups, the library is the site for these groups to meet and build connections and in that sense, grow other urban commons. Jennifer (WL volunteer) explains that:

There’s the Open House, which is a lesbian support group, there’s cancer support for lesbians. There have been in the past and probably will be again other types of women’s support groups, that meet here and continue to meet. We’ve run a depression group for women with depression … and we’ve run writing and art groups which essentially all of those work towards, I suppose increasing women’s sense of their own value … which is the core of, for me it’s the core of social justice. It’s valuing people.

Jennifer sees valuing people as a core way that social justice is practised and the WL provides a space for this type of connection to take place as a social commons. There are a number of groups run for women connected to the WL and beyond (see Figure 5.9). For example, Oestrogen Does not Rot Your Keyboard (ODRYK) is a group run out of the WL by one of the long-term members who is a skilled IT professional. This group aims to skill up women in the WL community and create a space for co-learning and knowledge sharing on computer skills.

**Figure 5.9 Groups at the Women’s Library**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Group</th>
<th>Intention of Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oestrogen Does not Rot Your Keyboard (ODRYK)</td>
<td>Computer skills training for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ‘C’ word</td>
<td>Cancer support group for lesbians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Tribe</td>
<td>Mums and bubs group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Open House</td>
<td>Social group for lesbian women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus of Women</td>
<td>Women’s community choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Support Group</td>
<td>Support group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity and Conversation</td>
<td>Creativity group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: The Women's Library, 2009)

The WL is connected to broader city-wide and national networks through providing a site for groups to meet. Additional groups are run with the support of other organisations such as the Aids Council of NSW (ACON) who runs *The C Word*, a support group for lesbians with cancer. The connections made between ACON and the WL allows women who are seeking help or support to connect at the WL. Rachel (WL
volunteer) explains how the WL was important in an encounter she had with a woman visiting the library and seeking support:

just for sometimes the people you meet, like last Sunday this woman came in and she was from Western Australia. And … she’d had breast cancer, and she thought that when she came to Sydney there would be a whole lot of other resources available to her. And she found out that there wasn’t. And she’s been in contact with ACON and, and she was a lesbian, and she was sort of saying, well you know, ‘there need to be some special resources for women who are lesbians.’ And so we had a great discussion about this, so just sometimes the people that you meet there. Also there’s also some of the times that are more difficult, I don’t know about your experience there but, sometimes you get people in there who are mentally unwell and you’d experienced that where at the other place, at the other job, and kind of sometimes that can be a little bit tricky. But also you realise that there’s, it’s providing a place for people to drop in.

Another group that is run out of the WL is the Lesbian Open House which attracts approximately 20 women per week (The Women's Library, 2011a). Through this group, the WL provides a drop-in function in the Newtown neighbourhood, particularly for women who have recently moved to the area, or who are lesbians. Rachel (WL volunteer) in particular mentions the role of the Lesbian Open House in the Newtown community as providing a place for women to meet.

In the city it is spaces like the WL that provide the possibility for care-full urban justice to be practised because they are sites of connection, spaces of being-in-common or micro-publics. The library space—kept open through everyday material practices of commoning—becomes a space that takes care of women in the neighbourhood and beyond. By providing a site for groups to meet, the WL enables practices of taking care of to become practices of caring for and about others (Tronto, 1993). The multiple and dynamic ways the WL becomes a site of care-full urban justice is revealed in connections made between volunteers/members; in connections made between the WL and broader activism and feminist groups; in connections made with other organisations and groups; and in connections made between the library and strangers. This urban commons becomes a space where more spectacular forms of activism can be practised alongside implicit activisms (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). The everyday material practices that reproduce the library enable care and justice to come into being through the connections made in the library.
5.4 Actually existing care-full urban justice in the Women’s Library

Actually existing care-full urban justice is contextually dependent. The responses to injustices and carelessness that occur in the here and now are often incomplete but they are steps on the way to more care-full and just worlds. The WL is responding to particular contexts and that response is taking place at a particular moment in time, practised by particular groups of people with the resources accessible through a commons. The interdependencies of care and justice are revealed because of the messy way people have to respond to actually existing forms of injustice, such as a lack of access to information on sexual assault or the absence of forums for the display of feminist literature and other books written by women. These everyday forms of redistribution are material and more-than-material. Thoughtful practices of taking care of strangers are enabled through the provision of books, a comfortable lounge, brochures, magazines and phone numbers. The materials present in the library are also enrolled in the practice of recognition and redistribution. These responses to injustice perform the library as a safe space that is critically exclusive.

The materials present in the library, and the everyday implicit activisms of volunteers in reproducing the common also contribute to the practice of taking care of women in the city. As shown in the many examples explored here, much is made possible by providing a space for people to be present, attend groups, put up notices and exhibit art. By being critically exclusive, the library becomes a safe place for women who are members and strangers in the city. Mundane, banal practices or implicit activisms sustain this urban commons along with practices of gifting time and goods. The WL is a site of encounter, both mediated and direct, that is performed into being through practices of commoning and it is the intentionality and politics of volunteers that transform the library into a space of care.

The women involved in the library play active roles in enabling care-full urban justice through their affective orientations towards the other or strangers, reflecting a sense of responsibility and understanding of collective being-in-common. Library volunteers reveal their sense of responsibility for women in the city in the way they care about women’s wellbeing, women’s voices and women’s rights revealing an understanding of collective interdependence akin to a relational social ontology. They are also central to performing the library into being as a space of spectacular activism through their
connections to broader movements (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). As the women involved in the library care about the feminist movement, queer rights movements, gender-based violence and unknown strangers, the WL becomes a space of care and a site of more spectacular forms of activism at particular moments. Connections to broader contestations, celebrations and rights movements mean that the library becomes a counterpublic (Iveson, 2007). The library becomes a space of spontaneous conversation where women encounter one another, plan events and just hang out. As an urban commons, the WL, as an organisation reproduced by volunteers, cares for women and becomes a space for justice and a site of possibility. The WL is a space of possibility which, when performed into being and at particular moments, can become a site of actually existing care-full urban justice that is always in process. It reveals the interdependent and contextually-specific ways justice and care are unfolding in the here and now.

Whilst the types of actually existing care-full urban explored here differ from those uncovered at Our Place, there are some important similarities. Once more the practice of taking care of is revealed as an important value shaping the role of the drop-in centre as an urban commons. And, like the WL, Our Place is performed into being as a safe place and plays an important role as a social commons and site of encounter in the city. Just as at the WL, the organisational ethos directly shapes how actually existing care-full urban justice is performed into being through the everyday material practices and connections constituting the organisation.
Chapter Six
Growing a social commons through Our Place, Enmore
Chapter Six: Growing a social commons through Our Place, Enmore

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I make the case that an urban drop-in centre, Our Place (OP), is a form of urban commons if we recognise actually existing commons as ‘relics of the ideal’ (Eizenberg, 2011: 765) and continue to broaden our understanding of what urban commons might be (McShane, 2010). There is no consensus for what urban commons are, as definitions continue to differ. Examples given of commons and urban commons have included physical spaces, cultures, knowledges, community gardens, common property, roads and networks (Blomley, 2008; Carlsson, 2008; Chatterton, 2010; De Angelis, 2003; Eizenberg, 2011; McShane, 2010; Ostrom and Hess, 2007). OP is a form of social commons that enables relationships and connections to be fostered and grown (Nonini, 2007: 6). Progressive urban commons are brought into being through practice, they sustain a group of people and involve commoners collectively making decisions about how the commons is appropriated and reproduced (Eizenberg, 2011: 767). Careful urban justice is revealed here through the organisational ethos, everyday material practices and connections grown through OP.

Day centres have been well documented as spaces of care in the UK (Cloke et al., 2005, 2007; Conradson, 2003c; Johnsen et al., 2005a), New Zealand (Conradson, 2003a) and Canada (Evans, 2012). They are diverse sites aiming to be welcoming and safe for homeless and disadvantaged people (Johnsen et al., 2005a: 796). Day centres—more often called drop-in centres in Australia—are often critiqued due to the organisational ethos that shapes whether or not the centres become welcoming and safe places of care, spaces of fear, or sites to proselytise (Cloke et al., 2010; Johnsen et al., 2005a). Yet Conradson (2003c) reveals how the practices of care transform these sites into spaces of care at particular moments. Drop-in centres for homeless and disadvantaged people can be approached as ‘key sites of care in the city’ (Cloke et al., 2010: 118). Moreover, when looking for difference rather than dominance (Gibson-Graham, 2006) drop-in centres can potentially be spaces that enable, as Cloke et al. (2010: 119) put it:

[a] radical site of resistance to neoliberalism and revanchism, in which self-motivated people get involved in the care of homeless people not as puppets of the state but as practitioners of (varying) ethical and political responses to the failures of the state.
It is in this vein that I approach OP as a site of possibility, a micro-public and a space of actually existing care-full urban justice.

Urban commons are never perfect, but by approaching OP from the perspective of a politics of possibility (Gibson-Graham, 2006), I reveal diverse insights into how actually existing care-full urban justice is practised every day in the ordinary banality of the city. The everyday practices constituting an organisation reveal whether or not it is a space of care (Cloke et al., 2010: 58-59). At the same time, in this case, the organisational ethos reveals a commitment to justice and a desire to take care of community members which shapes the context in which the everyday practices take place. The way in which volunteers come together to reproduce, sustain, and maintain OP as a commons, not just for themselves but for others as well, and the daily practices that bring it into being, reflect a sense of responsibility for others. OP is a place where people in the neighbourhood can come and be. In the UK context in particular this is radical because:

there are few that provide a place for people to relate to others and simply be. In a neoliberal polity where welfare transactions are increasingly instrumental and output focused, the significance of such placed for marginalized citizens should not be underestimated (Conradson, 2003c: 521).

OP becomes a site where everyday redistribution is practised through the provision of the materials needed to survive and the creation of a social space that is transformed into a commons through the intentional practices of volunteers and community members. Importantly, by approaching OP as a commons, the complexities of how drop-in centres function and how the connections formed by people in the city show how they care about and care for each other in unexpected ways. The significance of small acts of kindness akin to those explored by Horton and Krafl (2009) are uncovered along with the ways in which the drop-in centre becomes Our Place for volunteers and community members.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of the organisational ethos and the role of OP as a place of acceptance which frames how and why OP becomes a space of care and justice at particular moments (Johnsen et al., 2005a) (Section 6.2). I contextualise the practices that constitute OP in relation to the organisational ethos that shapes the centre and ultimately affects how it is transformed into a space of care at particular moments
(Cloke et al., 2007; Johnsen et al., 2005a). At OP volunteers practise recognition through adopting a non-judgemental and respectful attitude that recognises that care is both given and received (Tronto, 1993: 108).

In the Section 6.3 I discuss the everyday material practices that reproduce the commons and pay particular attention to the role of the physical space in providing a safe space for community members to be (Section 6.3.1). Volunteers reproduce this common through their everyday material practices or ‘implicit activisms’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) through contextually specific practices of care and justice (Section 6.3.2). I reflect on the generosity of supporters who are enrolled in everyday practices of gifting, revealing ordinary acts of care and everyday redistribution (Section 6.3.3). Redistribution is practised here through more-than-material support given to OP. Moreover, the commons is sustained through direct and mediated connections with individual businesses, friends or groups.

In Section 6.4 I explore the role of connections in facilitating actually existing care-full urban justice. I focus on how the relationships built between volunteers and community members enable care and justice to be practised here in ways that that leak out into the wider neighbourhood (Section 6.4.1). Volunteers practise respect in order to care for community members. More spectacular forms of activism play a role in the work of this organisation and in the final section of this chapter I explore the role of connections with friends, businesses, family and other organisations that facilitate care-full urban justice (Section 6.4.2). It is because of one-on-one relationships that volunteers have with community members that activism and advocacy at a wider level occur. Understanding the diverse and multiple ways actually existing care-full urban justice is intentionally practised, and practised in the moment, frames an understanding that ‘organisational spaces of care [and justice] are performatively brought into being’ (Cloke et al., 2007: 1097). OP reveals new understandings of the power of relationships and encounters to transform lives and the role of relationships in shaping responsibility and enabling actually existing care-full urban justice to be discerned in the city. The organisational ethos of OP is central to this as it shapes the context of the urban commons.
6.2 Our Place: a place of acceptance and everyday redistribution

The organisational ethos of this collectively-owned and run drop-in centre provides a number of different insights about how everyday redistribution, recognition, care receiving and caring for are woven through the practices of commoning that constitute OP as an urban commons. In this section I reflect on two areas that make OP a place of acceptance and site of everyday redistribution. These are the organisational ethos and the affective orientation of volunteers and staff. OP is based on a model that is informed by ‘the philosophy of social justice’ (Nicole, OP management) and OP relies on the goodwill of the community of supporters and corporations who donate the goods and labour needed to sustain the organisation rather than on government grants.

OP is committed to practising everyday redistribution by ensuring that, from the materials gifted to the organisation, the greatest amount of goods possible are redistributed to community members. This is reflected in the funding structure and organisational model of OP. OP is 40% supported by corporations and 60% by individual donors and is almost entirely run by volunteers who manage the centre (Nicole and Lisa, OP management). Because of this OP is not constrained by the accounting regimes placed upon other welfare providers who have to meet specific quotas or performance reviews. Nicole (OP management) describes how OP is:

very much driven by, I think, the vision that the four founding partners had, that it was going to be … financially lean, volunteer-based, client-centric, and based on building a spirit of community. So everything we do fosters that.

OP, like similar organisations in the UK, rejects government funding to avoid the accounting regimes of governments and to ensure its independence and ability to do the work it believes is needed (Cloke et al., 2010: 124). It is a volunteer-run, secular, independent, professional drop-in centre/commons that is not ‘tied in’ to government policy and therefore cannot be read as having been ‘co-opted’ by the state (Adams and Hess, 2001; Everingham, 2003; Rule, 2005). OP is an example of an organisation that is a space of ‘active citizenship’ that is actively engaging in practices of everyday redistribution and care (Cloke et al., 2007). The founding partners had a desire to create a drop-in centre with a difference.
The four founding partners who set up OP had previously worked together at another drop-in centre in Sydney’s inner west and wanted to do things differently. Nicole (OP, management) describes how:

one of the unique things about our organisation is that we had a very strong view that there were a lot of fat cat charities around who spend other people’s money in not so sensible ways. Our view … was that there are a lot of baby-boomers, there were a lot of retired and semi-retired people, with a lot of skills that were under-utilised, who wanted to contribute. And the culture of volunteerism was really growing and booming, and as the population aged, we knew that trend was going to increase. So our view was, like ourselves on the management committee, there were people out there with skills we could use, without paying for it, and therefore we could run an operation on a shoestring, and prove that it was about compassion, and will and organisations skills, rather than having to have a lot of money.

The OP volunteer management committee bears a significant burden in ensuring the smooth operation of the drop-in centre. With over 40 volunteers who volunteer anywhere from full-time, to once a fortnight, OP relies on the skills of the people connected to the organisation to offer assistance to people in the local neighbourhood by supplying meals and making OP a safe space (Our Place, 2009: 1). One part-time welfare manager was also employed for approximately a year along with an operations manager for a couple of months. The OP vision has attracted the majority of the volunteers interviewed to the centre as they wished to participate in a different type of community care. They aim to keep overhead costs to a minimum so that the greatest possible amount of money goes directly to the operation of the service rather than to wages. I understand this as a form of everyday redistribution, a way of providing physically for community members by relying on the neighbourhood and other connections for support. OP is no ordinary drop-in centre.

The practice of everyday redistribution is applied through the OP organisational model shown in Figure 6.1 below. It is based on a vision to ‘run on a shoestring’ (Nicole, OP management) in order to ensure the most support possible for community members. Implicit in the OP model is an understanding that there is a collective responsibility to take care of people in the local neighbourhood who are in need. The organisation is able to provide food for between 270 and 300 people per week, feeding people for around AU$0.90 per person per day (Our Place, 2009: 2). It takes the equivalent of
about $30,000 worth of labour a month to run the centre and this labour is gifted to the organisation as shown in Figure 6.1.

**Figure 6.1 Our Place organisational model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our low-cost volunteer-based model really works:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- $30.00 worth of free volunteer time worked per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 13,000 meals served July 08 to July 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cost per client for food is 90 cents per day: meals/coffee/tea/snacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cost per client for all services, per month is $8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Money, food and other goods donated go directly to benefit our clients: we have no fancy overheads</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Our Place, 2009: 1)

OP is being attentive to the needs of people in the neighbourhood and therefore the values of caring about and taking care of can be seen as shaping the organisational ethos (Milligan and Wiles, 2010: 742; Tronto, 1993: 127). Figure 6.1 shows OP has adopted the term ‘client’ to refer to the people who comprise the OP client community. It is used as a term of respect, positioning community members as service users. The term is mobilised in order to create a professional image and facilitate a client-centred understanding of the way OP is run. On a day-to-day basis community members are known by their names and referred to by name. I will refer to them here as community members in order to emphasise the role OP is playing as an urban commons, a role that exists simultaneously with its role as a drop-in centre.

OP is a space that is created by the affective stance of the volunteers and staff as reflected in the organisational ethos. The level of personal change required of community members influences how comfortable they feel in occupying a day-centre (Johnsen et al., 2005a: 796). OP is more akin to what Johnsen et al. (2005a) refer to as a place of acceptance. This is understood to be an organisation that does not impose requirements such as going to rehabilitation as conditions for community members to receive service (Johnsen et al., 2005a). OP becomes a site of recognition when, as Cloke et al. (2010: 59-60) argue in the context of their UK study, within places of acceptance ‘care is provided regardless of individual response … and it may well be that such services are better equipped to recognize, rather than subdue, the alterity of the homeless people concerned’. At OP nothing is required of community members apart from respectful behaviour towards others and this expectation shapes the practice of
volunteers. Nevertheless, OP is not always an open place that is accepting of all people at all times due to the duty of care OP has for volunteers and community members. Particular behaviours, including violence or drug taking, are not accepted. This is a common requirement even amongst ‘low-barrier’ drop-in centres (Evans, 2012). Although it seldom happens, people have been asked to leave due to safety issues or lack of respect being shown to volunteers. This shows that OP’s survival as a commons and a caring space is fragile (Conradson, 2003c; Mee, 2009). Amanda (OP management) describes how members self-regulate each other’s behaviour so that the centre remains safe:

I don’t know whether you’ve seen examples where there have been a few hiccups. And one good example here, when we got the new television, and somebody went up and fiddled with it and three or four of the other guys jumped on him, and said ‘hey mate, don’t do that or we’ll lose it.’ Guys will come up and say ‘don’t shoot up here, we’ll get in trouble, this place will close, then where will we be?’ So there is a sense of ownership from the clients … It’s unique, because they frequent all of the other places, but I don’t think their ownership … is as great to those other organisations as it is to this. That’s what I gather from a lot of them.

The fear of losing OP and the support it offers is evident in this comment, and so is a sense of ownership or belonging. A sense of ownership or belonging is demonstrated by people contributing to the centre by sweeping or mopping the floors at the end of the day, helping pack up the chairs and tables, making suggestions, and participating various activities and events such as the art classes or barbecues (Author, multiple field diary observations). The centre becomes a place of acceptance through multiple intentional practices of respect and care.

The organisational ethos of OP reflects an ethic of care that acknowledges how care is contingent upon the agency of the recipient who responds to that care (Tronto, 1993: 108). Recognition and respect for community members reflects the fourth value of an ethic of care, that of care-receiving (see Chapter 3 Section 3.3 for a discussion) (Tronto, 1993: 108). Care is not only given; it is also received. The recipient responds to practices of care because caring practice is a two-way process (Tronto, 1993: 107-108). This acknowledgement of the relational nature of caring practice is shown through the organisational ethos which aims to be a welcoming place of acceptance.
OP aims to be a non-judging environment that is kind and respectful, and all volunteers are required to practise non-judgement. One of the roles of the volunteer coordinator is to screen potential volunteers to ensure that appropriate volunteers for the centre are found. In my field diary I noted that in my volunteer interview we were required to be ‘kind, non-judgemental/tolerant and extraverted. I had to let them know how I fit into that and about my volunteer history’ (Field diary excerpt 17 April 2009). In part this is due to the desire for OP to be a welcoming space that is not out to ‘save’ people but to be a safe place where all are welcome. Lisa (OP management) discusses the role she plays in screening volunteers:

Sometimes volunteers come in who want to fix people, okay? And one of my key responsibilities when I’m doing a potential volunteer interview, is to see if I can figure it out, if there’s some agenda along those lines, because that doesn’t work here. If you want to fix people, that’s about you, that’s not meeting them where they’re at. And those people in my experience, burn out quite fast, because you know, none of these people got here overnight. None of these problems, some of these problems have been decades in the making. So for a volunteer to come in here and think, you know, ‘I’m going to solve this drug addiction or alcohol abuse’ or whatever, it just doesn't work. And then the volunteers leave, because they feel like they didn't make the difference they wanted to, or they get frustrated, or worst for everybody involved is if they get judgemental and intolerant, which really doesn't work. Yeah, and sometimes volunteers come in, even I might have that interview and I might think that I read it right, and they’ll come for their first day and at the end of their shift they’ll say, ‘I can't come back, I can't do this,’ and that happens too. I mean, because it isn't for everybody, especially in the hall, because the kitchen is the kitchen, you're really interacting more with the volunteers. But the hall is not for everybody.

Working as a volunteer at OP requires a particular affective stance or approach to the people who come into the centre and require help. To care for community members, volunteers are required to be attentive to their needs, rather than wanting to ‘save’ or ‘solve’ them.

By becoming a place of acceptance OP is making sure that all are welcome at the centre (to a point), thus enabling a general open access commons, a place just to hang out and be (Evans, 2012; Johnsen et al., 2005b). The organisational model reflects an understanding that, through relationships and trust, people will change or be able to ask for help when they need it and be open to receive it. Nicole (OP management) puts it this way:
It’s always, ‘you have to trust us first, and you have to ask us to help you,’ because until they get to rock bottom, or until they reach a point where they trust us enough to tell us what’s really happening, we can’t impact them. We’re not preaching to them, we’re not prescribing for them, we’re wanting them to be self-motivated, and if they are, you have a much bigger chance of success with those people. And it's not that we’re lazy, it's not that we’re silly. We see exactly what goes on with these people, because we see them day after day after day, and we see the changes in them. We see when they fall off the wagon and when they get back on. But eventually we find most people who have serious and complex problems, like Bryce, will say, ‘I can't do this anymore, you've got to help me, what do you want me to do?’ And that's when you can really make a change for people.

This description of the role of the organisation reflects an understanding of the community members as care receivers, in that they decide when they are ready to be ‘helped’. Mary (OP volunteer) describes how most of the time community members just want to be at OP:

Mary: Quite often, when we talk to the clients, they don’t want to be reminded of their problems, they like talking to us about normal things, the weekend, what’s on television and so on. They don’t continually want us to ‘care’ to the point that we’re almost voyeurs. We cannot save people.

Miriam: So it's not about saving them?

