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A MANIFESTO for the JUST CITY

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the Centre for Just City

Colophon

A manifesto for the Just City

Edited by Roberto Rocco & Caroline Newton

This book is based on a online workshop and lecture series that took place over four days in October 2022. Representatives from 106 universities worldwide participated in the discussion. 315 students from 63 different academic institutions submitted 82 manifestos for publication.

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DEDICATED TO PURSUING SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH THE LENS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT, THE CENTRE FOR THE JUST CITY VALUES ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, DIVERSE THOUGHT, AND COMMITTED ACTION.

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The Centre for the Just City was set up at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at the Delft University of Technology in response to the pressing challenges of rampant social inequalities affecting the cohesion and the sustainability of cities and communities. Recognising the vital need to address these issues, the Centre emerged as a platform for research, education, and outreach activities for the creation of just cities. Since its inception, the Centre has been at the forefront of bridging theory and practice, fostering collaborations, and influencing policies and actions that contribute to making cities equitable, sustainable, and inclusive.

Manifestos as Exercises of Hope & Care

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In her book "Doppelgänger: A Trip into the Mirror World," Naomi Klein (2023) writes about the forces that have destabilised her personal world and which are "part of a much larger web of forces that are destabilising our shared world". Klein talks about the disagreements she sees in a "mirror world" of distortions. These disagreements are not about a shared reality but about the very nature of reality. What is real? In recent years, our world has been savaged by fake news and "alternative facts," science denialism, and a profound and seemingly irreversible scepticism towards politics that have destabilised us all. But where does this "war on reality" come from? What has led us to seek our own private unique realities, giving up on broad collective endeavours and visions and, ultimately, giving up on politics? Why has public discourse become so dark?

All those factors contribute to a sense of a shattered world, where there are no guardrails or signposts that may point us towards a shared path to take. This, according to Klein, contributes to a "latent potential for fascism" in societies and individuals. This "potential for fascism" speaks to the inability of individuals to make sense of the world and to imagine different alternatives and positive visions for the future. Instead, they seek belonging in chauvinistic promises of unity and identity, as well as the simplistic answers offered by charismatic leaders.

This introductory essay explores the reasons for the destabilisation described by Klein. It posits that the rise of neoliberal governance is intrinsically linked to the rise of public irrationality, stemming from citizens' disillusionment with liberal democracy and politics as a whole. The contention is that neoliberalism aims to supplant politics with the market, ultimately deepening people's detachment from politics. Consequently, this detachment erodes the collective imagining of aspirational, positive futures. This profound disenchantment and growing helplessness leads to

despair (Case & Deaton, 2020). Disenchantment and despair are at the root of the "potential for fascism" described by Klein (Arendt, 2004; Paxton, 2005; Adorno et al., 1950). This essay concludes by elucidating why we posit Manifestos as an educational exercise to counter this disillusionment. In our view, Manifestos serve as vehicles for expressing shared, positive visions of a Just City, articulating and affirming our values while rallying others to actively engage with those shared visions.

The attack on reality

The current attack on reality shatters all possibilities of shared visions because it erodes public rationality, undermining the body politics itself. In "The Human Condition" (1998), Hannah Arendt writes about the "public realm" as a space of appearance where reality is constituted through shared understandings. An attack on this shared reality undermines the very foundations of democratic governance because it prevents citizens from reaching shared understandings of reality.

Rawls (2005), Sen (2009), Habermas (1991), Anderson (2006) and others seem to concur that rational public discourse is a cornerstone of democratic societies. Functioning democracies rely on the collective pooling of information and reasoned deliberation. Rational public discourse allows for the exchange of diverse perspectives on shared terms and allows for a well-informed citizenry that can hold their governments to account. Sen's (2009) concept of "public reasoning" is based on inclusive dialogues that account for multiple perspectives but presuppose some level of public rationality. Thus, rational public discourse is not merely an intellectual exercise but a vital practice sustaining democracy. Without public rationality, public discourse can degenerate into shouting matches and personal attacks over social media or, worse, physical, and political violence that stifles the possibility of meaningful conversations.

This is of course not new in itself, as many people around the world face political violence daily, in political realities that are all but "rational". Marxist theory contends that violence and the exploitation of labour in both core and peripheral countries were essential mechanisms for accumulating capital. In peripheral countries, Marxism explains violence and oppression through the lens of imperialist capitalism and class struggle. Core capitalist countries and their dependent local elites have historically exploited peripheral nations for cheap labour and resources. This exploitation often involves violent means to suppress resistance and ensure control, typically justified as "economic development". Current and past social rifts and institutional violence against black and indigenous citizens in the US, Brazil, Mexico, and other places tragically illustrate this. These are fundamental contradictions that contemporary democracies have to contend with.

But the intensity and scope of the erosion of the public sphere today means that even the exiguous existing invited spaces of democracy crumble under the pressure of irrationality and lies. An example of this crumbling of institutional spaces of democracy is BREXIT, an utterly irrational and profoundly misguided political project largely based on erroneous information and intense manipulation of facts (Cadwalladr, 2017; Haughton, n.d.; Marshall & Drieschova, 2018). Nominally democratic countries like the US, the UK, Poland, Hungary, India, Brazil, the Philippines, Turkey and more have suffered under extreme-right-wing elected leaders who regularly use lies and distortions to manipulate the public and have considerably shrunk the spaces of democracy for large swaths of their populations. Public irrationality, often fuelled by the spread of fake news and misinformation, can also undermine the capacity of grassroots to mobilise to tackle real issues.

Many political issues, such as climate change, require long-

term planning and rational decision-making. If public discourse is driven by short-term bias, sensationalism, and distortion, or if it is smothered by political confusion and violence, it becomes difficult to address complex, slow-developing challenges that require sustained effort and rational analysis anchored on evidence.

The scale and scope of the challenges facing us (climate change, ever more frequent pandemics, growing inequality, and resource exhaustion to cite but a few) require that we face those challenges together, in coordinated collective action. This collective action is essentially a political endeavour, as it involves making decisions and taking actions on a societal level, recognising our differences, power imbalances and competing interests, seeking *gemeinwohl*[1], the common good, and seeking justice.

The abolition of politics and imagination

As trust in institutions wanes (UN-DESA, 2021; Horne, 2017), our engagement in sound political processes diminishes, and the individual is left alone to face the threats, real or imaginary, they perceive. This disenchantment with politics is certainly not new and has emerged before in the form of authoritarianism and fascism (Griffin, 1993; Kazin, 1995; Passmore, 2014; Fisher, 2022).

Fascism is essentially the abolition of politics and imagination, as the charismatic autocratic leader tries to erase differences by creating a "perfect people" in his image, often against some sort of corrupt elite or invading hordes of migrants, eradicating all who don't comply with that ideal identity, often through a process of "othering"