Mary: It's good if clients come to the decision that they want help and support, but that’s their decision, not ours, and the more we push, the more likelihood is they’ll just become bloody minded, or go somewhere else and then they don’t have any support at all.

Community members have to, and do, ask for help when they want to go to rehabilitation or receive counselling. Volunteers build relationships with community members so that, over time, trust is developed. In my field diary I noted the role of relationships in enabling caring practice to take place and the way in which community members respond to care:

Having already built a relationship with [community member], she was able to divulge some information about why her and her partner had split up. If we hadn’t built that she wouldn’t have reached out for support in the way she did. Something else I have been pondering is the way that general chit chat and conversing opens up the relationships with [community members] so that … when a crisis hits they feel able to come and be supported in a way that is meaningful. For this woman she just needed to get out of the house, she needed some people to talk to when she was at risk (Field diary excerpt 14 December 2009).

I think today [community member] finally went to rehab, the one I had been talking to [about how he wanted to get off drugs] for ages. It was a
huge deal. His friend got up at 6 am to make sure he was packed and ready. We were worried he wasn’t going to show. But his friend made sure he did (27 April, 2010).

Perceiving change as something that comes out of ongoing respect, trust and relationships grown over time, shows the importance of simple practices like shaking people’s hands, playing cards with someone, saying hello when people walk in the door, and serving people’s breakfast with a smile—all everyday practices of inclusion (Mee, 2009). A request for care or help may occur on the first day community members come to OP, or it may happen after month or not at all. But rather than placing pressure on people to change when they do not wish to, OP practises care-full recognition and provides care in the form of context-specific responses to the needs expressed by community members.

The organisational ethos explored here reflects the value of redistribution, caring about, recognition and a respect for community members. Whilst OP is a space for disadvantaged people, the volunteers practise care, recognition and redistribution by:

Welcoming everybody as equals, helping people to get pretty basic human rights of, like somewhere to sleep, somewhere to eat … food, a bed and clothing and you know, general sort of basic human needs. Trying to meet that to start with, and then go from there, anything else is a bonus that they can achieve … (Rebecca, OP volunteer)

OP reflects an understanding that care is also something that has to be received as well as given (Tronto, 1993: 134). In the same way people respond to recognition and redistribution, they are present in a relational exchange of goods, services, care, and emotional support, and in acts of participation in decision-making processes. By connecting care-receiving to an understanding of responsiveness, OP becomes a place of acceptance through the practice of volunteers who are non-judgemental and see change as something that is also in the hands of community members rather than as something that needs to be thrust upon them. The commitment of OP to practise care-full everyday redistribution reveals how care-full urban justice is infused through the organisational ethos. In the following section the way in which care and everyday redistribution is practised through more-than-material means is described. The organisational ethos of justice and care shapes how this commons is constituted every day through mundane practices, with significant impacts.
6.3 Everyday material practices reflecting actually existing care-full urban justice

The basic work of OP in providing food and support services along with a place to hang out can be seen as an act of everyday redistribution and taking care of (Tronto, 1993). The material practices that constitute OP take place within this context and caring for people is a critical part of the work OP does. In particular, the value of caring for is woven through accounts of the role of the organisation by making it a safe place for community members. In this section I discuss three areas of everyday material practices. Firstly, I explore how actually existing care-full urban justice is manifest in OP providing a safe space for community members to simply be. In a context of fear and threat, OP becomes a safe space through the practices of volunteers who seek to perform it as such and through running a drop-in centre in this neighbourhood. Secondly, OP relies on volunteers to reproduce a caring and just commons. The practices of volunteers are banal, mundane and ordinary, yet meaningful and at times transformative. The everyday embodied practices (Conradson, 2003a) of volunteers at OP provide a snapshot of the types of activities that comprise an ordinary day for volunteers. And finally I explore how OP is sustained through practices of gifting, or what I term more-than-material forms of everyday redistribution. These everyday practices of redistribution reveal ordinary forms of generosity and care that sustain OP as a commons by keeping it open and facilitating practices of care.

6.3.1. Creating a safe place and a site of encounter in the city

Care-full urban justice is based on an understanding that care and justice need to be practised symbiotically in contextually sensitive ways. Both the physical context and the non-material commons of OP are enrolled in facilitating practices of actually existing care-full urban justice. The people who occupy the drop-in centre perform OP into being as a safe place (Cloke et al., 2010; Johnsen et al., 2005a). At the same time, the physical arrangement of the drop-in centre also facilitates whether or not the space is experienced as safe, comfortable or home-like (Fincher and Iveson, 2008: 200). In this section I discuss the importance of providing a safe place for community members and how the physical space and everyday systems have been arranged to create a space for encounter and a space for homeless and disadvantaged people in the city to be. Providing people with a place to come to during the day, access services, hang out, watch television, play cards, have a meal, have a cup of tea, is a contextually sensitive
response to the needs of community members. It is an act of actually existing care-full urban justice because community members can be at threat at home or on the streets.

OP plays a role as a safe place for homeless and disadvantaged people to be present in the city. Many of the community members with drug and alcohol addictions are at risk due to their own behaviour or are threatened by others when they are under the influence of drugs and alcohol in public. Furthermore, some OP community members either sleep on the streets or live in boarding houses where they are under threat from various forms of abuse. Robyn (OP management) reports that:

*a lot of the places, some of the boarding houses, the people that run them, they misuse the residents’ medication, they steal their money, they don’t give them any real human comforts at all.*

Within this context of insecurity and threat, finding a safe place to hang out is seen as an important way to meet human needs for safety and shelter (Hodgetts et al., 2008). At OP, a commons is provided for people to hang out in, a home-like space that provides ‘a space of refuge from the threat of physical assault which commonly plagues those who are roofless’ (Johnsen et al., 2005a: 795). For some people OP is just a place to meet people and hang out or a social commons. For others it is a place to access vital services or somewhere just to receive a meal. Figure 6.2 shows the layout of the centre and how it is set up with chairs and tables. The centre is housed in a church hall that it rents at commercial rates.

**Figure 6.2 Our Place hall space**

(Source: Author, taken 20 July 2010)
People who come to the centre do not necessarily have somewhere else they can meet people and hang out, although experiences are varied. Drop-in centres have been cited as being important spaces of connection between people, as living in boarding houses or on the street does not provide many places to hang out or meet others (Evans, 2012; Johnsen et al., 2005a: 794). This can be because of unsafe sleeping environments, or because people lack money to buy a cup of coffee at a space reserved for public interactions such as a café. Some people do not have the skills required to interact in conventional settings or are marginalised due to their dress and appearance (Hodgetts et al., 2008). People’s presence in place becomes a way in which they practise their right to the city, and also reflects their sense of belonging and attachment to a particular place (Hodgetts et al., 2008). By providing this space of connection, OP is taking care of community members, if they want to be cared for.

Each day OP becomes a space of encounter that seeks to be a comfortable home-like site for people to hang out: something that is vital for homeless people (Reitz-Pustejovsky, 2002). Moreover, drop-in centres allow for informal forms of encounter and contact between people with community members getting to know one another over time (Fincher and Iveson, 2008). According to Fincher and Iveson (2008: 200):

\[
\text{[a] central feature of planning drop-in centres for economically marginalized groups and the relatively isolated individuals within them is that centres are home-like in their size, internal physical features and the informal social behaviours they allow.}
\]

The physical space of OP has been arranged for social interaction between community members and the arrangement of chairs and tables transforms an open hall into the drop-in centre and social commons.

At breakfast and lunch people sit around these tables in the hall, drawing up more seats when their group exceeds four or bringing out new tables when people need them. In the morning when the centre opens, community members are greeted at the door by volunteers and members put their name down at the servery window. Names are called out when the breakfast of bacon and eggs is ready. In the meantime, people wait at the tables for their meals, talking to fellow community members or reading the paper. Food is served from the servery window (Figure 6.3). Community members are always welcome to help themselves to oranges and tea and coffee that are on a table at the side
of the room (Figure 6.4). They pick up loaves of bread placed on the side wall along with any games and books that are out for people to use during the day. Two beanbags are positioned under a table ready for use for people who wish to lounge about. A flat screen TV sits on one wall and provides entertainment for people who come in and want to sit around during the day. Sometimes films are played in the afternoon for people to watch and groups of community members play games together. Community members also use the space just outside the hall to smoke or hang out in the shade under the trees in the car park.

The intentional layout and positioning of the drop-in centre reveals how attention has been given to make the space a site for caring practice and sociality. Most importantly, it has been arranged to provide somewhere for people to sit and eat a meal. The role of OP as a place for people to hang out is highlighted by the context of threat and insecurity that some community members occupy away from the centre. And it is in this context that OP is acting, revealing a contextually specific actually existing care-full justice response. Although the physical design of a drop-in centre is important in providing a site for care and justice practice to take place, it is also the everyday practices that reproduce the site as commons and transform it into a space of care and justice at particular moments.

Figure 6.3 Our Place kitchen servery

Figure 6.4 Urn and oranges at Our Place

(Source: Author, taken 20 July, 2010)

(Source: Author, taken 20 July, 2010)
6.3.2 Listening and buttering bread: volunteer practices mediating actually existing care-full urban justice

Thinking through how commons are performed into being through practice allows us to contextualise the types of practices found at OP that mediate forms of actually existing care-full urban justice. In this section I focus on the everyday practices or implicit activism of volunteers that reveal actually existing care-full urban justice as contextually specific responses to broader injustices/carelessness that are taking place. Volunteer roles can be divided into three rough categories: hall volunteers, kitchen volunteers and management volunteers. In addition to overseeing the planning and strategic direction of the centre, management volunteers, who mostly comprise the founding partners, are involved in the day-to-day running of the drop-in centre as either hall volunteers or kitchen volunteers. Actually existing care-full urban justice is mediated through the mundane, banal acts of each of these volunteers because these volunteers reproduce and sustain this urban commons.

Justice here is practised in everyday ways and care for and about the other is woven through the everyday practices of OP volunteers such as helping people with forms. This is shown in the work done by the organisation that is described here in the OP newsletter:

We do the ‘simple’ stuff – provide meals (breakfast & lunch), provide conversation and comfort, make phone calls, sort through paperwork, fill in forms, make appointments, provide passes for public transport to important appointments, write references, send faxes and mail letters or simply provide the Our Place mailing address and contact number when clients have no fixed address. We do the ‘difficult’ stuff – provide referrals to detoxification/rehabilitation, anger management, abuse & trauma counselling programs; we have relationships with reputable local boarding house proprietors and assist in finding accommodation; we work in collaboration with local mental health care workers on behalf of clients; we are able to refer to medical or psychiatric professionals if and when that is appropriate; we liaise with the Department of Housing and Homeless Persons Information Service on behalf of our clients; we assist in navigating the bureaucracy of Centrelink [welfare provider of the Australian Federal Government] and utility providers to solve service & financial issues. We provide tenancy advice and assist in dispute resolution. We provide free counselling services to clients with our own volunteer professionally-qualified counsellors and also through an internship program with … a local tertiary education centre (Our Place, 2009: 2).
The types of practices depicted here are imbued with care but are also practices of everyday redistribution. OP is a site of physical redistribution of goods such as food, toiletries and blankets. The redistribution is a care-full redistribution, responding to the contextually-specific needs of community members such as assisting people in accessing their anti-psychotic medication that they cannot afford by purchasing it. OP cares for community members by providing them with the physical goods and emotional support to meet their needs (Tronto, 1993: 107). Caring involves listening to people’s concerns, being encouraging, providing affirmation or sitting with people and being present with them in a bodily sense in a way that extends beyond reciprocity and reflects a sense of being-in-common (Milligan and Wiles, 2010). On a day-to-day basis the types of care people require take a number of different forms. Some of the everyday practices that reproduce the commons are listed in Figure 6.5.

**Figure 6.5 Everyday practices at Our Place**

As shown in Figure 6.5 different volunteers are responsible for different tasks. Kitchen volunteers prepare and serve food, clean up after meals, and care for and take care of community members through these practices. These volunteers often do not see what
they do as very grand but the kitchen volunteers are actively involved in caring for community members in multiple ways. Hall volunteers provide companionship by hanging out with community members or offering assistance with forms or helping with phone calls. Some hall volunteers play a more social role whereas others are involved to a greater extent in direct welfare work. I spent a lot of time approaching different tables, chatting and playing cards with community members. Figure 6.6 illustrates the diversity of volunteer roles and how everyday practices of actually existing care-full urban justice are mediated through the implicit activisms of these volunteers.

Figure 6.6 A day in the life of a volunteer at Our Place

a) Lots of fiddly kind of ringing around. Yeah, people come for all sorts of things … queries for Centrelink. … some of them are just not articulate enough to be able to go through the system to make an inquiry so if something like that can be done … So anybody who needs assistance is usually seen after breakfast. And that can, depending on the query or whatever, can take you from five minutes up till the rest of the day. Ah, often it’s quiet though … there’s not much assistance required so it’s just interacting with the clients who have hung around. And lunch is a big busy time … so just kind of being around, helping out, helping you know, clear away, that kind of stuff happens around lunch time. After lunch the day that I’m there is usually the art class (Kate, OP volunteer).

b) Well a normal shift, we set up all the kitchenware, all the cups, saucers, get all the plates ready, get the bacon ready for when we’re having bacon and eggs, and you know, if we have to cut bread that’s all cut. Everything’s got to be prepared before nine o’clock, so we’re ready to go as soon as the people come in. And by getting there at eight o’clock we have it all done, and we have time for a coffee before the clients arrive (Paul, OP volunteer).

c) Well I come in at about a quarter to seven and have breakfast locally, to beat the traffic, and then, well, I stop on the way and get a box of oranges, that’s a donation I make every week, yeah. So I’ve set that up locally and I’ve got a guy who gives me a discount, because he knows it’s for charity. So, I bring a box of oranges, and then I help Benny set up the hall, and then I do the shopping, down at ALDI, for Robyn. She actually emails me a shopping list on the weekend, and if there’s any corrections on it, she’ll make it before we go. That usually takes between nine and ten, nine and half past, something like that, and then we come back and unpack it, pack it away, and then I’m free to assist in any way I can, by making phone calls. I play a lot of cards actually! (Peter, OP volunteer).

d) Benny arrives an hour before we open each day, sets up tables, chairs, desks, printer, phones, magazines, games, helps unpack food supplies and literally starts Our Place up for the day. He helps with food shopping, transporting supplies between Enmore and Marrickville, collects the mail, delivers the laundry and a myriad of other essential tasks that have to be carried out. At the end of each day, Benny supervises pack-up, takes care of the garbage and recycling and any other last-minute jobs that need to be done. Ever cheerful, Benny is a much-loved member of our community. Volunteers and clients alike look for him when they arrive. He is always ready with a joke and a smile and he embodies our philosophy of tolerance and respect for all (Our Place, 2010b: 3).

(Source: Interviews a), b) and c))
The ordinary practices of setting out the cups or playing cards are each important in their own way as they are responding to the needs of others, showing how care and redistribution are practised in ordinary ways through contextually-sensitive and responsive implicit activisms. The type of care and justice needed at particular times is context-driven on the micro and macro scales. It can be shaped by external factors such as changes in policy, the economic climate or other circumstances that affect people’s ability to maintain employment or manage by themselves.

Two particular features of OP show how it is responding to contextually specific injustices and carelessness. The responses show how OP becomes a space of actually existing care-full urban justice through particular acts that take care of or redistribute goods to community members. Firstly, the systems in place to care for disadvantaged people in Australia and elsewhere are at times unjust (Reitz-Pustejovsky, 2002). This means that people are placed in a situation where they cannot meet their basic needs because they do not know how to access, or are unable to access, the help that is available. According to Kate (OP, volunteer) ‘the [welfare] system is failing people’ which is a point Nicole (OP, management) expands on:

a lot of government policies contribute to social injustice. And you know, the whole Centrelink process is … predicated on the fact that nobody deserves it. It’s made incredibly difficult to access, and people commit crime because they don’t have enough money to live on. And there’s a lot of bureaucratic red tape … People who really should be able to access help, can’t, and a lot of people who fall by the wayside, who perhaps haven’t had that dysfunctional background, but through bad luck, and bad systems, end up living dysfunctional and maybe criminal lives, because they can’t get the help that they should have.

Helping people with forms and navigating the government bureaucracy is a key role of OP hall volunteers that can be read as a type of care that is seeking to facilitate access to forms of redistribution (Reitz-Pustejovsky, 2002). For example the government system can be alienating for people who have never had to access help from Centrelink, or for people without the ability to read and write, as Lisa (OP management) explains:

a lot of our clients’ literacy skills are not good, or non-existent, so it’s a case of helping them reform sometimes. And so, you know, somebody lives in a boarding house and they get a letter from Centrelink, you know, they can’t even read it, you know, what they’re supposed to be doing or are they in violation of something. So that’s a huge impact on their life if you can say, ‘oh well, look you know, you need to call them
and I will help you make the call, and I will sit down and hold for forty minutes with you, so you don't get too frustrated that you walk out’.

In her interview Lisa reflected that, around the time of the Global Financial Crisis, she saw more and more people who had never had to deal with Centrelink before and were overwhelmed by the process. OP was able to help people navigate what is at times an alienating welfare system. Reitz-Pustejovsky (2002) argues this can be a form of just care.

The second feature of OP that shows how it is responding to contextually specific injustices and carelessness is its location. OP was originally located in Enmore because it was close to a large concentration of boarding houses and services caring for disadvantaged groups. Since opening in Enmore the demographics of the neighbourhood have changed. An increase of rental costs in Enmore and Newtown (including other surrounding suburbs) explored in Chapter 4 has had a flow-on effect on the poorer residents of these areas living in boarding houses. According to Robyn (OP management) many students can no longer afford rents in private housing and are now accessing accommodation in boarding houses which has traditionally been kept for economically marginalised peoples:

It’s affected them recently, but only because the more yuppies move in, the less houses there are that they break up into boarding houses, and there’s less low cost rooms and things like that. But that’s been exacerbated in the last year, because of the economic climate … because what’s happened, the, you know, sort of working, the poor are working class people that get the low incomes. And the students, they had a reasonable level of accommodation that was at a reasonable rental. And they never touched this dirty boarding house type of, you know accommodation. But because of the rising costs now, those people have had to step down a level, which means that our kind of guys have been pushed out …

This process can be read as a form of displacement caused by neighbourhood changes that although difficult to track, mean that there are potentially more people accessing services at particular points or moving on (Lees et al., 2008). The extent of the flow-on effects of this type of situation is unknown. However, OP is seeking to redress these broader injustices by providing a space for people to access services and meet basic needs.
Practices of actually existing care-full urban justice are mediated through the everyday practices or implicit activisms of volunteers. OP is a space that seeks to take care of community members by providing food and other forms of context-specific help. The activities of volunteers can seem ordinary and mundane but they are actively engaged in the practice of providing support and help or reproducing OP through their participation. It is difficult to disentangle these vital practices from the work OP is doing as a social commons and site of everyday redistribution. In this example the coexistence of these implicit activisms that facilitate and assist grander schemes such as universal welfare provision are shown. Furthermore it is the caring orientation of volunteers that facilitates access to universal welfare. This makes caring practice visible in the here and now, and raises awareness of the role caring practice plays in facilitating actually existing and ideal justice practices. The example of the everyday practices of more-than-material care-full redistribution further emphasises the interdependence of care and justice in the actually existing sites where these ‘ideal’ ethics are reflected.

6.3.3 Everyday practices of more-than-material care-full redistribution

As an urban commons, OP relies on a broad community of supporters to meet the needs of the community members (De Angelis, 2003). It is reliant upon the practice of gifting and the goodwill of people connected to the organisation to sustain the commons that cares for community members (De Angelis, 2003). This reveals how needs can be met through ordinary acts of generosity. The practices of gifting reflect the organisational ethos that is seeking to provide the maximum amount of support possible from the common wealth available. Everyday redistribution is woven through these practices as the material goods enable volunteers and community members to take care of themselves and each other. The outcomes of these gifting practices are more-than-material. The gifts include time, blankets, oranges, encouragement and support. They do more than provide physical help as I show in the example of the weekly art class, which has had various flow-on effects.

OP’s organisational model is reliant on everyday practices of redistribution that draw on the generosity or care of people to support the commons. These supporters are not necessarily physically proximate to the drop-in centre because they are connected through both direct and mediated relationships. Supporters practice a sense of responsibility for others akin to a relational social ontology. In thinking through
whether or not caring is part of being a volunteer, Angela (OP, volunteer) responds saying:

Caring about my community, yeah. Yeah, absolutely … I think it's the—
I care therefore I give—people care therefore they support. I think it's
probably the central aspect of it … you are part of what you belong to,
and to make change and to make a better place, you've got to step up and
provide in some way.

Care is woven through practices of gifting time by volunteering or by gifting goods. As
previously explored, the OP model relies on people caring about others through a sense
of being-in-common or responsibility for others. Instead of being reliant on government
funding, Nicole (OP management) describes how:

We have people who give us a jar of coffee and a kilo of sugar every
week. We have people who give us, you know, twenty dollars twice a
year. Our view is every contribution is valuable, and that it's the
community that makes this work. And so all we are doing is capitalising
on the goodwill of everybody out there … This model is an absolute
example of how all you need really is a team to pull together the
resources that are already out there. You know when you think about it,
Our Place is actually, it's a shell for a team to work together. It’s a
meeting place really. It's not about the building, it's not about money, it’s
certainly not about money, it’s about goodwill. And we have worked
very hard at harnessing the resources that are already out there … Our
mission is to prove that it is possible to provide a fantastic service in a
very low cost way. So it isn't something that has to be left to
governments, it isn't about money, it isn't about big budgets, it's about
will and about drawing on the goodwill of the community.

The practice of gifting can reflect the logics of caring about and taking care of which
involve assembling the goods needed to enable care due to a sense of responsibility or
an affective response to the needs of others (Tronto, 1993). Figure 6.7 provides an
indicative illustration of the range of everyday gifts that sustain the commons and take
care of OP community members. Gifts come from businesses such as a major law firm
that provides free legal advice each Tuesday and a television network who were
corporate sponsors of OP for a number of years. Supporters come from a range of
different locations and places, but local businesses provide free bread and other
wholesale or cheaper prices on goods such as art supplies. Individuals such as Pam also
practise everyday redistribution by providing all the eggs and bacon needed for
breakfasts each week. Other donations are received through organisational connections
to groups such as Ozharvest (a ‘food rescue service’ that redistributes free food
preventing it from going to waste, to drop-in centres etc.) (Ozharvest, 2012).
The everyday acts of taking care of and redistribution illustrated in this figure show how ordinary people who give generously carry out practices of redistribution. Everyday redistribution is practised through gifts from connections and supporters that are part of informal networks. The diversity of these supporters is discussed by Lisa (OP management) who describes how:

we do get a huge amount of ‘in kind’ donations. Now all the toiletries, there’s, you know, somebody hears about something, and all of a sudden you’ve got eighty thousand tubes of toothpaste or whatever ... Yeah we get a lot of in kind donations, we get a lot of food, like the bread every morning is day old bread from the bakery ... we have a wonderful woman named Pam who comes every Monday and has a trunk load of food, she unloads it for Robyn, and it can be anything from fresh fruit and vegetables, to meat, to eggs, to cakes, to … Pam’s amazing, and that is out of her pocket, that’s her donation ... We get a lot of in kind donations, you know at Christmas time we get a lot of people, you know it's on the top of their heads every Christmas time, so they donate, or we get like cut-price deals on stuff.
People give so as to continue the work of OP in the neighbourhood. From the generosity of these people, OP is able to function in a way that redistributes these goods through various means.

OP is reliant on more-than-money to operate and the outcomes are more-than-material. An important example of more-than-material gifting is the work provided by the local art gallery owner who comes into the centre each Tuesday afternoon after lunch to provide free art classes for community members and volunteers. Every Tuesday Andrew arrives from his gallery with a box full of art supplies and works in progress. Art class is a time for community members and volunteers to sit, talk and participate in painting, drawing and making cards. During 2009 we worked on creating a number of business cards that had paintings or drawings on them along with larger works. Everyone was encouraged to participate in the art class and often it provided a restful space, where volunteers and community members would sit and ‘do’ together at the end of the day.

In both 2008 and 2009 OP held art exhibitions at Andrew’s gallery with the name of the exhibition being voted on and suggested by community members. In 2009 the exhibition was called ‘Art as you see it’ and it was held in October. Figure 6.8 depicts some of the artworks exhibited.

**Figure 6.8 Photo of Our Place art exhibition**

![Image](source: Author, taken 2 October, 2009)

An excerpt from my field diary paints a picture of the evening:
The evening was spent talking and chatting and celebrating the past year. Approximately $1500 was made from art sales that evening. Business cards were bought at $5 each and art was $20+ (three had greater reserve prices). Different sponsors and supporters came along. Nicole gave a speech and we were all thanked—all artists and people there. Some of the community members came along and shared in the evening … The artists were so chuffed when their works sold … It was fun and exciting to see the community support and a good opportunity for volunteers to meet each other. (Field diary excerpt, 2 October 2009)

The exhibition brought community members, artists and supporters together to celebrate the year’s achievements in a convivial space outside the physical confines of the drop-in centre. Drinks and food were provided through the generosity of a number of different people including volunteers who made food to distribute to the people attending. The gallery on this night was transformed into a commons through the relationships of care, friendship and support characteristic of OP emphasising the role of relationships in growing this commons rather than just a physical place.

All proceeds from the art exhibition went to OP as supporters contributed once again to sustaining the commons through practices of gifting. One of the key features of the exhibition was a wall covered in small art works on the back of business cards that had been drawn and painted each week. The cards were arranged by Sia (a regular at the drop-in centre) to spell ‘Our Place 2009’. En masse they represented weeks of work carried out on an everyday basis and shaped by the conversations that were had during the art class, moments of inspiration and creativity. As a result from her participation in the art classes, Sia went on to hold two solo exhibitions at Andrew’s gallery of work she made. The encouragement and care from Andrew, and the support of OP in building relationship with Sia and recognising her talent, made this possible. Andrew’s everyday practice of gifting his skills and art goods led to a transformative moment in the life of Sia, illustrating the more-than-material effects of gifting and care.

Each ordinary and everyday material practice sustains the commons as a collective resource, differentiating OP from other drop-in centres that are reliant on government funding. This resource becomes particularly important for community members who live in a context of insecurity and threat. Yet, both the physical space and the everyday material practices that constitute the organisation transform it into a place of actually existing care-full urban justice at particular moments. If the only services OP were to
provide were meals and a site to hang out it would still be a site of everyday redistribution. However, it would not be a welcoming, safe or respectful place for people to be without the care and affective orientation of volunteers who are seeking to take care of and respect community members. Moreover, OP responds to the particular needs of community members by helping those who need to navigate the welfare system and access networks of support. In an ideal world, care and justice would always be practised in ways that ensured that universal welfare was a form of just care (Reitz-Pustejovsky, 2002). Instead, in the here and now we see actually existing care-full urban justice practised through struggling with and attempting to reconcile an imperfect system that can result in injustice. On the ground, we see people doing the best they can to care for those in need by growing a social commons. The stories presented here have shown the importance of relationships in growing this urban commons in various ways. In the following section I focus more specifically on the roles of connections in enabling care and justice to be practised through the work of OP.

6.4 Different connections enabling caring and just urban commons

Relationships are important to how volunteers practise care and justice every day through connections with each other, with and between community members and with the city. Like the Women’s Library and Alfalfa House, OP plays a role as a community hub or social commons, a site of encounter for diverse groups of people in the city. In the context of OP as a place of acceptance, the relationships of trust grown between volunteers and community members enable caring practice as recipients of care become open to the receipt of care. In this section I discuss how OP is an important site of connection for volunteers, providing a place for people to socialise and form lasting relationships (Section 6.4.1). I explore how connections aid in growing OP as an urban commons and recollect a particular experience of how OP became a site of care between community members.

I then turn to discuss the connections OP has through friendship networks and with the city more broadly (Section 6.4.2). Volunteers harness the goodwill of their friends and connections to support the work of OP through the provision of goods and volunteer labour. Volunteers play an awareness-raising role by telling stories or asking for support in relation to particular needs and, at times, by transforming the opinions of friends by emphasising their being-in-common with unknown others. Furthermore, gifting is
practised through more formal connections OP has with the city such as those with the local bakery. OP’s involvement with broader agency groups provides an avenue for advocacy around issues that assist community members access just care (Reitz-Pustejovsky, 2002). Thus, at particular moments, volunteers at OP practice more spectacular forms of activism through their advocacy role. In particular, Nicole’s (OP management) advocacy role is a central part of how OP is able to encourage greater care and justice on behalf of community members. Nicole (OP management) sees OP as leading by example, as showing people that there is another way of doing neighbourhood care:

I think our whole organisation is predicated on the fact that we believe in treating people equally, we believe in social and financial equity, we believe that you know, people who have should give to people who have not, and that’s the only way that you can have social justice … and what we’re trying to demonstrate is that social justice is not about money, and I think that’s a radical view, it’s a very radical view. And what we’re trying to create is proof that you don’t need a lot of money to support people who have come from dysfunction, and to actually start to change their expectations. And if you change their expectations then you change their attitudes, then you change their behaviour. And it’s leading by example, is what we’re doing. So in our own small microcosm of society [we] create a socially just environment for people, and if we can do it, anyone can do it … So that’s our overarching view, is that social justice isn’t about money, it’s about attitudes.

Actually existing care-full urban justice is revealed through people’s connections with each other, with others and with the city. I frame this by introducing the important role of OP as a meeting place and social commons.

6.4.1 Belonging and respect: connections making OP a social commons

Relationships of trust are grown between volunteers and community members through sitting and talking, interacting and welcoming people each day in a non-threatening and respectful way. The relationships grown through OP are what make it a social commons and space of connection in the city. Above all, OP is a social commons where friendships are made between community members and volunteers. OP community members come not just from the immediate local area, but from the surrounding suburbs of Ashfield, Stanmore, Glebe, Camperdown, Redfern, Waterloo, Sydney and Marrickville despite there being other services closer to where they live. People from various locations will come to OP because of the uniqueness of the organisation and will join in the attempt to foster the understanding that it is Our Place: a collective space
of belonging. Volunteers and community members create a sense of belonging for each other through their practices of inclusion in an ongoing way. Angela (OP volunteer) describes the interdependent role of volunteers and community members in making it our place:

And the other thing about it is that Our Place is about our place, it’s about creating community. So the volunteers create the community as much as the people that attend, and even though there’s some community members that volunteer, I mean Benny is a classic example of someone who’s, see not everyone’s, not everyone’s of that competency, the community members that come regularly are also essential to the volunteers. They give the triggers and the, you know, set-up that makes a community, that makes everyone feel familiar, and allows new people to see that it’s a community that they might want to belong to.

Intentional practices adopted by volunteers mean that a safe space of recognition and encounter is encouraged. Practices of care and practices of belonging are connected (Mee, 2009). According to Amanda (OP management), a sense of belonging is created through the practice of respect:

because we respect them. We treat them as individuals, you know? The fact that we will remember their names, the fact that we will shake their hand as they walk through the door, there’s a lot of people out in the street who would never have been introduced to somebody and have them shake their hand. That means a lot. Remembering their birthdays, you know, it's just those little things that show them that they are a human being and worth something in this world, and having hope in them.

Recognition and respect are woven through the everyday practices and interactions with community members. Being smaller than similar services allows OP volunteers to remember names and form longer-term connections with community members. The practice of remembering names here is shown to be an everyday practice of care and an ongoing practice of commoning. It is these ‘mundane acts of caring’ that are central in practices fostering a sense of belonging (Mee, 2009: 850):

Robyn: ... because we want everyone to have an identity, and be respected, you know, yeah and not be judged.
Miriam: And so for example actually remembering people’s names is a key part of that?
Robyn: It’s a huge part of it yes. And I mean if someone has come in here, like this week Tony came in here, I don’t know what day he may have been here, might have been Tuesday, think it was Monday. Young Tony. He came every day for about eighteen months and then he disappeared for a year. And he came back this week, and I remembered his name, and his face just beamed, his face just beamed. And someone
will come in once and they’ll come in again, and not always but most of the time I’ll remember their name. And I’ll say, ‘hello your name’s so-and-so.’ You’ve heard me. And ‘oh you remembered my name.’ Because a lot of the places they are just, nameless people, you know they’re just, you know numbers ... (Robyn, OP management).

Furthermore, the personal attention given to community members is shown at times of celebration such as birthdays that foster a sense of connection and belonging to OP.

Celebrating birthdays and special occasions are important everyday activities in the life of OP because they nurture OP as a site of connection and belonging. Drop-in centres can provide a home-like space for people unable to access similar spaces in conventional settings such as private dwellings (Fincher and Iveson, 2008). At OP a home-like space is provided through celebrating special occasions such as birthdays, Easter, Christmas or Melbourne Cup Day with its associated frivolity, costumes (such as funny hats) and foodstuffs such as a ‘traditional Christmas’ roast. These practices were important for OP in creating a family-like atmosphere and engaging in a little fun. As was argued in the OP newsletter (2008: 3):

many times, our clients say the only birthday wish they receive is the cake and card (and singalong) they get at Our Place. So we tell our volunteers not to underestimate their own contribution—small things can matter a lot to people who have nothing.

Simple celebrations such as singing happy birthday and receiving a card, can enhance a sense of belonging and connection to a particular group of people and perform OP into being as a home-like space or a place of connection. As Benny (community volunteer) is quoted as saying on the OP website ‘It’s not a soup kitchen. It’s like family. Everyone knows who’s who. I feel at home here’ (Our Place, 2010a). Here he is connecting the ideas of being ‘named’ to those of belonging and family. Whilst all community members will have different experiences of belonging and home, often they do not have other opportunities to celebrate in common. This may be because they are isolated or do not have the material means to feed themselves. The small things that create a sense of home, a sense of belonging and a sense of ownership reveal the care-full intention of OP volunteers and are part of performing OP into being as a social commons for community members and volunteers.
The majority of the volunteers I interviewed at OP volunteered because they wanted to do something with their spare time: either something to help, or something that allowed them to meet other people. Paul (OP volunteer) who volunteers for a range of organisations explains that for him:

it has just been great, we have a very extensive life, we have a very full life, and it’s from being a volunteer. The network of people that you meet, otherwise you're just locked into your little social group, and you really don’t do much at all, you don’t do anything.

Mary (OP volunteer) identified that she likes to volunteer as she enjoys socialising with the people at the centre: ‘funnily enough, with all the time I've on my hands, I’m probably there for exactly the same reasons as a lot of clients, socialising and talking’. I do not discount the emotionally and physically draining nature of the work done by volunteers, which I myself experienced, but want to emphasise how amongst the hard work of caring, the organisation becomes a social space for volunteers and community members as they forge connections with each other. At the same time, people’s motivations for being involved at OP are diverse.

Furthermore, the relationships and connections grown at OP reach beyond the bounds of the organisation and flow into other areas of life. In the context of not having these similar home-like spaces, OP becomes a site of care and support which is often connected to home as the centre straddles the public-private space division (Jupp, 2008; Mee, 2009; Smith, 2005). One of the most significant events in the life of OP while I was present was the tragic death of one of the long-term community members. The excerpt from my field diary below provides a perspective of the way the community members cared for and supported each other in times of grief and loss:

One of the [community members] had died that night before and his close friends, all part of the community, turned up in the morning and told Robyn (OP management) who I was helping in the kitchen … Robyn and all the … vollies and [community members] seemed in shock. He had arrived at the centre the day before and was really starting to get his life back on track. A tragic accident ended his life. Mixed emotions and feelings surrounded everyone as Robyn made an announcement with the news. Conversations followed that morning were centred on shock, grief, numbness, sadness and sorrow for the loss of a friend who everyone knew and regarded as a key person in the centre. Stories of his life and importance followed. I observed an announcement made that trauma counselling would be made available before lunch. [Yet] the chairs set up were left empty as friends gathered over a cigarette in a more informal session out front with Amanda (OP,
management) … The usual scrabble and card games did not occur. More people hung around for longer though as the space became a place where people sat and talked … Lunch was solemn (Field Diary excerpt 29 October 2009).

This example shows how community members cared for each other and are central in growing OP as a commons through their relationships. They did not take part in the offered formal counselling, but instead had a chat and a smoke out the front of the building together, as friends grieving over the loss of a friend. The connections made through OP are important in providing a space for relationships to grow and caring about to be practised through the provision of a space for this to happen that extended beyond the boundaries of the centre into the neighbourhood. These relationships leak out into many different spaces of the city. OP is just a site in which they are practised at particular times.

OP becomes a common resource for community members and volunteers who sustain the social commons through their presence and through the connections they make with each other. Whilst only a partial extent of the meaning and importance of OP in the lives of community members can be gleaned from my own observation and interviews, I know OP plays an important role as a common resource, a place of connection, somewhere to hang out where people are shown care and care for each other and that this experience is diverse. It plays a key role for people to just hang out, play cards, watch television, participate in art classes, chat with friends and eat some lunch for those who feel welcome and have a sense of belonging. The stories shared here illustrate how the ethics of care and justice shape the approach of OP volunteers, how their recollections and affective stance towards community members are mobilised at particular moments and how this is evident in the relationships and connections between people. Different types of actually existing care-full urban justice are revealed not only between volunteers but also in the connections between OP volunteers and the city.

6.4.2 Connecting the city and advocating for change

Relationships built between people provide the possibility for care and justice to be enacted. As previously explored, OP is reliant upon the goodwill of a broad network of supporters. Stories of generosity provided by Angela (OP Volunteer) show how ordinary people create caring connections in the city, recognising their being-in-
common and responsibility to take care of others. I focus on the connections that strengthen practices of gifting that support the OP model through the creation of linkages with other groups that enable OP to care for community members. Moreover, I explore how advocacy on both personal and general levels is connected to practices of care and justice as the case-work of OP allows Nicole (OP management) to advocate on behalf of community members.

The type of meaningful contact (Valentine, 2008) facilitated by being a volunteer and working with diverse people changes understandings and opinions. One of the ways in which micro-publics have been said to be transformative spaces that challenge stereotypes and encourage respect for diversity has been through the mode of meaningful contact (Valentine, 2008). Mediated forms of meaningful contact are practised through the connections OP volunteers have with friends and family. Volunteers talk about how they draw other people into the network of supporters at OP in a number of ways. Angela (OP volunteer) talks to her children about what homelessness means and the importance of that to their learning and how ‘I know it's made people think about what they can do to give in more practical ways to the community they live in’ (Angela, OP volunteer). Peter (OP volunteer) describes how his participation in OP draws interest from his friends:

> it's funny because a lot of people are really interested, outside this service, they’re really interested in what I do. Do you know Jeff? He volunteers on Friday, well he was talking to me about a year ago, and said he was thinking about volunteering. He’s a teacher I've known for years. And so I introduced him to the place too. He was talking about volunteering and I said ‘Well I've got just the place for you’.

Talking with friends and family about OP can have a number of flow-on effects. In particular, the connections can be a source of new volunteers. Simon, Grace and Belinda began volunteering at OP because they were having dinner with another volunteer who told them about the organisation. For volunteers the drop-in centre can also play a role as a site of transformative encounter and meaningful contact. As a middle-class, educated woman I was deeply challenged, uncomfortable, and changed during my time spent hanging out, chatting, playing cards and listening to ex-prisoners, homeless people, people with mental health concerns and/or drug addictions and other people whom I had rarely encountered in my day-to-day life. These encounters were transformative, thought provoking, and at times uncomfortable. It is through these
encounters that I gained insight into the lives and stories of the people I met which have in turn changed my ideas and life.

Volunteers utilise friendship networks to further the practices of gifting and encourage other people to become supporters by donating goods to OP. These networks sustain OP as a common resource and are an example of the ways that a commons is reproduced through broader connections. Some volunteers creatively harnesses the goodwill of their friends and connections. For example Angela (OP volunteer) mediates the care of her friends by calling for support for OP on a regular basis. She explains how:

[be]cause I live in the Inner West and know a lot of people that are very like-minded and supportive but work full-time, I would send, you know, my first email was just about … ‘winter’s coming,’ a very small thing about Our Place, how it was you know, run by volunteers, oily rag, and does anyone have any old coats? And of course I've got people that have got leather coats that are just out of fashion and they won’t wear anymore, and so I'd go collect them and make sure I gave them suitably, so they weren't dumped with it. So I started doing that, and at Christmas time … I realised that … one of the practical things that we could give (because they were very much about the practical and not just money) is … the ability to give people travel passes, so that if we set them up for an appointment, they could often do it … So I just did an email to my networks, told a short story that ‘if you wanted to donate for travel passes, I’ll do a collection,’ and so I've done that for like, I think, three or four years. So … we get between, now up to about three thousand dollars’ worth of money to spend specifically buying travel passes.

So the people that I tell … respond really positively … and they'll be supportive by giving money, giving clothes, giving in some way. And they’re people that give, most of them give naturally, but they’ll give very specifically and I think in a greater generosity, because they know me, therefore they’re connected … like I've got people in my life that you know, are single mums and are struggling and things like that, but they'll pay twelve dollars to give Our Place a travel pass, which they wouldn't have done, just to be supportive. And I value the small, you know, and the big. People I know that can give $500 cheques, there’s people I know that can't, but will give me, you know, will call me out of the blue saying, ‘do they need, do you need blankets?’ Or you know, when they shop at ALDI, will do an extra thing of teabags.

Angela (OP, volunteer) utilises her connections, her friendship networks throughout the city to support the work of OP. Once again they are sustaining OP in more-than-material ways. Angela’s involvement with OP becomes a way that people who cannot directly volunteer can take care of community members. Angela’s story shows how
everyday redistribution is mediated through relationships with people and the role of connections in sustaining OP as a social commons.

The work of OP is strengthened by a network of organisations that help clients-in-common. Part of the intention of OP is to work with other organisations in the area and not replicate the services they are offering. Instead OP utilises connections with these other groups and agencies in order to care for community members. Nicole (OP management) reflects on her connections with other groups:

Oh look it's been an absolute education, because our view has always been, we must operate in cooperation with all of the other services … We also have a philosophy that we don't do what somebody else is already doing well. So we don't do food parcels, we don't do clothing, except on the odd occasion, because someone needs something, because they’re standing up in rags … There’s a whole lot of stuff that we don't do, because there are other people who do it, and do it well. And we’re not reinventing the wheel here, we’re just providing a hub that all those other services can hang off, and we have a lot of people who ring us to find out where their clients are. Marrickville Mental Health, Redfern Mental Health, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, Mission Australia, the Rawson Centre, they’ll all ring us and say, ‘have you seen so-and-so?’ or ‘if you see this person, can you tell them I need …’ because we’re a central meeting point.

Connections are made with different organisations based on the needs of the community members because context-sensitive responses are required. A number of the OP management volunteers are active in various agency groups and organisations that work with similar people to advocate for appropriate care. In the case of Alfalfa House the connections made are ones of caring for or about farmers and other groups. In contrast, at OP the connections made with other groups assist OP in caring for community members.

The different types of connections OP has with these groups/businesses and government departments serve different purposes. Figure 6.9 shows some of these connections. Some of the organisations participate in practices of gifting to OP such as the art gallery and the local bakery. Other organisations/businesses play a different role; St Luke’s Op Shop provides people with a limited amount of clothing; Centrelink provides monetary help. These organisations and groups assist in caring for and enabling redistribution for community members. OP has connections with the Rawson Centre which provides emergency accommodation for men, and a law firm that provides free legal help every
Tuesday for community members. A significant number of ex-prisoners come to OP post-release due to the difficulties associated with being released without any food, money or accommodation. In response to this OP has formed important links with the Community Restorative Centre, an organisation that supports prisoners who have just been released through mentoring programs and other services. OP refers people to various support services based on personal need. Relationships and connections formed with other organisations help OP care for community members in contextually dependent ways.

Figure 6.9 Our Place Networks

OP connects quite regularly with organisations that have similar service users such as the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre (NNC). The relationships formed with these organisations facilitate the practising of actually existing care-full justice in particular situations. For example, Sharon from NNC used to regularly help out at OP in writing priority housing applications. Lisa (OP management) describes how she was able to access:

some kind of government funding from Newtown Neighbourhood Centre [who] paid her to do that outreach, and when she first started doing that, she actually came here one morning a week … it was two hours out of her working week, because this is where the clients were. And she started out being up there, and it was like, ‘yeah well if they’re all down at Our Place having breakfast, shouldn’t I go down there?’ So that was wonderful for us.
Caring for and helping community members access sources of redistribution are mediated through connections and relationships. In connecting with other agencies, OP volunteers are able to care for community members by helping them meet their basic needs and access the services they need to allow them to receive redistribution from the state in the form of welfare payments (Reitz-Pustejovsky, 2002).

Care and justice are practised through advocacy on an individual level through connections built between volunteers and community members. Individual advocacy is a form of care-full redistribution in which volunteers attempt to advocate for and meet the needs of someone who has been affected by systems and processes of injustice. Personal advocacy occurs via volunteers taking on the responsibility to provide care for community members when others will not. Particular situations and life stories need to be understood in context for adequate care and justice to be practised, particularly in the context of homelessness. Reitz-Pustejovsky (2002: 246) argues that,

> Proponents of an ethic of justice largely ignore the particularistic. Individuals mired not only in their present circumstances but also in the realities of their life histories leading to this degrading and demoralizing existence are not to be understood abstractly.

OP advocates for community members in contextually-specific ways as a response to the lack of competence of other agencies (Tronto, 1993). It is through the connections that OP volunteers have with the community members that everyday care-full redistribution is practised and volunteers are able to care for and enable continuing care for them. Kate (OP volunteer) discusses a number recollections she has of volunteers caring for community members:

Sarah (OP volunteer) who worked there before you came I think, she would do amazing things. One of the clients was pregnant and she had three other children or something in care. And she would go to her hospital visits with her … she did a lot of that kind of thing. Nicole (OP management), who’s gone all out with David (community member), you know, making sure he gets to court … going into the home situation and trying to get some of his possessions and things like that. I mean … Like Betty (community member) … Nicole took her to court … ringing all sorts of places trying to sort out you know, cause the system had failed someone like Betty … the mental health team had failed her. It was obvious to us what her problem was but it didn’t, it kind of just got missed by the system and the amount of effort they actually went to, the people from Our Place, and actually got her sorted in the end, into the right place where she should have been a long time ago …
Care is also practised through encouraging other agencies to work together for the best interests of the community members as OP plays an advocacy role through their connections. Amanda (OP, describes) how this happens at OP:

there are cases that are one off like that here, you know, where this woman really needs help. So even though there are lots of other services involved, it needed somebody to stand up and say ‘whoa, hang on a minute, let’s start from the beginning.’ So, in that respect, we’ve done that a few times. Carly (community member) is another one, as well as Pete (community member), he’s going to be another one of those, where we say ‘well hang on, all these people are out here, nobody wants to take on case management. We’re not case managers, but how about you all just build together, and do what’s right, you know, for the client, I guess.’ You know, but it really comes back to when you asked about justice, is being an advocate, I think, yeah, just sort of seeing the bigger picture.

In both of these examples OP is practising what Reitz-Pustejovsky (2002: 247) terms just care by ‘addressing multiple issues that are at once emotional, practical and physical’. OP does this by assisting community members access redistributive help provided by the state, which can be a barrier, through their connections, in a responsive way.

Conradson (2008) also finds people involved with social service organisations play an advocacy role, but in a broader sense. In his study of faith-based organisations in Christchurch, New Zealand, he found ‘a move beyond charity as emergency relief towards a broader concern for socioeconomic inequality and the structures and processes that (re)produce such outcomes’ (Conradson, 2008: 2135). There are parallels here with the work of OP and specifically with the work that Nicole (OP, management) is doing to advocate on broader levels for the rights of community members. Advocacy can occur at a larger scale, which is seen through Nicole’s connections with a number of agency groups and as an advocate on mental health issues. She describes how:

we have become very active in that whole issue of mental health, because we believe that the services, or the system that operates in this country at the moment, is woefully inadequate, and that, and we’re trying to influence change. We believe that there are a lot of our clients, for example, that do require institutional care that just isn’t available anymore, and as a result our view is that the jails are filling up with mentally ill people who should be patients and not prisoners ... And I attend a lot of forums and meeting about that particular issue and you know, I do a lot of interviews and writing about that kind of thing,
because it's a subject that we really believe that we have a role to play in, an issue that we believe we can influence.

Nicole regularly attends agency group meetings and writes letters to the editor in both local and national newspapers. Her advocacy has increased the number of OP supporters, bringing in a number of volunteers who heard about OP on radio or newspapers and were inspired by the OP model. Nicole cares about mental health issues, which motivates her to advocate for alternative measures for psychiatric care and to respond to policy announcements in print.

Connections between people, groups and the city play a key role in mediating actually existing care-full urban justice at particular moments. Similar to AH, OP is a social commons through which diverse groups of people form relationships of care and trust. Care and justice are practised by volunteers at OP who advocate for community members in order to achieve caring and just outcomes or just care (Reitz-Pustejovsky, 2002) through their connections with the city. Without these relationships of trust and respect built through ongoing care, volunteers would not be able to advocate on behalf of OP community members. The small acts that contribute to creating a sense of ownership, connection and belonging in OP such as remembering birthdays and names create a social space and open up the possibility for OP to become a home-like space in the city. These stories show how care and justice are practised through connections in ordinary ways that are important indicators of how people are attempting to be/think/do a different type of city.

6.5. Conclusion: a drop-in centre growing an urban commons

In this chapter my focus has been how actually existing care-full urban justice has been practised in a drop-in centre. OP becomes an urban commons through the intentional practices of volunteers who seek to make the centre an inclusive and open site for community members. OP becomes a progressive urban commons when community members care for one another, feel a sense of ownership, connection and belonging to Our Place. The intentionality of the volunteers in seeking to create a safe, welcoming, non-judgemental place, where people’s names are known and humanity recognised, are all part of growing OP as a place of acceptance. OP becomes a just and caring urban commons through these intentions.
The intentional practices of OP are central to creating a caring place for community members. Diverse practices of gifting uncover other ways that neighbourhood care can be done in neighbourhoods and cities through creative connections and linkages between volunteers, their friends, and local businesses that practise everyday redistributions that are more-than-material. Instead of the local bakery throwing away bread, it is used to feed people three days a week or more. OP draws people together in providing the basics such as food and shelter and relies on the generosity of connections that sustain the urban commons.

Care and justice are practised here in contextually dependent ways which attempt to respect the care recipients and meet their needs. The interdependent and contextually-specific practices of care and justice reveal how actually existing care-full urban justice can be practised on the ground. All of these everyday practices are contingent on the context that they are responding to, and the context in which they take place. The organisational ethos provides a just framework that means that the everyday material practices that constitute OP are constituting a just and caring urban commons that aims to be a place of acceptance, and aims to take care of people and redistribute the greatest amount of goods possible. Practices of care and justice such as showing people respect and responding to specific needs reveal how care and justice are also performed into being at particular moments. A key example of this practice is the help provided for people who need access to basics: food, medication and a home. Sometimes care is practised by sitting with people on the phone or helping them fill out forms. At other times volunteers advocate for individual community members to help them access redistributive measures that are difficult or confusing. Yet the interconnection between performance of care and justice and the organisational context in which this takes place reveals the way everyday material practices can be more broadly enrolled in the practice of care-full urban justice in the here and now.

At times OP is not a caring place and the work of doing community care as volunteers can become difficult. OP found it challenging to recruit volunteers to take on roles in the management committee and some volunteers found it difficult to find ways through which to fully share their skills. Particular personality clashes between volunteers and between clients occur that compromise the ethos of the organisation. Yet in understanding justice and care as partial and always unfolding, the messy and imperfect
ways in which commons like OP practice care-full urban justice reveal the importance of trying and that the struggle to create a place of care and justice is ongoing.

The resources given by the community also shape what care is offered and how everyday redistribution is practised. Furthermore it reveals the ways in which redistribution can be practised in more-than-material ways. Volunteers such as Andrew offer what they have to help directly in the form of art classes and exhibitions, whilst friends of Angela offer money to buy bus passes and care-full justice becomes a mediated practice. The generosity and sense of responsibility for others shown in the variety of gifts that are more-than-material reveal a sense of being-in-common and the role of a relational social ontology in shaping the practising of actually existing care-full urban justice. Thus the diverse ways actually existing care-full urban justice is practised are revealed in this complex example.

In exploring the everyday material practices of volunteers the diverse ways actually existing care-full urban justice are practised become visible through their interdependent, everyday, mediated and contextual practice. In caring for people in the neighbourhood by providing a safe place to hang out and meet others, the importance of spaces of encounter and connection in the city is reinforced. Without the physical meeting place, many people would not have met and relationships of mutual support and care would not have been formed. Again, the provision of a space in the city emphasises the need for urban commons that intentionally elicit practices of care and justice and create spaces of being-in-common. The possibility of these sites to reveal other ways of doing/being and thinking the city should not be underestimated.
Chapter Seven
Cooperative commoning at Alfalfa House food cooperative, Enmore
Chapter Seven: Cooperative commoning at Alfalfa House food cooperative, Enmore

7.1 Introduction

Alfalfa House (AH) is a not-for-profit food cooperative owned by its members. It is an example of an urban commons that wishes to be ‘the change we want to see’ (Louise, AH staff) in the world. AH is growing another food system, one that is predicated on relationships, practices and policies that recognise a responsibility for the in-common (Popke, 2009) and one that is brought into being through everyday material practices and connections that are changing what Barnett et al. (2011: 84) term the organisation of collective infrastructures of provisioning. They are an example of an urban commons that is doing food differently, growing other ways of being/doing/thinking urban life by changing the nature of food supply and consumption in the here and now. The context specific responses to perceived injustices of the food system demonstrate how the cooperative is shaped by a collective understanding of the in-common and a responsibility for the in-common (Popke, 2009). In this final example of an urban commons, actually existing care-full urban justice is most clearly expressed through the messy and interdependent ways care and justice are practised through everyday implicit practices and mediated relationships.

The study of AH as a site of possibility is in line with a number of recent explorations of alternative food economies and enterprises that play a role in ‘[c]ountering the notion that capitalism is either definitive or inevitable [instead] …locat[ing] economic agency in the human’ (Daya and Authar, 2012: 885). Using the work of Gibson-Graham (2006), I regard AH as a form of diverse economy with the capacity to bring more progressive economic subjectivities into being in the city. In addition, as a collectively owned food cooperative, AH demonstrates how practices of commoning that involve supplying and buying food as an alternative food network can be (though are not always) caring and just (Cox, 2010; Harris, 2009). Alternative food networks are often predicated on a desire to create more sustainable food systems which involve closer connections with farmers and producers in order to support local food production and low-impact farming methods such as organic farming (Evers and Hodgson, 2011). Care and justice can be, and indeed need to be, practised through ethical food networks, consumption practices and markets (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Harris, 2009; Smith, 2005)
because ‘the food system is absolutely foundational to any socially just society’ (Sumner, 2011: 65). Food cooperatives such as AH are actually existing alternatives to unjust global food monopolies which suggests how ‘landscapes of consumption can, under certain circumstances become “ethical places”’ (Malpass et al., 2007: 634). AH becomes an ‘ethical place’ when caring for and caring about the in-common (human and non-human) is performed through everyday practices and connections.

Connections between care, consumption and responsibility are not new (Cox, 2010; Daya and Authar, 2012; Massey, 2004; Popke, 2006). In the first section of this chapter (Section 7.2) I focus on the role encounter plays in how care-full urban justice is manifest, being reproduced through everyday material practices and implicit activisms (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). These practices are expressed through participation and the growing of a different food system that is performed into being in the organisational space of a food cooperative (Section 7.2.1). They are not spectacular acts; they are the mundane and ordinary practices that reproduce the commons. The interdependence of care and justice is particularly evident in the way AH becomes a transformative space; as a site where people in the city learn about the politics of food supply and consumption and shift everyday practices to form more caring and just ones (Section 7.2.2). Knowledge-sharing practices about how to ‘shop’ at AH, the politics of food supply/consumption and the health concerns/benefits of particular types of food reinforce a relational social ontology grounded on a collective understanding of our being-in-common and the need for care. Volunteers play an important role in ‘reproducing in common’ through their everyday practices of commoning (7.2.3) (De Angelis, 2010: 955). Moreover, in Section 7.2.4 I discuss how ethical decision-making processes reveal how an ‘everyday right to the city’ (Fincher, 2007: 41) is practised through systems and policies that seek to be care-full, allowing members to shape the cooperative to reflect their ‘heart’s desire’ (Harvey, 2012).

At AH people encounter more than just new ideas and ways of ‘doing food’, and in Section 7.3 I explore how connections between people/place/others reveal a sense of responsibility for the other, reflecting a relational social ontology (Section 7.3). The physical presence of AH in Enmore is an important node, a commons that facilitates the practising of care and justice through connections between members, staff, volunteers and customers. At particular moments AH becomes a space of care as relationships are
developed between friends and strangers (Section 7.3.1). Moreover, intentional policies are developed which seek to make AH a safe space for diverse groups, revealing how care-full recognition is practised and the ways in which the values and norms of the cooperative are negotiated in response to particular contexts and events. The safe space created here is less dependent upon the physical arrangement of materials, and more about the intentional engagement of co-op staff and volunteers with a politics of recognition. Relationships with farmers and suppliers reveal how a sense of responsibility and being-in-common is practised through relationships of supply and consumption (Section 7.3.2). AH becomes a site of encounter, a micro-public or community hub where diverse people can meet and engage in meaningful contact (Valentine, 2008). In Section 7.3.3 I explore how connections made between members, staff, suppliers, other groups and the city play a role in bringing care and justice into being at particular moments. This chapter reveals how care-full urban justice through AH:

gives you a taste of another way cities could be organised and that, you know, these really alienating experiences you have in other parts of the city aren’t necessarily something that has to be that way because this is a city in this space and time in history. It’s a choice we can make to change our cultural landscape and Alfalfa House is doing that every day (Karen, AH volunteer).

7.2 Everyday material practices and implicit activisms reproducing a food commons

Care-full urban justice can be practised to create a different food system, one that is not reliant on the objective of accumulating surplus to benefit the few. In this section I pursue three key strands of inquiry and focus on how the everyday practices that reproduce AH are imbued with actually existing care-full urban justice. Firstly, I focus on the material practices of commoning that constitute and reproduce AH (Section 7.2.1). These practices are infused with a sense of being-in-common (Popke, 2009) and responsibility for the other. I specifically focus on shopping practices. People do not shop in the same way at AH as they would in a large-scale supermarket because the cooperative is collectively owned which reflects an everyday right to the city. Members, volunteers and staff simultaneously mobilise an understanding of individual and collective responsibility to grow a different food system through participation at AH. Secondly, in Section 7.2.2 I explore AH as a site of encounter which enhances people’s
awareness of their being-in-common and therefore their responsibility for each other and the environment through a variety of knowledge-sharing practices that politicise the food system and facilitate care for other and self. AH becomes a space of care when staff and volunteers seek to take care of each other through providing information on healthy food and food for people with particular dietary needs such as children with allergies. Thirdly I discuss how volunteers and practices of gifting are vital in reproducing the organisation through everyday practices of commoning, and ordinary acts with larger impacts (Section 7.2.3). Fourthly, I focus on how ethical decision-making is practised in an ongoing way by staff, volunteers and members showing how a politics of recognition and participation can inform everyday practice (Section 7.2.4). This is revealed in the negotiation and development of buying principles, and the choices made on what to sell, what not to sell, and how to sell it. These decisions shape the materiality of what is bought. Material markers such as labels play a role in disseminating knowledge and facilitating ethical decision-making practices that reveal how values and norms are negotiated by the collective and individuals. These negotiations are never fixed, and nor do they stagnate, but rather they are ongoing situated engagements with ethical questions. AH uses consensus decision-making that seeks to include members, volunteers and staff in the ongoing management and governance of the cooperative and attempts to be both caring and once more recognises the everyday right to the city and ‘right to not-for-profit food’ (Iris, AH staff).

And finally, in Section 7.2.5, I use the example of waste to show the politics of material practices and reveal how a sense of responsibility and being-in-common is reflected in the intentionally care-full way the organisation deals with waste. I explore how AH attempts to minimise waste and packaging both within the shop and in the homes of the members/customers. The systems in place involve a number of different actors both human and non-human that reflect a relational social ontology. Worms, grubs, cars, bins, crates, boxes, towels, jars and bags are enrolled in constituting a different way of supplying, buying and consuming food as routines are formed that minimise some impacts of consumption and supply. These small acts start to shift everyday material practices towards more just and caring ones in a way that attempts to engage people in the politics of food at the same time as actively being a part of bringing a more caring and just food system into being in the city.
7.2.1 Growing a collectively owned and run food commons

When the fruit and vegetables come in, so do the crowds and this morning Alfalfa House is filled with regulars brandishing bags, boxes, and jars. They roam the store’s aisles, help themselves from the containers and wander through the stockroom as if they owned the place, which, of course, they do (Cooper, 2007a).

The AH model is a radical alternative to the present dominance of large-scale for-profit supermarkets in Australia, revealing a contextually-specific response to a perceived injustice. As Deidre (AH volunteer) aptly puts it, ‘it is quite a radical thing to be saying you don’t actually ever need to walk into Coles [one of Australia’s two largest supermarket chains] if you don’t need to’. In the context of average Australian urban living, it is radical to suggest this. Seventy per cent of all packaged groceries and 50% of all fresh fruit and vegetables bought nationally in 2008 were bought from the two largest retailers, Coles and Woolworths (Australian Competition and Consumer Commision, 2008). Refiguring how ordinary people can access other food supply systems that are predicated on a desire to care for people and the environment is a part of the challenge in making care-full and just cities, revealing other ways of thinking/doing/being consumption/production to/in the urban. Moreover, it reflects an ‘everyday right to the city’ (Fincher, 2007: 41), in that this not-for-profit food cooperative is owned by its members, giving them the ability and the mechanism, through consensus decision-making, to shape this part of the city to reflect their ‘hearts’ desire’ through active participation. I explore this form of participation in Section 7.2.4.

Collective ownership in the food cooperative can change the way people navigate the store and why they shop there. Members and volunteers have the opportunity to shape the cooperative to reflect their heart’s desire as Kira, a AH staff member says, ‘it’s everybody’s’. A number of interviewees contrasted the way they would participate in a conventional supermarket compared to AH, including James, an AH volunteer who describes how:

James: …it changes the way that I shop there. Because if something spills on the ground or I see that something needs doing or something needs re-stocking at Alfalfa House, I’ll be likely to just go and do whatever needs to be done to maintain the smooth running. Whereas in like a supermarket like Woolworths, I don’t feel that sense of ownership … I don’t participate if something needs cleaning up … So I kind of feel like I’m at home there, and I feel … kind of, a full participant because
I’m allowed to care about what happens, I’m allowed to contribute to the smooth functioning.

Miriam: And that’s something that’s important to you?

James: Yeah … I guess it kind of makes my time there feel more meaningful. Kind of being able to contribute more. Yeah. And I, I haven’t actually, I’ve never really tried to pull it apart like this but I guess it, there’s more of whatever it is that feels good about being in your own home, a sense of, a sense of belonging I suppose, a sense of having purpose there. Because all those things all contribute to what makes it valuable.

James connects ideas of agency, participation, ownership, attachment and belonging. He associates these elements with AH and his sense of ownership as fostering an understanding in him that he is a participant in the cooperative, which shapes how he navigates and engages in the space. Thus, collective ownership of this food system creates new spaces of possibility as it becomes more akin to a home-like space (Cornwell, 2012: 731). Members like James are encouraged to participate in their not-for-profit food store in many different ways. One important way is through buying food or groceries at the co-op which reproduces the commons.

AH is guided by a set of care-full and just collective objectives and goals that seek to create an ethical and just food system (see Section 4.3 for all of these objectives). The objective to ‘minimise resource wastage and, hence, encourage reuse and recycling’ (Alfalfa House, 2011c) changes the materiality of shopping at the cooperative, and what is sold at the co-op. In her article on AH, Cooper (2007a: 38) puts it this way:

From outside, it resembles a funky grocery shop but inside the differences from mainstream retail are immediate: no shelves packed with plastic cartons or packets. Instead, drums, tubs and jars contain good things in bulk. And rather than polished, homogenous fruit and vegetables, there's the store's eclectic centrepiece—the vibrant pyramid of seasonal crops.

Members/customers and volunteers have a different material relationship to the shopping space that requires a particular set of knowledge practices and behaviours. Participation in AH through shopping is a different experience to conventional shopping. The difference is immediate when you walk in the door as the bulk, minimally packaged, food and grocery items starkly contrast to more conventional shopping experiences. Co-op staff order stock in bulk which is then transferred into large tubs or gravity bins to be re-sold. The engagement of the member/customer through self-service from these tubs into containers brought from home is in stark
contrast to conventional supermarket shopping practices. The effects of changing to an AH way of shopping affects other realms of everyday life, such as domestic waste production, food storage organisation in the home. The story in Figure 7.1 gives a taste of how participating at AH by shopping might be a different experience to the conventional buying of food and groceries.

Figure 7.1 Story on shopping at Alfalfa House (developed from field diary observations and conversations)

At home I gather the many plastic containers, jars and green shopping bags I have spare or lying around.

When I arrive at the co-op I wash my hands and make sure I grab a shopping basket to carry all of the things I wish to buy.

I weigh my containers and jars at the counter on the scales and write the weights on them with a marker.

I take out my big lentil jar and scoop in as many lentils as I want. I repeat this for the flour, honey, dishwashing detergent, shampoo and olive oil, sometimes pouring and sometimes scooping what I want from the gravity bins or big tins. I wipe up any spills I might have made along the way. I think through what I value more—price, organic certification, fair trade status or origin as shown on the labels.

I place tins of diced tomato and coconut milk in my basket, a tub of yoghurt from the fridge and choose some apples, feijoas and broccoli from the fresh produce. I look for tomatoes in the fresh produce display, but realise they aren’t in season as it is winter. I choose some beetroot and grab a bunch of coriander from the fridge instead.

I do not move about the shop alone. Fellow members also move about with me. A member asks me a question about quinoa, and how to cook it. I discuss the benefits of quinoa with her. I overhear another customer asking a shop coordinator about gluten free flours as his child has just recently been diagnosed as coeliac.

I remember I have to buy cumin seeds but have no more containers, so I find a small paper bag that I fill with some seeds.

I am served at the counter by a shop coordinator who weighs my food and deducts the weight of the containers from the price. I receive a 25% discount as I had volunteered two hours that week.

When I get home I refill my jar of cumin with the seeds I have bought and put my new paper bag aside to take with me to the co-op next time. I place the other things I have bought in my pantry, fridge and fruit bowl.

(Source: Author, photos taken 13 October, 2010)

Customers and members thus confront another way of ‘doing food’ that raises awareness of particular justice and care issues at the same time as living out an
alternative politics by growing this food system. Shopping at AH requires quite a different set of embodied material practices and knowledges to participate and staff/members engage in a number of knowledge-sharing practices to help facilitate shifts in behaviour for new members.

### 7.2.2 Practices of knowledge-sharing and learning ways of commoning

In a similar way to the community gardens studied by Eizenberg (2011: 773), the co-op becomes a site where of spontaneous learning or ‘an informal urban resource for learning’. The different types of education are both spontaneous and planned (Eizenberg, 2011). The behaviours needed to negotiate the shop differ from conventional sites and are learnt through education and participation, as Sarah explains:

> I think … most people will never be enlightened by a negative example, and of course Alfalfa’s a living breathing [example]. It does a lot of the work for you. And if someone says, ‘hey Sarah, tell me about dot, dot, dot.’ You just say, ‘Oh look, just start shopping there and start living and breathing it, and it’ll all just, make sense, slowly but surely.’ And people can take it in at a pace that they can cope with. (Sarah, AH volunteer)

What people learn at AH are ways of commoning or dynamic spatial practices that comprise ways of participating in a food system (Chatterton, 2010: 626). Practices are learnt through formal and informal processes of spontaneous learning or knowledge sharing involving multiple actors. I separate these processes into three categories: (i) educating about how to shop differently; (ii) educating about the politics of food; (iii) and educating about health and food. In what follows I discuss these three areas of knowledge-sharing, in turn revealing how the cooperative is constituted through forms of supplying and buying that attempt to care for and about multiple others and that challenge the inequitable and unjust nature of the food system, not by contesting conventional forms of food provision alone, but also by growing a different food system.

#### (i) Educating about how to shop differently

We’re trying to, to educate people about, about where their food comes from, and what their food is, and can do, to the environment (Rick, AH staff).

Education on how to shop at AH is one of the ways staff care for new members and members learn the ways of commoning that reproduce the co-op. AH is a site
constituted by shopping practices that are learnt and reproduced by members, staff and volunteers at particular moments. The co-op prioritises minimising waste, re-use, recycling and transforming everyday practices. Describing first time shopping at AH as an adventure, Rick, an AH staff member, discusses how first time shoppers and members at AH can have a difficult time getting used to the changes in everyday material practices that are a part of the shopping experience because they can seem quite foreign. Part of the role of shop coordinators is to gently help new members or customers make the transition to shopping at AH, encouraging or introducing them to a shift in practice that results in a positive experience that people are more likely to repeat:

Miriam: And so do you see that as part of your role? To actually educate and teach?
Rick: Yeah, it definitely is … it’s in my job description … to inform people about our principles and … to help and guide them through their shopping adventure... So to kind of guide them … into the practices of Alfalfa House. Because when a customer walks in, they’ve been shopping at Woolworths for twenty years and they want to give it a go. It is so stressful. I remember the first time I came into the shop and just being so overwhelmed, by all of these things ...
Miriam: It’s quite alien isn’t it?
Rick: It is, you feel stupid, and you feel, you feel like yeah, really guilty for, for not knowing and not doing. And if you are faced with a shop coordinator who thinks ‘oh my god what an idiot,’ it’s just a totally alienating experience, and they’ll never come back.
Miriam: Yep, so you try and help them?
Rick: Yeah … you have to … I don’t ever want to force someone into going back to Alfalfa House, but I want to make sure that they feel comfortable (Rick, AH staff).

Providing people with more information about sustainable habits and practices does not necessarily translate into behavioural change (Barnett et al., 2011; Hobson, 2003: 17). Changing learnt behaviours and habits can be a difficult practice. At AH, education occurs through demonstrated behaviours as part of another way of buying/selling groceries, rather than through the provision of more information to assist in conventional shopping practices which is often the way ethical consumption in a supermarket environment occurs. The caring act of education about how to shop at AH involves encouraging people to bring their own containers and jars (as I did in the story in Figure 7.1) and introducing people to the objectives of reducing packaging and waste by buying food from gravity-fed bulk food bins shown in Figure 7.2. At times the
alienating experience of not knowing about the material practices at the co-op can be
minimised through the help of staff, volunteers and other members.

**Figure 7.2 Bulk food bins at Alfalfa House**

![Bulk food bins at Alfalfa House](image)

(Source: Author, taken 13 October, 2010)

Interestingly, the practice of shopping differently can raise awareness about the ethics of
food supply that begin to interrogate existing ways of buying food that are less just. Knowledge-sharing practices around food supply are common, particularly in terms of
providing education practices that promote ethical consumerism (Barnett et al., 2011). Staff play a role in educating people about the ethics of how food is sold and the
resources involved in packaging, as Iris (AH staff) puts it:

> a big part of what we do is educate. So people come in and they're like,
> ‘oh whoa, how do I shop here?’ And we’re are like, ‘you know, you can
> bring in your own containers, or you can buy them from here. And the
> reason that we ask you to do that is because it really minimises on waste
> if you have a sugar jar at home just bring in the sugar jar. Don’t go to the
> store and buy a sugar packet and bring it home and fill the sugar jar and
> throw the packet away. That doesn’t make sense. Bring the jar’… (Iris, AH staff).

People begin to think differently about objects like jars and packets. A small shift in
how people shop can flow on to affect other everyday practices and change how much
waste is produced in the home. For example, instead of recycling jars used to package
food, members start saving them and reuse them, or bring them in for other members to
reuse, as Mark (AH, volunteer) explains:
I think it plays a bigger role than most people think in the community, because even without thinking about it, you are going to that place. And you bring your jars with you … you bring the bag that’s been in your house for two years. You’re eating healthier, you’re learning things.

People encounter new ways of viewing packaging, perhaps in a way that acknowledges the multiple connections, interdependencies and environmental impacts that are embodied in the making of a jar. In a similar way the way members and volunteers view food stuffs shifts as AH plays a role in politicising supply and consumption.

(ii) Educating about food politics

It's also about connecting people with their food and putting a face to where it comes from, getting back in touch with where the food is grown and how the food cycle works (Oliver, 2009).

Education around food is a significant component of how AH is growing relational connections between people, place and non-human others, including the environment and raising awareness about the injustices and carelessness of existing food systems. These connections foster an understanding of our collective ‘being-in-common’ (Popke, 2009: 442) through an awareness of our interdependence that is manifest in the everyday material practices that constitute the organisation. Material practices of food supply reflect a set of negotiated values that are apparent in the presence of particular products on the shelves of the cooperative and reveal an engagement with the ethics of consumption. Ethical consumption can be ‘understood as an organized field of strategic interventions, that seeks to use everyday consumption as a surface of mobilization for wider, explicitly political aims and agendas’ (Barnett et al., 2011: 13). But the co-op is also involved in the ethics of supply and engages in both contestation and an attempt to change the current food system through a care-full justice ethos of collective provisioning or what I term doing food differently (Barnett et al., 2011: 84).

The friction between contestation and practising a different food system is evident in the day-to-day of AH. Being part of AH teaches members about the injustice of particular aspects of the conventional food supply system and models one that is more aware of the impacts on the shared commons. Members are made aware of seasonality, farming practices, health benefits of particular products, issues involved with particular processing methods and supply chains. Information on these issues is disseminated via
monthly e-newsletters, signage throughout the shop, staff and volunteers answering questions and by other means. The ways people think about food at the co-op can differ from conventional views because of these knowledge-sharing practices. In one interview, we discussed the role AH plays in transforming the relationship between people and food which Nicola (AH volunteer) and I both experienced:

Nicola: And it also teaches people that food doesn’t have to look perfect.
Miriam: Yeah exactly, if it has a dot on it that’s okay, it’s still an apple.
Nicola: That’s right, or if it’s little or weird looking and until you see that, and I’ve noticed this myself when I’ve brought fruit in the supermarket, I think I’m not taking that one. It’s got a bruise on it. But at Alfalfa, I think well that’s all right.
Miriam: Yeah. Isn’t that interesting, cause that happened to me as well. Yeah,
Nicola: I know … but it’s certainly … you know I can think one of the prime thing Alfalfa does is educate people … one of the things, I think one of the signs that they put on the fruit and vegetables, which is what you do … are fabulous, because sometimes, they’re really, amusing, and … is funny. If you only ever live in a supermarket you only shop like a supermarket shopper, don’t you?

Education about food politics thus takes a number of forms. It happens informally through spontaneous conversations and questions that people ask the staff about the supply of food. While I was volunteering at AH brown rice was not available due to the global rice shortage. Information about this shortage was in the newsletter and on the website and questions were asked of staff. For example, Iris (AH staff) discusses how ‘people come in and you know, they don’t know why we don’t have … organic rice … we have to just say “you know what, Australia’s really crappy at growing rice”’. During this time, members could make a choice, whether to continue to buy rice from other sources, or replace it with another more ethically produced grain. Here, the co-op responds to a particular context and ethical decisions, both individual and collective, are made this response.

Education occurs more formally through information that is provided on the website or in newsletters. When products are unable to be sourced for whatever reason, AH raises awareness about the issues surrounding the supply or production of particular products in its newsletter. For example, in March 2009 the AH newsletter featured an article on the effects of the recent floods, fires and other severe weather events that were interrupting fresh fruit and vegetable supplies. Pictures of the farmers’ flooded farms and stories of the effect of cyclone Larry on banana crops featured in this newsletter in
order to inform members of what was happening with their food supply.

AH is engaged in knowledge-sharing about the politics of food supply/consumption. The co-op mobilises an understanding of responsible consumption that could be read as adhering to discourses of the citizen consumer (Barnett et al., 2011), and is also engaged in changing both consumption habits and terms of supply by negotiating individual and collective understandings of responsibility. The intermingling of these two modes of action reveals how actually existing care-full urban justice is being practised through contestation as well as creativity, by educating about the problems of existing food systems, responding to that context, and growing a different form of food economy simultaneously. Importantly, at different times modes of resistance and modes of creating will be granted greater priority. This is revealed in how AH is seeking to care for members and customers by providing information about diets and food.

(iii) Educating people about health and food

AH is an example of an organisation that could be termed a space of care for those who are attempting to remain healthy, heal through food choices or care for others through the provision of particular food stuffs. A number of people who are members of AH have specific dietary requirements due to lifestyle/ethical choices (vegans, vegetarians, people on raw food diets) or health issues (coeliac, irritable bowel, allergies). AH enables members to care for themselves or others by providing particular foodstuffs at the co-op that they are unable to access elsewhere or cannot do so affordably. Care in this way can be understood as comprising affective responses to the needs of others. These responses that take place at particular moments and bring a space of care into being through the performance of caring acts (Conradson, 2003c). Care is practised through material systems of collective provisioning (Barnett et al., 2011: 84) that address the specific needs of members. Care is manifest through materials in space and the ways in which AH provides access to food stuffs that enable people to care for self and family is most akin to the ethic of care value of taking care of. The practice of taking care of involves assembling the resources, including material resources, that enable care to be practised which then transforms a site into a space of care that is always unfolding (Tronto, 1993: 107).
Conversations surrounding health and wellbeing often take place in AH between all types of actors and the materials such as food and groceries are assembled in the co-op space to care for members. Many people come to AH seeking information about particular foodstuffs to assist them with illnesses or with their lifestyle choices (e.g. veganism, vegetarianism, raw food diets) and the co-op is transformed into a space of care-for-self through providing access to these foodstuffs. Three interviewees commented on the way AH had supported them through some times of ill-health through nurturing their bodies by providing access to organic wholefoods and nutritional supplements. For example, one AH volunteer has a very specific diet as she suffers from a serious illness:

I have a no gluten, no dairy, extremely low fat, no flavourings no colourings, blah blah anyway I won’t take you through my dietary restrictions but … there’s a lot of stuff that’s quite hard to come by. And things are usually really expensive and lots of packaging.

AH provides a place for her to access the food that she needs through the collective provisioning of food. At the same time, care for others is practised through knowledge-sharing.

Through spontaneous learning (Eizenberg, 2011) volunteers learn from each other through conversations, or members share knowledge while they are shopping: ‘you pick up loads of stuff obviously from everybody else there, about nutrition and good things, and new concepts …’ (Sarah). Or, as illustrated in Figure 7.1, new members ask shop coordinators about particular products or what they should do when they are suffering from a particular medical condition:

**Iris:** We have someone on the e-news whose kid is, like, allergic to the world and she writes about how she’s come up with recipes to help him. And I’ve had people come in to the co-op and be like ‘a friend of a friend of a friend of mine is a member here and there was an article in your e-news about allergies and my kid is only a baby and is already allergic to everything … and I got this article and now I’m here and I want to get, you know these things’…

**Miriam:** So it really helps?

**Iris:** It’s a resource (Iris, AH staff).

Iris goes on to talk about why she takes questions around food and food products seriously and tries to help members and customers find information about food that will help them heal, or support their lifestyle choices such as deciding to be vegan. She is
attentive and responsive to their needs, reflecting a caring approach (Philips, 2007; Tronto, 1993).

Information about the health benefits of particular foodstuffs is also distributed electronically through the monthly e-newsletter and on the website through a regular spot called ‘Ask Rebecca’. Rebecca is a member of AH whose email is linked to the website so that AH members are able to ask her nutritional information. While I was writing this thesis in 2011, AH had begun to run various short courses or events in the AH shop including courses on raw food breakfasts, sourdough baking classes, healthy digestion classes, positive posture courses and vegetarian/vegan nutrition courses (which I attended in June 2011). The extent of AH’s focus on food and health education was expanding, which indicates the ongoing and varied nature of the role of health in caring for self and others in the co-op.

Health, wellbeing and food are thus interwoven in the AH spaces as people attempt to refashion habits or routines surrounding food for health reasons. The shop space itself becomes a space of care for self and others at particular moments through material practices of education surrounding health and wellbeing. Other informative spaces are created such as the newsletters on the website that contain information about how to shift practice, recipes that support particular diets, lists of products stocked and regular updated information. Each of these everyday forms of knowledge-sharing provides a way for the co-op to practice the goals and values of the organisation. Whether it be about how to shop at AH and why, issues in food supply and production or information relating to health and wellbeing, these forms of knowledge-sharing are enabled by everyday material practices. The changes associated with this knowledge-sharing involve a shift in everyday practices that reveal how actually existing care-full justice is practised through an understanding of collective interdependencies manifest around the provision of food. The practice of volunteering further enables people to care for self and others by continuing to reproduce the commons.

7.2.3 Reproducing the commons through volunteering and gifting
AH is sustained by members participating in the everyday material practices or practices of commoning that reproduce the common (Chatterton 2010:627). Volunteers are involved in practising implicit actvisms. This involves the participation of
volunteers and the practice of gifting. With an average of 50 volunteers per month, there is a steady pool of volunteers participating in running the cooperative every day, although there are always times when there are too many or too few volunteers. People volunteer for many different reasons: because they feel a sense of belonging to the AH community; because they want to help out; because they want to meet people; because they want to learn more about food and health related issues or because they are interested in sustainability. Mark (AH volunteer) describes the reasons he began volunteering at AH saying:

well there’s probably a few things, you know getting to know how … recently … I’ve begun to question where things come from, you know how it all works, how things are grown, so you know there’s that aspect…I got to meet a couple of people so you know, it seemed an interesting place. So that’s the people as well. They said, you know ‘I should come and volunteer, you do this and that’ so that … sounded interesting. Also you get a discount so there’s that as well.

Volunteers receive a 25% discount on all food and grocery items they purchase for every two hours they work and this is an important motivator for many volunteers. If they work eight hours or more each month they are eligible for a permanent 25% discount which rewards volunteers and makes food more affordable for them.

By encouraging volunteering, AH is able to minimise the number of employees in order to keep food prices more affordable. As Iris (AH staff) says, ‘Coles isn’t going to offer you a discount no matter how much time you spend there [laughs]’. The day-to-day tasks of volunteers are crucial to the way in which care-full urban justice is manifest through implicit activisms as relationships of care and connection are grown between people involved and volunteers reproduce the common in banal and ordinary ways. The everyday material practices of volunteers and staff can seem ordinary, however they are important to growing the commons with ‘people building their skills’ (Ethan, AH staff) through volunteering. Volunteer roles are shown below in Figure 7.3, revealing the diversity of the everyday material practices undertaken at AH.
Figure 7.3 Everyday material practices of volunteers at Alfalfa House

Figure 7.4 illustrates the diversity of volunteering practices in the form of a volunteering story that aims to help contextualise the material practices listed in Figure 7.3. The story has been assembled from recollections and moments of volunteering that were talked about by my interview participants and from recollections from my own 18-month experience as a regular volunteer. It shows the mundane nature of the work of volunteering, and at the same time reveals the importance of small acts and implicit activism that reproduce the commons (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). The small acts such as volunteering to help with set up, or making cups of tea for everyone when they need an energy boost help grow AH as a space of friendship and care. Each volunteer contributes to growing the urban commons directly or indirectly as people play a role in contributing to the everyday ways the commons is reproduced in ways which benefit members and the volunteers.
There are a number of ways AH is sustained by everyday practices of gifting as members, volunteers and staff donate their time and goods to support the co-op. Members donate jars, bags, spare food, cakes, towels, labour and skills when volunteering or shopping, all of which help sustain the commons. When a specific need is identified staff usually contact members and wait for the response. Iris (AH staff) describes how this has happened in the past:

yeah, okay, sure, so when we need something we usually put it in the e-news … and that goes out to 1700 of our members every month. And if we really need it I’ll even put it in the little blurb at the beginning before you open the e-news … and then often the responses kind of pour in … When we started the gravity bin drive a year ago, we sent out the e-news with ‘we’re going to start using gravity bins’ and here’s what they are. I got an email the next morning from a member who said ‘I’ve got like 40 of those, I used to run a lolly shop, you can have ’em if you like’.
During the gravity bin drive a number of suppliers donated chocolates that were sold to fundraise for the purchase of the equipment and members donated money and time to complete the required renovations. In part, the gravity bin fundraising drive was dependent upon the networks that surround AH, as Kath explains:

There’s a lot of love at Alfalfa, there’s a lot of good will. The money we raised for the gravity bins in 11 months, which is all Karmen’s hard work, but you know people have sold chocolate, people gave money. The people who supply products gave us money to buy bins. It kind of came from everywhere (Kath, AH volunteer).

As Kath mentions, Karmen (AH staff) played a major role in volunteering her time to the gravity bins project. It was through her relationships with suppliers and her creativity that goods were donated. Moreover, the excess bulk food bins that AH had after their gravity bin renovation were then gifted to another co-op. These practices of gifting time, labour and goods help sustain the co-op.

Mundane, banal and ordinary everyday material practices reproduce and constitute AH so that it can relate to food differently and bring another form of urban food system into being. These acts are not spectacular activist moments; they are everyday and ordinary, but they are vital for the reproduction of another way of relating to food and growing an alternative food economy. The everyday ethical decision-making processes are also ordinary, but they reveal how a sense of responsibility for the other is imbuing organisational and volunteer practices. Actually existing care-full urban justice can also be practised through particular systems and intentional policies that seek to be inclusive in their decision-making practices.

7.2.4 Ethical decision-making processes
The material practices of collective decision-making facilitate the negotiation of shared ethics. Arguably, the question of who has the ability to participate in decision-making practices is at the heart of discussions in urban justice-thinking on recognition and the rights to the city (Waterstone, 2009). Questions about who has the ability to transform and participate in the city, ‘to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts’ desire’ (Harvey, 2012: 4) are central to how spaces are transformed and made. Collective ownership of AH means that everyone has the right and opportunity to participate in the decision-making practices that shape the commons, whether or not that right is exercised. Ethical decisions made at AH shape the materiality of the cooperative and
material markers are used to help people make their own ethical decisions in relation to consumption. In this section I discuss how individuals and the collective make ethical decisions. These practices can be broken into two key modes: (i) individual decision-making, and (ii) collective inclusive decision-making negotiated in grounded context-specific ways.

(i) Individual decision-making processes: practicing mediated caring encounters

The physical presence of fruit, vegetables, chickpeas, dishwashing detergents, and so on in AH has multiple meanings. The objects themselves embody particular values and are often the result of a series of careful and thoughtful decisions that have been made through ethical negotiations surrounding the items for sale. To be sold at AH, these items have passed a number of ethical judgements that have resulted in their physical presence in the shop. At the same time, the labels on the items provide visual markers that allow members to make ethical decisions. Thus, responsibility for the human and non-human other is articulated through consumption and supply at the scale of the collective and the individual (Barnett et al., 2011; Young, 2011).

Food politics and ethical considerations are negotiated by members and customers while they are shopping at AH. We know from research into ethical consumption that people are motivated by diverse sets of ethical considerations (Barnett et al., 2011; Clarke et al., 2008; Lockie et al., 2002) and that people consuming organic foods in Australia are a diverse group (Lockie et al., 2002). Labels act as visual markers in order to communicate a set of values or ethical coordinates that facilitate the process of ethical decision-making by letting people know where the product is from, its organic status, what is in it and the price. Figure 7.5 provides an example of a label for trail mix, which informs people about what is contained in this product, where it comes from and what its organic status is. Labelling products plays a significant role in allowing members to make these types of ethical decisions about what products they wish to buy and thus the ethics they wish to practice.
The visual markers placed on food and groceries throughout the co-op are vital in mediating everyday ethical decision-making practices, as I illustrate by my shopping story in Figure 7.3, and they play a role in how each person’s identity as an ethical person is articulated (Barnett et al., 2005). They enable people to express their concern for justice and care for others, both near and at a distance (Cox, 2010: 32; Milligan, 2001; Popke, 2006; Silk, 1998). For example labels allow the negotiation of a series of important ethical questions. Iris (AH staff) puts it this way:

> [w]ith rice, do you support Fair Trade over local? ... do you support biodynamic at two hours away over organic and ten minutes away? Do you, you know … I’m not sure there’s a right answer, I’m not sure there is a way to find out (Iris, AH staff).

These questions and the answers to them are shaped by many different values and ethics including a sense of responsibility, care for others and even love for others (Barnett et al., 2005: 28-29). How members respond to these choices reveals their particular ethics around who and what they are seeking to care for.

At the same time, the choices I make as a participant at AH about what to buy, and how my ethics are able to be articulated, is also shaped by the collective provisioning of groceries and food (Barnett et al., 2011: 84). To some extent, I could navigate AH without thinking through my own ethics and place trust in the collective ethic that has enabled the products to be sold at AH. There is an element of trust placed in the staff to make appropriate ethical decisions, as James (AH volunteer) explains: ‘to a large extent I’m leaving that decision-making up to the stock coordinator. So by coming in and
supporting the shop I’m able to let them make some of those decisions’. Unlike a conventional supermarket, the decisions I make at AH are already made in the context of an organisation with a caring and just ethos manifest in a set of buying principles which shape what is sold, how it is sold and what is not sold. Hence, by participating in the practices of AH by shopping, I am directly growing a food economy with an awareness of our collective interdependence.

The buying principles that govern the selection of items are informed by the objectives of the co-op, which Louise (AH staff) sees as containing specific values:

- things like organic, GMO-free, vegetarian, vegan, minimally packaged, bulk … local isn’t officially written down anywhere but it fits in that heading of sustainable … Other things you would also look at would be it would be grown in an area that we would want it grown. So for example, getting Fair Trade rice from overseas actually makes a lot more sense than trying to grow rice in Victoria or in Sydney or near Sydney where we kinda don’t get a lot of rain [laughs].

Buying principles rely on staff in specific roles, such as the produce coordinator (responsible for fruit and vegetable supply) and groceries coordinator (responsible for all other products), making value judgements about the perceived ethics of products, as shown in Louise’s comment. They involve acknowledging the diverse values of members because:

- obviously we get quite a lot of opinions about food miles versus, dot, dot, dot, you know, in amongst different people, cause it’s a co-op and we have to try and respect each other’s feelings … and because we can’t be perfect, but, and in some ways we can be a bit blurry about those edges, about some of those things, which I’m sure many people would like to see firmed up. But I quite like the blurry edges, personally … (Sarah, AH volunteer).

AH thus becomes a site for agonistic politics that are vital to a space seeking to encourage diversity (Amin, 2002), as members negotiate, question, discuss and articulate differing values. The values and ethics of members are diverse and staff and volunteers negotiate these informally by asking questions of members about specific concerns, or by calling for a response in the newsletter. Additionally, the buying principles are often re-addressed. The decision-making processes are never stagnant, as Iris (AH staff) explains: ‘if we’ve made one decision, you know, years ago to get this kind of rice or something, if it comes up [again], it means we’ve gotten a decent option for rice … which is pretty exciting news’. Recently (July 2012) AH ran an online
survey of members to gauge what members value more: organic certification, local food, farmer-direct produce, or price. This survey is illustrative of AH’s ongoing commitment to asking ethical questions to inform collective values on the ground.

Another everyday mechanism to assist members and staff negotiate these ethical questions and their own ‘moral selving’ (Barnett et al., 2005) are knowledge-sharing practices in newsletters which provide information about why particular products are unavailable. An example mentioned many times in the interviews that illustrates this is the cashew nut. Ethan, a long-term member of the co-op explains:

**Ethan:** …when we discontinue products for whatever reason, we talk about why. If there’s a problem with a particular ingredient in a product, we talk about why, and if we’re not sure about the supply, because they’re exploiting workers. Cashews [are] a good example. Prior to probably the late 90s we were buying cashews from Mozambique, but we stopped buying cashews for some time, because of the way workers were treated, they started to lose their fingers, because they weren’t given protective gloves—

**Miriam:** Because the hulls are so poisonous, aren't they?

**Ethan:** Yes … But now we’re certain of what we’re buying, so we stopped buying and people respected it, but it was a tough call because people love cashews, but when you know that every time you eat one of those cashews, you’re contributing to this problem, that people are suffering because of what you're doing directly, just from eating a cashew (Ethan, AH staff).

There are a number of complex ethical negotiations playing out in this example that reveal a situated negotiation of actually existing care-full justice norms. Firstly, an awareness of the other (caring about) and responsibility for them in this instance, results in a desire to care for the other by not supporting an unjust trading relationship shown through the notion of care-at-a-distance (Popke, 2006; Silk, 1998). Both individuals and the collective take on this responsibility. This is revealed in the collective decision to stop buying cashews, because the co-op saw it as their direct collective responsibility to ensure what they buy is caring for workers. Informing people about the politics of food enables people to decide either to stop buying a particular product, or to buy it from somewhere else. Secondly it reveals the way the co-op took direct responsibility for the treatment of workers because buying a cashew meant harm to a worker (Barnett et al., 2011: 21). The co-op has a sense of responsibility for the other that is mediated and practised through relationships of trade (Milligan and Wiles, 2010; Popke, 2006). Thirdly, once a more caring and just supplier is found, the co-op resumes supply
because the everyday act of consumption of a cashew is viewed as political, as a site for ethical/political action and as a moment for care/justice to be articulated by growing a more caring food economy (Barnett et al., 2005, 2011; Cox, 2010). And finally, knowledge of or awareness of the plight of the other is what motivated action in the first place as a context-specific response to a particular situation (Philips, 2007; Tronto, 1993). Whilst the various ethical negotiations that took place can be viewed in multiple ways, they reveal the complex ways AH is practising both care and justice through the politicisation of supply, and through the sourcing of products that seek to bring about a more caring and just food system.

Labelling products as organic or chemical free and indicating where they come from is another method of allowing members to negotiate their ethics. These material markers help members engage with the complex politics of consumption and supply in order to develop context-specific norms that can govern the spaces of caring and just supply and consumption. The everyday collective systems of provisioning (Barnett et al., 2011: 84) are imbued with a relational ontology, an awareness of multiple others that is practised through care-full buying principles seeking to be just, through an acknowledgement of the complex and diverse ethical considerations that affect supply and consumption; through an engagement in agonistic politics (Amin, 2002) that recognises the situated nature of ethical judgements; and through the practicing of both a collective and shared responsibility for multiple others (Barnett et al., 2011). Consensus decision-making is a means through which this engagement with the politics of decision-making can and does happen.

(ii) Collective inclusive decision-making: everyday rights to the city
Collective consensus decision-making models reflect a commitment to democratic values that are practised every day. Decision-making practices are always complex, but participation in decision-making is an important way that everyday rights to the city are practised in the here and now. AH has adopted a flat, non-hierarchical structure of collective ownership and a formal consensus decision-making model that is followed in staff and management committee meetings. These meetings shape the materiality of the co-op and how it functions every day. Decision-making practices aim to be (but are not always) inclusive and facilitate what I term care-full recognition. All members are able to attend monthly management committee meetings and have the option of seeking to
be an elected member of this committee and thus shape the direction and everyday practices of the cooperative.

Consensus decision-making is a model that has been adopted by many different community organisations and groups including other cooperatives (see Cornwell, 2012). Although labelled consensus decision-making, this model does not require all members to agree. Rather, all:

people have been heard (in Dikec’s (2005) terms, their ‘democratic pronouncements’ have been heard) and their opinions taken into consideration before an agreement is reached and an action moves forward (or not) (Cornwell, 2012: 732).

Consensus decision-making involves a person acting as facilitator, and in the case of AH this role is shared. For Deidre (AH volunteer) democratic decision-making processes are a significant way care is practised through the co-op, as it is seen as ‘very caring of one’s … immediate neighbours’. Ethan (AH staff) makes a direct link between the practice of care and recognition:

I know in our staff meetings, we’re pretty big on consensus decision-making, ensuring that everyone comes along and hearing from everybody, there’s a real, you feel like there’s a duty of care in the way we treat each other. So that, you know, we don't um, we don't make decisions unless everyone’s happy with them.

The consensus decision-making model was highlighted in interviews as a way of overcoming conflict, but interviewees felt that as a model it worked best when there was a level of trust and an established relationship between people involved, especially in relation to staff and management.

Consensus decision-making is based on a number of processes that are dependent upon honest discussion that aims to allow for the space for multiple views and opinions to be voiced in a respectful manner. Rick spoke about this practice in relation to staff meetings:

because there’s, there’s technically no-one in charge, but people make decisions as a group. And so, you know, everyone has the right to be heard, and to voice their opinion, and if other people are willing to hear them, and some may agree, then they have, they have a kind of a say I suppose. So we do care a lot about what people have to say (Rick, AH staff).
Ethan (AH, staff) explained that the practice of making sure everyone has been heard is more successful in some meetings than others and can often mean that decision-making is a long process. AH has a set of guidelines that outline a detailed set of procedures and processes for consensus. These guidelines acknowledge that people do not always agree and provide a way forward for decision-making in situations where there is not full agreement, whilst recognising that people need to be heard. The practice of consensus decision-making does not always lead to care-full justice and can result in conflict. However, consensus decision-making is a form of an everyday *agonistic politics* and drawing on Amin (2002: 973) I wish to emphasise that it does not mean that all conflicts are resolved. Rather, it means that there is hopefully honesty and transparency in the decision-making process that can be built upon over time. The outcome of this type of decision-making and arguably all forms of decision-making, are therefore very dependent upon the people present in the room and their commitment to care for and about one another in order to recognise and enable their collective right to shape the cooperative to reflect ‘their heart’s desire’ (Harvey, 2012: 4). As a decision-making framework it holds much potential for allowing many diverse voices to be heard, although in practice this can be difficult. Nevertheless, this decision-making model is seen as having the potential to make radical impacts if used in other places and times. Ethan (AH staff) believes that:

> [i]f we had lots of little organisations doing that, the links that would be created, would send a firestorm out into the world and would change it overnight, if that was the basis of how you made decisions.

In this example the messy fusion and interdependence of care and justice practices manifest in ethical decision-making practices and the possibility this model might hold for ways of doing/being/thinking the city is shown. The everyday personal ethical decision-making practices take place in a context of a care-fully just ‘collective infrastructures of provisioning’ (Barnett et al., 2011: 84). It reveals the role that everyday practices, systems and processes might play in constituting urban commons in a way that enables care-full urban justice to come into being. Ethical decisions are always negotiated in an ongoing manner and are open to contestation as context-specific responses to ethical dilemmas. Moreover there is an element of intentionality, responsiveness, awareness and thoughtfulness that embeds care-full justice in practice, as is clearly shown in the example of how the cooperative approaches waste.
7.2.5 *Everyday practices care-fully dealing with waste*

The final area of everyday material practices I wish to outline here is the way in which AH care-fully approaches waste. This example reveals the role of practices, processes, policies and systems that intentionally seek to care for and about the global commons. Materials that wrap, cover, hold, wipe and house food/groceries and the food/groceries themselves are approached through a relational social ontology, an understanding that ‘we are dependent on others’ (Cox, 2010: 31). Importantly, it means that even though ‘Alfalfa House turns over a million dollars’ worth of product a year … we have one wheelie bin of rubbish a week’ (Iris, AH staff). This approach is manifest in a number of ways, and I would argue reveals a number of implicit activisms that are constituted through habits and routines and systems of waste disposal.

Care-full justice is revealed in the everyday material practices and habits that are part of how the co-op approaches waste. I first became aware of this approach whilst volunteering and reflecting on the systems in place to minimise waste and the role they play in ‘caring for the environment—through ethical buying/purchasing practices and the way that each person plays some role in keeping recycling, composting happening’ (Field diary extract, 24 February 2009). I began to think through what systems and practices constituted the AH approach to waste and the various actors and materials involved every day. As shown in Figure 7.6, these systems are followed in order to dispose of waste in ways that minimise the ecological impact of that waste or to look for alternative uses for the materials such as up-cycling bags, to avoid the production of waste. A number of different actors play a role in constituting this care-full way of approaching waste, which recognises the interdependence of living organisms and seeks to care for multiple others. Staff negotiate with suppliers about the packaging of their produce; volunteers refill big gravity food bin dispensers; members bring in their own containers and bags; store labels are made from degradable materials; bins are labelled for specific purposes such as composting or landfill; and worms break down compost and food scraps in community gardens.
Figure 7.6 Carefully dealing with waste at Alfalfa House

Waste systems and practices at AH involve multiple actors. They are dependent upon the connections and relationships that AH has with suppliers, members and the broader community. Louise (AH staff) explains the role of these relationships, describing how:

It is all about relationship building. It’s just like the cleaning products we get them from, some of them from one supplier who actually takes all of the containers back and takes the containers from the other supplier as well. So, we have vollies who take the cardboard to recycling. We’ve got people who pick up the compost for community gardens. Actually one of the farmer-direct fresh produce people we have at the moment is taking some of our compost to help grow food for us.

(Source: Author)
These everyday material practices contribute to a different way of approaching materials in the co-op and they seek to re-use and value them in ways other than as goods to be disposed of or recycled. A key example of this is in how the relationships with the suppliers mean that AH is able to change how food is packaged:

Loving Earth, one our chocolate suppliers, used to do their chocolate pre-pack. We got them to do it in bulk for us. That worked really well. They are now doing it in bulk for anyone who wants it. So it’s not actually about just creating change within Alfalfa but also about creating change outside Alfalfa’s walls so it’s part of something bigger (Louise, AH staff).

The changes made to how food is packaged begin in relationships made between AH and suppliers, but are spread out beyond this. I talk more about the importance of connections in facilitating care-full urban justice in Section 7.3. One of the challenges to AH achieving its goals was this very issue: suppliers not wanting to supply in bulk, or not wanting to use reusable materials to package foodstuffs. This example demonstrates how small acts and small gains are made through some relationships with effects beyond AH.

The approach AH takes to waste is intentional and involves people actively developing relationships, responding to specific situations and problem-solving. These systems are not stagnant, but are made and re-made based upon different conditions or changes in supply. They are in the process of becoming, as different assemblages of materials need to be negotiated. Staff and volunteers/members need to respond to different changes in how food is packaged, and are creative in the ways they continue to minimise waste:

As a staff member we do try and look for ways of reducing our waste constantly. If a supplier decides to change their packaging, and we can’t convince them to go back to their original packaging, it may, like say for instance, I’ll use the example of Demeter ... they went from using cloth bags—the cloth bags we could re-use—to using hessian sacks and covering the hessian sacks with paper. So we ended up with two waste [products], which is the hessian sacks and the paper bags. And so at the moment we’re working on a scheme to recycle the bags and cut them and make them into smaller bags that we can have them used in the shop (Rick, AH staff).

Although an inconvenience, the bag here is thus viewed as an opportunity to change one way of doing things, to enable the adoption of a different set of practices that continue to reflect the objectives and ethics of the organisation. The commons is thus sustained.
through dynamic spatial practices and routines (Chatterton, 2010: 626). Materials are re-used instead of discarded as actors negotiate new ways of approaching the materials.

The example of care-full waste practices reveals the very material, habitual and ordinary ways implicit activisms constitute and reproduce AH as a commons. These everyday material practices are imbued with actually existing care-full justice values, which reveal how a relational social ontology can be reflected in an acceptance of individual and shared responsibility. Moreover, AH becomes a knowledge-sharing site of spontaneous learning, whilst systems of provisioning and material markers in the co-op facilitate ethical decision-making. Actually existing care-full urban justice can be infused through particular systems, practices and processes that care for and about, recognise and acknowledge collective and individual responsibilities. The previous example of waste continues to reveal the importance of connections and relationships in facilitating care-full urban justice practices in the here and now. The connections grown at AH between members, staff, volunteers, other groups, suppliers and the city continue this work, and it is to the notion of connections, which are inextricably linked to the everyday material practices, that I now turn.

### 7.3 Connections growing an urban commons

Acknowledging that actually existing care-full urban justice can take place every day through mediated encounters, practices and connections is fundamentally grounded in an awareness of the importance of relationships and situated engagements with our being-in-common. I firstly explore the connections made between members, staff, volunteers and customers and how they are practised everyday through encounters with each other (Section 7.2.1). Relationships grown between people can enable care, and at particular moments, AH becomes a space of care and a micro-public where transformative interactions and meaningful contact can take place. However it is the intentional practices and commitment of volunteers and staff that make AH into a safe space through an engagement with a politics of recognition.

Secondly I discuss how connections made between the co-op and suppliers facilitate the practicing of care-full urban justice (Section 7.2.2). This is most evident in the direct relationships AH is seeking to grow with farmers and suppliers which reveal a sense of being-in-common and responsibility to take care of others. Thirdly, I describe how
connections made with other groups help reproduce other caring and just commons to reveal a web of networks that facilitate care-full justice in the urban through growing other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life and food systems (Section 7.2.3). And finally, I focus on the connections made through AH with the city and how the co-op becomes a social hub and a site that fosters difference (Section 7.2.4).

7.3.1 Growing connections through friendship and recognition

AH is a site of encounter where connections are built between participants and members sometimes come seeking a place of belonging. The creation of an AH community brings with it ongoing struggles around practising inclusion, welcoming, embracing and respecting diversity. Intentional policies attempt to make AH a safe space, but creating a safe space is a practice that needs to be continually worked at (Hunter, 2008). As a space of encounter, AH provides a meeting point for people to develop relationships and grow a sense of belonging and friendship. In this section I explore how AH becomes a space of connection that fosters a sense of belonging and friendship. Intentional practices of recognition transform AH into a space of care and a micro public that attempts to be (but is not always) inclusive.

Friendships are important sites through which care can be and is practised (Bowlby, 2011). The concept of belonging is one that geographers have used in order to describe the affective connections between people and place (Mee and Wright, 2009: 772). It involves people having a sense that they are ‘meant to be’ present and are connected to others, both human and non-human (Mee and Wright, 2009: 772). Care and belonging have also been connected by Mee (2009: 844-845) who explains how ‘[c]are involves [a] demonstrated affective stance (which contributes to a sense of belonging) and is an everyday practice between people who interact (contributing to everyday practices of belonging)’. While I was volunteering at AH I was surprised at the number of people I met who were volunteering at AH because they were new to Sydney and wanted to meet people with similar interests. Perhaps it is not surprising that people gravitate to particular sites in the city where they might have the opportunity to meet other people and build friendships. One of the long-term members of AH, Ethan (AH staff), recounts his experience of running orientation tours for new members when I asked why he thinks people become involved at AH:

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I used to run those tours for a number of years, and those that ran them before me would say the same thing. We would ask, ‘Why are you wanting to join the co-op?’ and one of the main things was that ‘well, I don't feel any sense of belonging to anything’. There’s a real lack of connection that people have, people don't know their neighbours … So we’d have people coming from all over the place, and my sense was that that’s the same reason I had, because I live in *, I know a few of my neighbours, but I don't know many people in the area, really, because we don't have a lot in common. It's not where you live, look at our cyberworld, people have connections all over the planet, it's not to do with where you live. So, I think people come together, and I've met a lot of my friends through the co-op. I’ve met so many people through there, and so have they.

As Ethan explains, the sites where connections are found can be other places than within the ‘local’ community. This echoes the argument of Amin and Thrift (2002: 43) who explain that a number of ‘localised community bonds’ still ‘thrive’ in cities whilst many people have a sense of connection to places and people outside their local neighbourhoods. However, in this example people are still looking for some form of physical presence with others in order to develop friendships and belonging.

What the AH space does is enable the process of encounter at particular moments, as people are able to interact, grow friendships and meet strangers in what can be considered both a ‘place-based’ community and a ‘community of interest’ (DeFillippis and North, 2004: 73). One way this happens is through volunteering, which facilitates connections between people and leads to friendship networks that exist outside the co-op. For one interviewee, Kira (AH staff), who moved to Australia from Europe, AH has played an integral role in providing a space for her to meet people with similar interests via volunteering and later working at the co-op. In particular, she has become close friends with another regular volunteer in a way that has positively affected her life. Through these one-on-one relationships and through the orientation of the organisational ethos, AH is also transformed into a space of care at particular moments. Drawing on a range of work on the ‘spaces, practices [and] experiences of care’, Conradson (2003b: 453) describes how:

care is woven into the fabric of particular social spaces and communities, at times supporting individuals and facilitating their well-being; at times breaking down and leaving significant gaps; and often requiring very significant amounts of effort.
In the case of AH, care is practised through relationships and connections between people. The relationships grown between people in turn transform the co-op into a space of care at particular moments through one-on-one relationships and through the atmosphere of the place. Eve (AH staff) puts it this way:

In the food co-op relationships are built then develop a lot further than within the walls of the organisation... it’s sort of about looking after each other. And you know, I’ve ended up baby-sitting people’s kids and someone ended up driving me home when I’ve had a broken bike you know ... those sorts of things come out of it ... I think they’re kind of integral to the organisation, but they happen above and beyond it as well. Just because of the type of people who are part of the community ’cause they’re interested in that. I mean, that’s why people shop there because they feel cared for. If you wanted to do your shopping then you’d go to Coles. But if you wanted to know who made it and feel like you had a real conversation with the person and feel like you can participate in and felt cared for then you’d go to the co-op.

Sarah (AH volunteer) talked about how the shop was a place that she felt comfortable coming to when she was unwell and that she also felt able to contribute and participate at AH by volunteering:

After I broke down I’d spent lot of time in the shop, in fact in a way that was the one thing that kept me feeling useful, was being able to do stuff around the shop. ’Cause it was about the one stress-free place I could, could come out to when I was particularly unwell. So yeah it’s been a pretty good spot.

In her interview Louise (AH staff) makes close connections between the ‘small simple things’ that volunteers and staff do and feeling cared for: ‘on simple level stuff like cups of tea, making sure people have lunch. These really, really simple, practical, little things, but stuff like that’ (Louise, AH staff). Small acts such as building relationships with volunteers and staff, making tea or bringing in a cake, are ways in which caring for each other is being practised. Thus, multiple practices and people make AH a caring place through a care-full orientation or approach.

Returning to the notion of belonging, one of the ongoing critiques of the idea of communities such as AH is that they can be an exclusionary or can deny difference (Staeheli, 2008a; Young, 1995). There are tensions surrounding how belonging, being welcoming, inclusion and exclusion play out in place because belonging is about boundary making (Mee and Wright, 2009). As Fincher and Iveson (2008: 171) intimate, ‘[n]o encounter, planned or not, can be envisaged without some form of exclusion being
associated with it’. Moreover, commons in an exclusionary category (Nonini, 2007). Customers/members of AH will not experience the same care, or the same sense of belonging and inclusion or the same level of recognition as volunteers as each other. To expect all 3000 members to have similar experiences would be unrealistic.

Although it is imperfect, we cannot simply write off the way AH is attempting to become more welcoming, to grow connections, to include and to embrace difference. And nor can one ignore the potential for transformative encounters to take place at AH. Instead, with Staeheli (2008b: 18) I argue that the practices of inclusion and belonging in communities need to be ‘engaged and worked with, rather than dismissed, ignored, or condemned’. Communities are full of contradictions, yet there is the possibility for agonism to be part of how these contradictions are negotiated (Staeheli, 2008a: 7). For example, Kath mentions that one of her motivations for being involved with AH is her desire to make AH a more welcoming place. She describes a number of friends who buy organic, but find AH an intimidating or cliquey space:

I find Alfalfa House really valuable, but a lot of people who are friends or peers or whatever, who buy organic food and are very of the mindset that should shop at Alfalfa House, don’t find the space very inviting, don’t find the staff very inviting, don’t find the whole atmosphere very inviting, and to me that’s a problem because we are a community organisation (Kath, AH volunteer).

Kath’s commitment to addressing these issues and make AH more welcoming for her friends is one that is echoed by other interviewees and reveals a desire to engage in caring for/about others. Yet for Yvette (AH volunteer), AH is a welcoming site where she is able to express her identity and her sexuality freely:

I definitely feel with experience and sexuality I have complete, complete freedom there…even little things like, if a friend of mine comes in and they’re an ex-lover and they’re people who I feel comfortable kissing on the lips.

She also expresses how she sees her role as an educative one and that she attempts to practise recognition and educate others through caring interactions:

on a personal sense being a person who will absolutely not tolerate homophobia and racism in a workplace and tries to interrogate my own practices in that sense, yeah I feel like I contribute in a social justice way. Knowing that I can, as much as possible, provide the safe space for difference … try to be in an educational kind of role … not meeting a comment that has not come out of animosity that may have in fact come
out of lack of exposure, meeting comment like that with care. And, with mindful compassion instead of with reaction (Yvette, AH volunteer).

This is an example of how spaces are made safe or unsafe through particular practices at particular moments and the multiple ways people will view a space, moment or group (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 485). Moreover, we see the intentional politics and practices of volunteers and staff who are attempting to practise a politics of difference and recognition.

Attempts have been made to ground AH in a progressive politics that tries to enable meaningful connection and recognition by encouraging the expression of multiple differences (or creating a progressive micro-public). Symbolic actions such as having an acknowledgement of traditional owners at the beginning of meetings are important ways of recognising past and present injustices. On Australia Day, one of the staff also asked the management committee if they could place a sign on the co-op door that recognised Aboriginal people as the traditional landowners. These small acts of recognition that seek to grow AH as a site of connection are significant.

The collective decision-making processes and ways of engaging democratically with conflict assists in enabling AH to be a more inclusive community that is doing what DeFillippis and North (2004: 86) call ‘working with and through difference’. This commitment to carefully working with difference both individually and collectively is manifest through an orientation towards the other and a desire to struggle with what it means to be inclusive through the development of a safer spaces policy.

The desire to embrace diversity and build a safe space for connection is reflected in the development of a safer spaces policy, which was implemented as a response to a customers’ homophobic behaviour in the shop and the commitment of the staff of AH to make sure people feel comfortable and ‘safe’ at AH. When asked about justice and how it plays out in the co-op Phil (AH staff) responds by mentioning the safer spaces policy:

So that’s kind of treating other people with respect but also understanding that other people might be different in a lot of ways. And trying to recognise your failings in understanding some differences and for example gender is a very complex term ... part of the safer spaces policy was to address that sort of thing and make it explicit … these binary terms aren’t simple and they should be recognised as such so people feel more comfortable with not conforming to a certain side.
The safer spaces policy, which all volunteers and staff were asked to read is about practising recognition and care by ensuring that conflict resolution systems are in place to respect that diversity and deal with issues that arise in a caring way:

It creates a … backdrop for having a caring sort of space that doesn’t discriminate against people and also policies and procedures that mean that if anything is to come up, that we deal with it respectfully (Eve, AH staff).

This policy is an example of how intentional policies or systems can be fashioned through context-specific approaches that seek to create safe and respectful places of interaction that encourage difference and minimise unsafe moments (Amin, 2002). Context-specific approaches to recognition are seen as an important way to avoid essentialist understandings and performances of particular identities (Fincher and Iveson, 2008). The techniques learnt by staff and members in dealing with conflict may help inform others about appropriate responses to negative behaviour and enhance conflict resolution skills. Although concerns were expressed in the interviews about conflicts between staff, management and volunteers, particularly around overwork (which echo unjust and uncaring worlds), the hope is that the safer spaces policy will aid in addressing some of these concerns alongside other policies and practices that aim to build relationships between staff and management. This is of course an ongoing process.

In looking at the connections made between people that are enabled through AH, I have highlighted three main aspects: belonging and friendship, spaces of care and safer spaces, and the role of informal and formal means of facilitating these connections. Each of the aspects of the connections made between people at AH emphasise relationships and the way they are encouraged through the physical space of the co-op as a site of encounter, and the systems that provide the opportunity for participation. The three aspects show the ways in which care and justice can be practised through connection, intentional policies and activities that seek to recognise difference and care for people in ways that are interdependent with forms of justice practice. In a different way, connections between staff and suppliers and farmers also reproduce the urban commons in a way that fosters actually existing care-full urban justice.
7.3.2 Care-full and just connections with producers and suppliers

And it’s not just about the shopping: by joining a co-op, you're joining a network of like-minded people and choosing to spend money with those with similar interests and values. This gives you the opportunity to influence the place where you shop and support an alternative model to the corporate chain store. In addition, through the ordering power of the co-op, you can help promote those values which can influence and support suppliers' policies and produce (Holbeck, 2010).

When we look at the notion of individual and collective responsibility, we can see the importance of both individual ethical consumption and the role of politically challenging and changing the collective infrastructures of provisioning (Barnett et al., 2011: 84). Both modes of ethical behaviour feed into an understanding of how actually existing care-full urban justice is being practised through the cooperative, and are manifest in the connections made between AH and suppliers/farmers. Here I look specifically at how actually existing care-full urban justice is practised through the connections made between AH and suppliers/producers, which are producing new types of solidarities. The process of directly supporting farmers through what is termed ‘Farmer Direct’ produce is a clear example and attempts to rework the ecological impacts, redistributive impacts and relational impacts of supply as people encounter new understandings of food and the food industry.

Creating direct relationships with farmers and producers of products is seen as an important part of the way in which AH is seeking to change the food system. The complexity of the connections between suppliers/producers/farmers and consumers have been studied (Clarke et al., 2008). However, the types of connections AH is growing with farmers reflect a broader engagement with context-specific ethical decisions shaping the choice to source food directly. AH sources some of its fruit, vegetables and grocery items directly from specific producers. These products are labelled Farmer Direct and can be uncertified or certified organic or local-chemical-free as described on the AH website:

[t]he co-op is keen to buy more of its supplies of fresh fruit and veg as well as other stock direct from farmers. Dealing direct means fairer and truer prices for farmers and consumers alike and provides farmers with real economic incentives to broaden the range of what they grow. It also gives the co-op a direct influence over quality, seasonal availability and genetic integrity – all of which helps meet the co-op's key objective to
provide food over which members have some form of control. Look out for Farmer Direct on price tags (Alfalfa House, 2011b).

There are many reasons motivating AH to source food directly from farmers. One is the proximity of the growers. Due to the physical location of AH close to the Sydney CBD, AH grows preferential relationships with farmers who are physically close to reduce transport costs and corresponding ecological impacts. It also provides assurance that the food produced is in season, reducing the need for further inputs. Another key reason is that as in conventional food supply systems, there are wholesalers who monopolise the food markets making it difficult for organic growers to receive a living wage:

they [market wholesalers] just have such a huge control over prices and … they can direct what people are eating pretty much by choosing—no, no one’s going to choose white eggplants, we’re not going to stock them—whereas if I talk to a farmer directly and say, ‘hey people want to eat this, can you grow it then we can have it in the shop?’ And they can also tell a grower ‘no we’re only going to pay $10 a box for tomatoes even though it costs them $30 a box to make’ and then they are going to have to end up selling it for under so that they can get anything for them (Eve, AH staff).

As Eve explains, there are many justice issues related to the way the food system works, particularly the existence of what she calls the ‘Market Mafia’. Ensuring fair prices for farmers can be seen as a form of redistribution.

The produce and grocery coordinators are seeking to create a more just and ethical system of collective provisioning by building connections with farmers and suppliers or through developing new types of solidarities and forms of caring for farmers. The close relationship with farmers, both local and further afield, means that in times of hardship or natural disaster, AH is able to directly respond. Louise (AH staff) explains this when she is talking about Farmer Direct:

Louise: It also means that it’s fresher. And we can also go hey, we sell a lot of this type of potato, but not so many of this one can you grow more of this next year please.
Miriam: So it’s a conversation?
Louise: Yeah, it’s a conversation, like I suppose fits with that trying to create a food system where you know the people. It’s a social justice thing as well as an environmental justice thing. Trying to take that kind of a holistic approach. And it also means like, for example that if Greg’s garlic crop fails, we’ll try to make sure we buy other things [from] him. So he’s still got income coming in so it’s also security for farmers.
By buying direct from farmers, producers are provided with greater security and profit in their operations. This refigures the actually existing economic relationships between farmers and retailers which could arguably be considered an everyday act of redistribution through reworking the terms of the economic transaction from the outset.

In a similar way, AH stocks a number of Fair Trade products, and many interviewees discuss this as being a significant way that AH is practising justice which they connected to Farmer Direct. The importance of farmers receiving a living wage is a prominent reason in explaining the desire to buy Farmer Direct and Fair Trade. In particular, Yvette (AH volunteer) spoke of the injustice of governments supporting conventional agricultural systems and cited Farmer Direct relationships as responding to these external issues:

I’m a very strong believer in Fair Trade…and I know that Alfalfa House supports Fair Trade…and for me that’s a social justice issue. In terms of supporting local growers and I mean, I believe that there’s an element of social justice in terms of our food politics and our growing politics. Because I feel like this, the Australia government’s policy of subsidizing conventional farming practices that are causing land degradation is…that’s a very big issue … not going into it. But I feel like organic farming is … has a tendency, is certainly not ideal, but small producers tend to have fairer employment practices, tend to be more along the line of Fair Trade policies.

Yvette connects the broader global connections of Fair Trade to the local politics of food supply in Australia, in a similar way to the way in which people in Bristol, explored by Malpass et al. (2007), were negotiating their interactions and understanding of ethical responsibility for both local and global farmers. In this and many other ways, interviewees see how they spend their money as political. Ethan (AH staff) talks about how, when AH buys directly from farmers, people are supporting the farmers directly and their communities indirectly:

buying direct from the farmers means we give more money to the farmers, because they get screwed all the time, and the big boys always do well out of it; they [the farmers] don’t. So in cutting out the distributor, in cutting out the supermarkets and buying direct, we support those families, and hence their communities.

Building relationships with the farmers is an important role of the produce and groceries coordinators who source the products for AH. Eve (AH staff) talks about this as
encouraging people to participate in how their food is produced and education and knowledge-sharing once more being part of the role of a food co-op:

That’s something extra to my job that I think's really important in terms of educating people about where their food comes from. Because, I mean, I didn’t even know what an apple tree looked like till I was 19. No people, especially people in the city growing up have no idea. It’s just a green drawing with red dots on it … I think part of that idea of the co-op where you get, where you have control over your food and you know where it comes from is the possibility to see that with your own…first hand … I’m really keen on creating relationships with farmers where we can go and visit them and we can see the produce and participate in even planting it and stuff I think that’s really exciting.

She uses the example of the farm visits as a way of building these relationships and enabling people to participate in the production of their food. Farm visits are run every few months by AH who invite members to visit the farms of some of their suppliers. Eve, as one of the organisers runs these visits on top of her normal role because she sees value in building connections between the farmers and AH members in this way. The relationships grown here are not superficial, but are longer-term commitments to create connections between farmers/producers and consumers. These connections enacted through AH provide a means for members to encounter the way food is grown, thereby developing a fuller awareness of the food system and the interdependencies between grower, environment and co-op member. An example of someone who went along to a farm visit is Mathew (AH volunteer), who talks about what he gained from the farm visits:

Well, I was never really sure of what techniques they used … I learnt a little bit about different techniques. And I was surprised about how adaptable each person was. And they really do have to change from season to season.

Louise (AH staff) talks about this type of encounter with the food growing process as ‘putting a face on your food’ or connecting to the food. This can be considered a transformative caring encounter that grows an awareness of the other, thereby developing an affective connection or understanding of mutual being-in-common in a context where it is quite easy to avoid meeting farmers and suppliers due to the nature of conventional food consumption. The AH way of explaining the importance of connection to food highlights the widespread disconnection, which is often touted as being a reason for why injustices continue as food buyers usually cannot see the impact
their purchasing decisions are having on distant others (Barnett et al., 2011; Barnett and Land, 2007; Milligan and Wiles, 2010; Popke, 2006).

The relationships built through the farm visits are thus granted extra importance in increasing awareness of the politics and issues surrounding food, an awareness AH also promotes through material practices of education/knowledge-sharing. The farm visits have resulted in members attending pickling and other workshops at the farms and growing their relationships with the farmers in other ways. By viewing these visits as a vehicle of meaningful contact which enable continuing interactions and relationships between AH members and farmers, one transforms perceptions and increases the awareness of customers’ responsibility to care for farmers and the environment. The relationships established and the connections developed between AH and the producers and suppliers of products potentially help change the food system both for AH and more broadly.

Connections made between farmers, producers, suppliers, and AH are part of the everyday constitution of a different way of doing food that reflects an awareness of interdependencies between farmer, member, supplier, customer, staff, land and seeds. These connections are grounded in a sense of a relational social ontology: a collective interdependence fostered through encounters with diverse others. Members and customers encounter the food system and build relationships with farmers which potentially foster caring practice and grow other modes of collective provisioning that are more caring and just. Connections grown with the city further AH’s ability to bring more just and ethical economies into being by supporting and growing other commons.

### 7.3.3 Growing other commons and connecting with the city

AH is a place of encounter, a meeting place or a community hub where diverse groups of people can meet, gather, share ideas or interact. At AH, actually existing care-full urban justice is practised through connections that are being made with the city. To show this I explore the role of AH as a meeting place and the materiality of the noticeboards as enabling what Fincher and Iveson (2008: 193) term mediated encounters. I then discuss the connections AH has to other organisations that help it fulfil its goal of minimising waste and the ways in which AH is growing like-minded commons, collectives and cooperatives through the practice of redistribution, not only
of money, but of goods and labour. AH is building a different food movement in the city through supporting other cooperatives and groups.

Overall, AH is a meeting place that connects diverse groups of people in many ways. For instance the connections made through noticeboards (Figure 7.7) mediate encounters between individuals (Fincher and Iveson, 2008). As James (AH volunteer) suggests:

[AH] becomes a meeting place and a place for sharing ideas … the noticeboard out the front is also significant. It’s a place where people can come for, for things they might associate with Alfalfa House that might be … of a spiritual nature or might be about organic, or sustainable food production.

The materiality of the noticeboards provides access points for people to be able to meet others, to advertise events or to communicate about political issues and communicate with a diverse range of co-op members (Fincher and Iveson, 2008: 193). These noticeboards are constantly changing as each day, notices are removed or more added as events come and go, or people need and find housemates.

Figure 7.7 Alfalfa House notice boards

( mun ctio fn, tum e 130 c e, 2010)

AH has a number of formal connections to local organisations that are grown through particular staff contacts, but also through organisational contacts. AH’s connections with the city help minimise waste, grow the food cooperative movement and support
like-minded organisations through sharing surplus. Figure 7.8 illustrates some of the connections AH has with a number of different groups and organisations.

**Figure 7.8 Selection of Alfalfa House networks**

These connections facilitate actually existing care-full urban justice by growing a number of different forms of commons. For example, AH is involved in a bag share program along with a number of other local food shops. This initiative was set up to share and use the large number of green bags in the community that would otherwise stay at home. The bag busters bag share program is run by the Watershed which is a local environmental organisation funded by City of Sydney and Marrickville councils that organise a number of workshops and environmental programs. Mathew and Louise both talk about the bag busters bag share program:
basically bag busters is a program coordinated out of the Watershed on King Street. What happens is ... everyone has heard of green bags but the problem is people buy green bags and there are 50 million at home and you don’t actually take them with you when you are shopping. And so the idea is that there is a deposit point where you can bring your excess ones and then the Watershed has vollies who pick that up and put labels on them about the program and there are signs out in the shop that if people don’t want to take a box they can borrow a bag and bring it back (Louise, AH staff).

The program helps AH further their objective of minimising waste through their partnership with the Watershed and reveals the role that connections in the local neighbourhood play in enabling care for the environment.

AH helps grow other commons in a number of ways. Firstly, AH is participating in building other economies and ways of supplying food through the participation of staff and members in broader food cooperative movements. Many members of AH are also members of other cooperatives in the Sydney area or further afield. A 10% discount on all stock is provided to members of other cooperative and other organisations. As AH is the largest food co-op in the Sydney area it plays a role of supporting other cooperatives. This happens through ad hoc buying groups that allow smaller cooperatives to share orders so that minimum purchase orders are achieved. For example, each week AH provides the produce for Jura Books food cooperative, run by an anarchist bookshop located in Petersham. Secondly, a way AH grows other co-ops is through the training of staff or volunteers from other cooperatives. A number of AH staff are or have been involved with Thoughtful Foods and the Australian Student Environment Network. A regular activity of both groups is the yearly co-op crawl, which involves members from all the Sydney cooperatives travelling to each cooperative by bike or other means, sharing knowledge, taking tours and providing support. Additionally AH has been involved in providing support to Rhubarb Food Co-op in the Eastern Suburbs. Finally, AH practices everyday redistribution by carefully dealing with the surplus created in a way that reproduces AH and grows other commons. The money made by the cooperative is reinvested in the co-op or gifted to other community groups through the monthly food grants program. This program involves groups receiving $100 worth of food at 25% off. Groups have included climate change activist camps, local schools, community gardens and others. AH gifts food each
week to The People’s Kitchen which is a weekly free or by-donation community meal (vegan) that is run out of Black Rose Books in Newtown.

As has been shown in all of the examples of connections that the above organisations create with each other, with farmers/suppliers and with the city, AH plays a significant role in maintaining and facilitating relationships. Central to all of these examples has been the way relationships have been fundamental to the role of AH as the space that enables connections to be formed. They are built between people through encounters, intentional exchange relationships, and through various material means. In addition, connections are constituted and remade over time. Care, support, encounter, redistribution, fairness, equity and care-at-a-distance are facilitated through connections both proximate and distant. Connections between members and suppliers and groups and individuals in the city reveal everyday practices of commoning as shown in the examples of waste minimisation, caring for farmers, providing fair prices and generally performing the food system differently in a way that encourages mutual support and sharing.

7.4 Conclusions
Actually existing care-full urban justice is manifest in many different ways in this example of an ethical place of collective supply and consumption. AH is a powerful example because it is an actually existing alternative to conventional food systems that is attempting to bring more caring and just food economies into being in the city by changing the ‘organization of collective infrastructures of provisioning’ (Barnett et al., 2011: 84). Ethical responsibility for the other is collectively and individually shared, changing the materiality of how and what is sold. Collective ownership of the commons changes how people relate to AH and how ethical decisions are made. In this example we see how care and justice are unfolding in messy and interdependent ways in the everyday city. The practices of actually existing care-full urban justice are contingent on the context in which they occur.

In the example of AH, we see how everyday material practices of commoning reflect a sense of being-in-common, as ethical decision-making practices shaping the materiality of the co-op reveal a shared understanding of responsibility for the other, both human and non-human. Small acts of care-full recognition and ethical decision-making
practices show how care-full justice norms are negotiated on the ground through collective consensus and individual decision-making processes mediated through physical markers and information in place. AH enables members to shape the cooperative, and therefore the city, through participatory decision-making practices reflecting ‘everyday rights to the city’ (Fincher, 2007: 41) practised in the here and now.

Spontaneous conversations and knowledge-sharing are part of learning how to participate in this commons, particularly in regards to waste practices and ways of shopping. Different ways of thinking about waste and materials grant insight into ways food supply and consumption can be done differently. Care is practised through the embracing of a sense of responsibility for the physical common and for interdependent others such as farmers and suppliers and this care is practised in a way that responds to a perceived injustice in the food system. There are no hard and fast rules in regards to what foodstuffs are more ethical or less ethical, as the ethical decisions made are revisited and renegotiated in contextually-specific ways and in relation to a sense of collective and individual responsibilities. However, the ways in which these negotiations occur, as seen in the example of cashew nuts, reveal the complexity of food ethics and how a sense of being-in-common and desire to participate in growing more just and caring food systems shapes practice.

AH reveals how other ways of doing/being/thinking the city (and food) do exist and by participating in them through volunteering or being a member, this urban commons is sustained and sustains the community of commoners. Deidre (AH volunteer) touches on the significance of AH by explaining how:

It’s main role is being there, is being an alternative, is being some kind of beacon of an alternative food … what I love about its role is that it’s very practical. You get your food there, there’s no esoteric book theory, it’s your food that you eat. So someone couldn’t just shop there their whole lives and have absolutely no affect from going there except from purchasing these items … it is so much more than that. It is not Woolworths, it’s not Coles. It has the alternative of making you take containers and take your bags and do the process of buying it … so its role to me, in that way; is to be an alternative and in a very practical way perhaps, um, sow the seeds of thinking about other ways of doing things. So they’re not preaching about you should do this, you should do this. It’s a very gentle way of perhaps inspiring change (Deidre, AH volunteer).
The example of AH shows how the banal, ordinary acts that reproduce the common, by reflecting more implicit activisms, can simultaneously co-exist with broader, bigger political aims to grow more caring and just food economies that acknowledge our collective being-in-common. The organisation becomes a space of care at particular moments through knowledge-sharing practices and the relationships grown between volunteers, members and staff. Interactions that occur are spontaneous and planned and relationships are both direct and mediated. Thus we see the intermingling of banal and ordinary activisms with more spectacular activisms as another way of doing food is grown in the here and now.

The everyday practices of actually existing care-full urban justice explored here, whilst imperfect, reveal how care and justice are practised in context-specific, everyday and mediated ways interdependently. It reveals how AH is growing another food system and how being alert to small acts might bring to light actually existing forms of transformative care-full urban justice in the here and now.
Chapter Eight
Cities of Possibility
Chapter Eight: Cities of Possibility

The purpose of this project has been to develop an argument for a grounded and everyday theorisation and application of what I have termed care-full urban justice. By focusing on actually existing justice and care practised in the here and now, I have been attuned to moments of possibility within cities in order to document a rich set of justice and care knowledges. Valuing and seeking to uncover everyday justice and care practices, I have focussed on the small acts, implicit activisms, and spectacular ways that actually existing care-full urban justice surfaces in response to, or independently of, injustices and carelessness. The forms of actually existing care-full urban justice uncovered are always unfolding and reveal the ways in which care-full urban justice can be practised as both progressive contestation and as developing other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life. I conclude this thesis by returning to my three aims and reflecting on how I have addressed these, and what the insights gained have meant for theorisations of the city. I begin by discussing the practice of looking for possibility in the city (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 7).

8.1 Uncovering possible cities situated in urban commons

The first aim of this thesis was to develop a theoretical approach to identifying sites and moments of possibility in the city in order to recognise more just and caring worlds. I have viewed research as a way to produce new knowledges of the world as an act of hope that the present might already contain other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Because of my focus on uncovering care and justice, I wished to avoid adopting a research epistemology and ontology that operated in the mode of generative critique—work that exposes, opposes, and proposes solutions to injustices—because such an approach remains primarily attuned to injustice (Marcuse, 2009a). There is more going on in the urban than the reproduction of injustice alone. At the same time, current theorisations of justice do not necessarily encompass the ways justice may be practised in the everyday. When coupled with an ethic of care, urban justice-thinking can reveal grounded practices of actually existing care and justice, as shown in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. My work to uncover actually existing care-full urban justice has therefore sought to hold the broad justice categories, and the values of an ethics of care, in tension with the practices observed on the ground in an effort to move...
knowledges of justice in the city beyond a focus on injustice (Fincher and Iveson, 2012).

To look to the city as a site of possibility and uncover actually existing care-full urban justice I required a research politics and ontological framing that made space for justice and care to emerge. Consequently the research politics adopted was one of possibility along with the practice of weak theorising which, I argue, makes room for care and justice to be uncovered in the city amidst other processes (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Weak theory can help reveal other ways of thinking/being/doing cities because it broadens the scope of academic knowledge beyond focusing on dominant framings and the reproduction of particular aggregative theories (Gibson-Graham, 2006). At the same time, it also provided me with a sense that there is no need for accounts of care and justice to be perfect, as may be the case in stronger, grander theoretical narratives. Instead, I have aimed to provide accounts of actually existing care and justice that reflect their complex, everyday expressions and tentative intersection, at the same time as arguing that these practices are important and meaningful for performing justice and care in the contexts studied.

Adopting weak theory was in line with my view of research as performative, where I embraced the role that I as a researcher play in bringing particular worlds into being through my research practice (Gibson-Graham, 2008). I have engaged with the practice of situated knowledges in order to reflexively outline my research politics and reveal how the knowledge I have created has been partial and context-specific. The situatedness of the knowledge gained is one of the strengths of this research approach as grounded empirical observations have shaped claims of truth rather than broad claims of universalism (Slocum, 2004). Acknowledging the partiality and situatedness of knowledge can be viewed as one of the key strengths of grounded research because deep understandings of the world can be provided from the perspective of ‘the fly’ that locates knowledge claims (Woodward et al., 2010). The analytical understanding of justice and care practice were drawn from my three case study organisations.

The knowledge claims I make about care-full urban justice have been developed from my experiences of volunteering at The Women’s Library, Our Place and Alfalfa House and interviewing other volunteers and staff of those organisations. The method of
researcher volunteering provided rich insights into the practice of care and justice due to the way in which the researcher was immersed in the everyday. These organisations were my entry point to understanding what the possibility of the city might look like and what forms of doing/thinking/being urban life were present. Whilst other possibilities are waiting to be uncovered elsewhere, the ways in which care and justice were practised in each organisation shaped my theorisation and development of the four premises of care-full urban justice which, I argue, can be used to guide other research. My theorisation of care-full urban justice has been crafted in a way that makes space for grounded, contextually-specific, relational, everyday and mediated expressions of care and justice. I have sought to open up limited understandings of abstract justice by enriching justice-thinking with the radical ethic of care. It was through my immersion in these urban commons that I began to think through the role of everyday material practices and connections in constituting these commons and the significance of implicit activisms.

In looking at cities as sites of possibility, I have argued that urban commons are a useful entry point for uncovering practices of care and justice as they are performed into being through everyday practices of commoning (Chatterton, 2010; De Angelis, 2003; Eizenberg, 2011). There is a distinct connection between the everyday and urban commons because commons are grown through practice. I have focussed on the everyday as a potentially transformative space where an emphasis on care and justice may cause practices, which are often seen as banal or ordinary, to become valued and politicised (Felski, 1999). In adopting the political project of uncovering and growing urban commons, the practice of reading for difference has been particularly useful for naming urban commons in the city and I have grown new understandings of the types of urban commons that may exist.

Extending the definition of urban commons provided by Eizenberg (2011), I propose an understanding of commons as peopled, as sustaining and sustained by a community of commoners, and as grown through everyday material practices and connections that can range beyond the physical bounds of place, to shape and constitute other places. This relational understanding provides an open framework to draw upon in order to locate progressive urban commons amidst portrayals of their absence in the inner city, which is often read for processes such as gentrification or neoliberalism (Fraser and Weninger,
2008; McGuirk and Dowling, 2009a, 2009b). As I have shown, an ethic of care and urban justice-thinking can inform how we detect progressive urban commons. Urban commons are ephemeral rather than fixed forms of organisation (Chatterton, 2010). Relying on care-full urban justice as a framework through which to view commons makes a space in which both progressive and regressive elements that may be a part of these commons at particular moments can come into view.

Whilst I have consciously avoided reproducing problematic critiques of the inadequacy of small-scale organisations in the face of the domination of neoliberal capitalism, I wish to acknowledge their existence briefly here (Hardt and Negri, 2000). These critiques would position local initiatives as reactionary, regressive, insignificant or fleeting in the face of global power (Gibson-Graham, 2002). The ephemeral nature of urban commons should be seen not as a failing, but as part and parcel of commons being reliant upon the practice of people. I acknowledge this critique in order to frame my discussion of Our Place as an example of an urban commons that has since closed. In response I argue that we cannot fully know the ongoing effects of people’s experiences within these commons, both positive or negative. Yet we can gain a glimpse of the meaning these organisations can have for the people involved and value the contribution to care-full urban justice that these sites can make.

On the last day of my time as a volunteer at Our Place an announcement was made that the centre was going to close after five years (2005-2010) working in the neighbourhood. The volunteers assembled at the meeting met the news with sadness. The circumstances of the management volunteers, who were the driving force behind the organisation, had changed in unexpected ways and after much deliberation, they had concluded the only option they had was to cease operation in a couple of months. The reason was not financial, as they had the funds to continue. Rather, the labour required by these management volunteers to continue the work of Our Place was no longer sustainable. As noted previously, it was increasingly difficult for the management volunteers to gain new recruits to the management committee due to the large time commitment needed.

Perhaps there is something to be learnt here about models for community organisations. Perhaps the reliance of the Our Place model on the work of a few that carry the
organisation tells us something about the need to share the load and vision amongst many in order to sustain urban commons, or that care work of the kind needed at Our Place is difficult. This example reveals the temporal and transitory nature of urban commons that exist for particular times and can then disappear. Our Place volunteers continue to care for community members to the best of their ability and relationships built between volunteers continue. Contacts were made with other agencies for particular community members who needed further care and attention from specific service providers. There were other places for community members to obtain meals and hang out, but nowhere like Our Place, as is expressed in Figure 8.1, a photo of a card that was given to each volunteer at a closing celebration. The quote on this card comes from one of the long term members of Our Place and encapsulates what the centre meant for him.

Figure 8.1 Card received celebrating Our Place’s life and commemorating its closure at a volunteer reunion at the end of 2010

I want to emphasise that the ephemeral or transitory nature of urban commons should not constrain our understanding of what these spaces can achieve, as explored in Chapter 6. Everyday experiences of justice and relationships of care grown within these commons may resonate and ripple out in the lives of people touched by the transformative experiences they have had through these commons. People’s experience at Our Place may in turn lead to other commons being built, lives being improved or lives being transformed by encounters with others. At the same time I think this
example highlights the radical nature of an ethic of care and how demanding the practice of care can be, whilst reinforcing the need for justice and care to be practised in interdependent ways, and the benefits of viewing these two ethics in tandem.

Searching for possibility in the city does not mean blindly ignoring injustice; rather, in the process of doing this research, the multiple manifestation of injustices and forms of carelessness also present in the city have been uncovered alongside the ways people are attempting to address these by resisting or growing other ways of doing/being/thinking the urban in their everyday lives. In this research, I sought to provide an account of the world that reveals care and justice as present practices shaping cities. By so doing it is my hope that my analyses have generated a greater understanding of what is possible in the city, particularly through the new concept of care-full urban justice.

8.2 Enriching justice-thinking with care-thinking: theorising care-full urban justice

And so I turn to the second aim of this thesis, which was to demonstrate what is made possible when care and justice are considered as valuable, interdependent ethics in urban theory. I have proposed a new utopian dreaming for urban theory that can be grown and mobilised to reflect on actually existing practices, here, not ‘out there’ (Pinder, 2002), and now, not at some far off future point. I have explored the limitations of justice-thinking, one of which has been the abstract and universal framing of justice and the relative absence of the everyday from conceptualisations of justice practice. I have argued that being alert to the everyday ways in which justice is practised through implicit activisms widens our view of, and makes room for, justice to be uncovered in the here and now. I have gone one step further and argued that the situated, practised and relational focus of care-thinking enhances urban justice-thinking. To take this forward I have developed the concept of care-full urban justice in order to unite and enrich care-thinking and justice-thinking by arguing that the two ethics are interdependent and inform my utopian dreamings. The concept of care-full urban justice brings relational, everyday, grounded practices of justice and care into our dreaming of the possibilities of cities. I argue for a grounded, theory-informed engagement with how actually existing care-full urban justice might be manifest because context, position, location and situation are vital for how justice and care can be practised. The concept of care-full urban justice makes space for those practices and connections that may be seen
as too small or banal to be part of broader justice programs because daily life is political. It also makes space for the incomplete or tentative ways in which justice and care may intersect in everyday life, as the ideal of care that is fully just and justice that is fully caring will, inevitably, always be an ideal that is always in process rather than being a fixed achievement.

Care-full urban justice can be practised through growing and participating in other more care-fully just ways of doing/being/thinking urban life such as creating safe places for people to gather, transforming the food system or respecting marginalised communities. By looking for actually existing care-full urban justice I intentionally draw on the categories of care-thinking and justice-thinking—redistribution, recognition, encounter and taking care of, caring about, caring for/care giving and care receiving (Fincher and Iveson, 2008; Tronto, 1993). Theorisations of care and justice practice were strategically drawn upon to inform understandings of everyday practice. The benefit of drawing on the rich conceptualisations of care and justice is that, together, these categories grant enough room to encompass how care and justice are practised interdependently, and in ways that involve partial intersections between care and justice, unlike framings of justice or care alone. For example the provision of brochures on sexual assault at the Women’s Library, or the help provided with forms at Our Place, are everyday responses to injustice, yet they are difficult to characterise through the sole frame of justice or care. Perhaps the everyday in its ordinary multiplicity bears witness to the complexity of justice and care responses that always take place within diverse contexts and as incomplete responses to present injustices and carelessness.

The four premises that comprise my theory of care-full urban justice, in relation to the examples chosen, also expound the second aim of this thesis. Firstly, I argued that care and justice need to be approached through a relational social ontology. As explored in Chapter 3, justice-thinking is enriched by being grounded in a relational social ontology. A relational social ontology foregrounds the role of relationships and the common in how we think through notions of responsibility and justice-practice. The Alfalfa House example most clearly showed how a sense of the in-common (Popke, 2009) was shaping people’s everyday practices in relation to both consumption and waste practices. At Alfalfa House, practices of consumption were politicised and relationships between individual practices as reproducing particular forms of economies
were heightened by an awareness of the in-common—interdependencies between producers and consumers, waste and environmental degradation, food and farming, personal and political. In addition, both the Women’s Library and Our Place were places where every day, people took responsibility for the wellbeing of others, which shaped their organisational ethos and revealed the role of collective spaces in facilitating opportunities for care and justice to be practised.

The second premise of care-full urban justice is that care and justice are distinct yet interdependent practices that can bring the just and caring city into being. Revealing the interdependency of care and justice was a key political aim of this thesis. This aim was chosen in order to bring the role of care in repairing our world into view, in the context of its relative absence from framings which focus on justice. Ideally the two ethics would always be practised together. For example, I have argued that redistribution needs to be caring and revealed the work that Our Place did to ensure that people who perhaps cannot understand Centrelink systems or cannot read, could access formal welfare programs, reflecting a form of just care (Reitz-Pustejovsky, 2002). Ideally, universal policies of redistribution would be caring and just, but they are not always so when practised on the ground. Furthermore, responses to injustices often require care. How people can be encouraged to care or plan for care is a key question for another project.

The third premise is that care-full urban justice necessitates that care and justice be practised and understood in contextually dependent ways. Weak theorising and situated knowledges have affected how I have developed this premise in that care-full urban justice makes space for multiplicity in how the ethics are practised on the ground. I argued that care-full urban justice is contingent upon context and can only be understood through engaging with a situated context. Whilst we can never possibly comprehend the entire context in which any practice takes place, we can make informed deductions based on past theorisations of what actually existing care-full urban justice may look like and relate these to our own experience and observation. I sought to reflect on the practices of care and justice observed at my case study commons as contextually-specific responses to particular injustices and forms or carelessness or as revelations of other ways to do/think/be the city. For example, at Our Place, care-full justice was practised through the provision of a safe space for marginalised community members to
hang out and access food because of the context of fear and threat that affected many of them. Importantly, the examples of urban commons explored here show how justice in particular is practised as more-than-contestation. Everyday justice practices can also be about creating and growing other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life, as shown by Alfalfa House growing a different food system.

The fourth and final premise of care-full urban justice is that care and justice can be practised in everyday ways as well as through mediated encounters. In each of the case study examples we see the ways implicit activisms have been enrolled in the reproduction of the commons. Everyday practices, such as filling a gravity-fed bulk food bin at Alfalfa House, seem banal in isolation. However the context in which these practices take place is important. For example, buying food from bulk bins in a context where excess packaging and waste is the norm, can be seen as a more caring and just practice. Another example is that of the Women’s Library where selling second-hand books can seem ordinary and unimportant. Yet it is the proceeds from these books that assist in keeping the library open which enables it to do the work it is doing for the feminist movement. Consequently, everyday practices can be understood as contributing to care-full urban justice due to the context in which they are taking place rather than by understanding each practice in isolation. Moreover, the mediated ways care-full urban justice is practised are evident at Our Place in relation to the networks of supporters that provided oranges, bread, bacon, eggs and bus passes in order to ensure that Our Place community members were cared for. This and other examples of everyday redistribution allowed me to highlight how these mediated forms of care and justice are already manifest in the urban.

Knowledge of actually existing justice and care can be enriched by grounded accounts. Care and justice practice can only be understood in context because they are themselves contextual responses to injustice and carelessness or responses arising from dreams and hopes of caring and just ways of doing the world. My aim has been to develop an ethical framework (care-full urban justice) that does not predetermine the playing out of these ethics from the outset, but instead makes space for contingency, diversity and contextually-specific practices of care-full urban justice to unfold.
8.3 Uncovering actually existing care-full urban justice

Building from the approach and conceptualisations developed through aims one and two, the bulk of this research project has been focused on addressing the third aim of this thesis which has been to develop a grounded understanding of actually existing care-full urban justice practised in the here and now. Whilst I have already begun recounting some of the grounded insights that have been gained through this research, in this final section I focus on the role of organisational ethos, everyday material practices and connections in facilitating actually existing care-full urban justice in a series of urban commons. These were the analytical lenses through which I reflected on care-full urban justice.

Care-full urban justice was manifest in the organisational ethos of each of the commons studied. I made the organisational ethos an explicit focus of my analysis of Our Place more so than the other organisations, inspired by the literature on drop-in centres (Cloke et al., 2005; Conradson, 2003a). For example, the practices of taking care of and caring for were clearly recognisable as being practised in tandem with redistribution and informing the organisational ethos of Our Place. However, it was the everyday practices that evidenced the desire of management and volunteers to create a place of acceptance that embraced diversity. In this example I argued that systems, processes and policies can be shaped to reflect the ethics of care and justice. Yet it is in the respectful and non-judgemental approach of volunteers and staff that Our Place becomes a place of acceptance and therefore recognition, and a progressive urban commons. People volunteer or are members of these organisations for diverse reasons and may not necessarily be motivated by progressive politics. Therefore there needs to be a connection between the ethos of organisations and the practices that constitute it, because it is the practice of the people involved that make a site of care and justice.

The second analytical frame through which I observed care-full urban justice was that of everyday material practices. Thinking through the role of small acts and implicit activisms (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) in reproducing each common made me alert to how each common both sustained practice and was sustained by practice. Understanding the everyday material practices as implicit activisms in the context of the organisation meant that ordinary practices were given greater importance than when studied in isolation.
In relation to the everyday material practices that constituted each commons, I discussed how materials were involved in the practice of taking care of and caring for women at the Women’s Library. The lounge, brochures, chairs, signs, and books had greater meaning than their physical presence due to the intentionality that shaped their placement. Caring for strangers through the provision of a place for women to be in the city is a vital role played by the Women’s Library. In particular, the example of the Women’s Library opens up broader discussions about how injustices may be addressed in the here and now and the need for care to be a part of this process. In being a critically exclusive commons in response to broader injustices, the Women’s Library sought to be a safe place for strangers and members. Moreover, the provision of books by women authors and books that are not regularly accessible was a response to a broader form of injustice limiting the voices of women and expression of diverse sexualities. And so, even in the material practices that reproduce these commons, we see the contextually dependent articulations of care-full urban justice as situated responses.

In a different way the material practices shaping Alfalfa House were also connected to the organisation’s ethos and were responding to problems in unsustainable food systems. The systems of waste disposal and the ways that food is provisioned in bulk bins and through minimal packaging reflected the aims of Alfalfa House to bring into being a food system that cared for commons. The everyday material practices of shopping at Alfalfa House is an example of how people constitute another way of doing food through their practice. This example exposed how changes to the food system can be made in a way that affects individual consumption and creates a different form of organisational provisioning (Barnett et al., 2005, 2011). Alfalfa House is transforming how consumption and supply are done and this changes the forms of material practice that are involved in consuming and supplying food. Its practices change how decisions were made individually and collectively. My analysis showed how progressive commons can be grown around different forms of economy, highlighting how habits and routines bring about other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life. I argue that a relational sense of being-in-common, and interdependence with non-human and human others, is expressed in the organisational ethos and connections shaping Alfalfa House. In wanting to care for producers and the environment through ethical consumption, a sense of responsibility for others (both human and non-human) was expressed.
The final analytical category shaping my analysis of the ways care-full urban justice was manifest was that of connections. Connections made between people, commons, other groups, suppliers, businesses and the city more broadly reflected how care-full urban justice was practised through relationships. The role of connections is evident through the direct connections Alfalfa House made with suppliers and producers in order to ensure producers received fair wages and were cared for. In a different way care-full urban justice, and more specifically the practices of everyday redistribution and taking care of, were practised through the provision of material or monetary gifts at Our Place. This example revealed everyday forms of generosity and the ways in which people were attempting to care for community members. On a different note, the connections grown at the Women’s Library were particularly significant in linking with broader feminist and lesbian rights movements. Here we saw the role of a commons as a space of encounter and relationship building, where groups of women could gather and participate in forms of counter publics, grown at particular moments (Iveson, 2007). Each organisation played a role as a community hub and meeting point for people in the city, as a place to grow relationships and encounter others or different ideas and practices. Importantly, by being present in the everyday, and by participating in growing and bringing these commons into being via researcher volunteering, I became aware of the significance of practices and connections in reflecting care-full urban justice.

8.4 Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued for the role of care-full urban justice as a lens through which to see the possibility and grounded practices of actually existing care and justice present in the city. In terms of the applications of this concept, care-full urban justice enhances urban justice-thinking by providing a vocabulary to describe everyday and ordinary forms of justice and care. Utopian thinking enabled me to engage with dreams for cities in tension with actually existing experiences in the hope that care-full and just worlds are always in process. The approach I have taken to viewing care-full urban justice politicises the everyday and places responsibility for others at the forefront of practice due to our interdependence with both human and non-human actors. It has been my intention to highlight the importance of spaces like urban commons in fostering relationships and other ways of doing/being/thinking urban life. This thesis and the ideas contained within it will hopefully assist people in thinking differently about what is possible in cities. It may assist people engage with the transformative potential of an
In this thesis I have highlighted the ways in which both justice and care are manifest in everyday practices that constitute urban commons in modest and imperfect, but real, ways in the present. I have shown how care-full urban justice can be used as a lens through which to discern progressive forms of urban commons. I have emphasised the need for a different way of doing research that is alert to justice and care, one that is a form of knowledge creation that engages with an understanding of research as political and performative. I have highlighted the importance of relationships built between people and places, both proximate and distant, in building just and caring connections. I have argued for a grounded engagement with care and justice practice and the benefit of situating this knowledge in place. This thesis shows how small acts are important and that just and caring connections can be and are being grown in the here and now. Furthermore, I have revealed how a grounded research project can be attuned to actually existing justice and care by adopting a hopeful ontology. Hopefully, this research will lead to further engagement with the radical, situated, and transformative potential of care and justice in cities, as articulated through the concept of care-full urban justice.
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Appendix

Volunteer Interview Schedule

1. General Personal Context
   i. Participant context
      → Are you from the Newtown/Enmore area?
   ii. Relevant work/volunteering history
      → What is your work background? Are you still working?
      → Could you tell me a bit about your volunteering history (prior history, volunteer with other organisations?)?

2. Your role and experience in this organisation
   i. History of involvement in the CBO/Motivations for volunteering
      → What motivated you to join/ start volunteering here?
      → How long have you been involved with this organisation?
      → Were you a member before you began volunteering here? If so for how long and why? (Alfalfa House only)
         i. Types of activities/practices generally performed
      → How often do you volunteer (weekly, fortnightly, monthly)?
      → What do you do when you volunteer here? (Examples or activities and practices performed as a volunteer). Could you describe what a normal volunteer shift for you would look like?
      → Can you tell me a bit about your experience of volunteering here? What are some of the challenges you face as a volunteer? What hinders your ability to volunteer? How are/are these challenges overcome?
         i. Role within the CBO
      → How do you think about the role you play here?
      → What words would you use to describe your role? And the role of volunteers in the organisation more generally?

3. The organisation’s role in the community and your role as a volunteer
   i. Role of the organisation and volunteers in the community
      → In your opinion what role does this organisation play in this community or neighbourhood? How do you think it affects the local community? Any stories or examples of this?
      → How has the organisation affected you? What does volunteering here bring to your life?
      → How would you say your volunteering affects others (clients, other volunteers, the organisation etc.)? Stories/examples?
         ii. Role of the organisation and volunteers in relation to care and support
      → In your opinion is caring (for people, providing physical assistance, listening to others, caring for the environment or the community) part of what you do as a volunteer? How? What does that mean to you?
      → Do you think caring (for people, providing physical assistance, listening to others, caring for the environment or the community) is part of the function of this organisation? How?
      → Do you see what you do as a volunteer as playing a role in carrying out any of these things?
→ What are the things this organisation does that are about caring? Do you have any stories or examples of this?
   iii. Role of the organisation in relation to social justice
→ In your opinion do you think part of what you do as a volunteer is about social justice? How/ what does that mean to you?
→ Do you think part of the function of the organisation is about social justice? How?
→ What are the things this organisation does that are about social justice? Do you have any stories or examples of this?
   iv. Changing inner city context and effect on CBO/ changing nature of neighbourhood and community overtime (connection to place?)
→ In your opinion has/how has the local neighbourhood changed over time as the inner city has changed? Do you have any stories or examples of this?
→ Has this affected the organisation or your role within it? Do you have any stories or examples of this?
→ Do you have any opinions about what you’d like to see this community/ or neighbourhood become?

4. Do you to add anything that you think we haven’t covered?

5. Is there anything you’d like to add about the research or interview?
Staff/Management Committee Interview Schedule

1. General personal context (Participant context)
   - Do you live in the area?
   - How long have you lived there?
     i. Relevant work history
   - What is your work background? Have you worked or been involved in (CBO type) before?
   - How did you come to be involved with the organisation?
     ii. Other volunteering history
   - What do you do other than working/ volunteering at this organisation?

2. Role in the organisation
   i. History of involvement in the CBO
   - How long have you been involved with the (CBO)?
   - What motivated you to join/ start working here?
   ii. Role within the CBO
   - Can you tell me a bit about what you do at the (CBO)? How often do you work? What is the extent of your involvement? (types of practices)

3. History/Goals purpose of the organisation- interested in practices of care and social justice and how they are playing out in community-organisations along with what fosters and inhibits them.
   i. History and purpose of the organisation
   - Could you tell me a bit about the history of the organisation?
   - What do you see the goals and values of the organisation to be?
   ii. Role of the organisation in the community
   - What do you see to be the role of the organisation? How do you think it affects the local community? Any stories or examples of this?
   iii. Volunteering and role of volunteers in the organisation
   - What are the roles of volunteers in the organisation? How do you understand the contribution they make?
   iv. Understandings of why people volunteer
   - Why do you think people become involved at the (CBO)? Or why do you think they volunteer? What do you think they get out of it?
   v. Role of the organisation in relation to care and support
   - Can you tell me what role you think care plays in what the (CBO) does?
   vi. Role of the organisation in relation to social justice
   - Can you tell me what role you think social justice plays in what the (CBO) does? E.g. advocacy etc.

4. Spatial context- can we talk about the location and space?
   i. Information about locality of CBO
   - Do you know why the (CBO) was located where it was? How does the local community sustain the centre?
   ii. Use of the CBO space- layout, set up etc.
   - How does the physical space, so things like the set up enable the Women’s Library to function?
   iii. Networks of care (connections to other groups- scale)
→ Is the (CBO) connected to other groups? How? What type of connections does it have e.g.? E.g. other community or support organisations, are there other ways the (CBO) supports the community?
   iv. How the community/neighbourhood has changed over time and the effect on the CBO

→ In your opinion how has the neighbourhood changed overtime and has this change had much of an effect on the CBO?

5. Policy, processes and practices that help foster or inhibit care
   i. Funding- donations, government support, grants, membership etc.
   → How is the (CBO) funded? How does the monetary side happen?
   ii. Organisational policies, practices and processes
   → Can you give me some examples of particular policies, practices or processes that enable the organisation to fulfil its goals and values?
      → Internal policies and systems
      → External policies and systems e.g. government policy
   iii. Challenges and overcoming challenges
   → What are some of the challenges to the (CBO) fulfilling its goals and aims and (how) are these overcome?

6. Do you have any additional comments you would like to make about the research or interview?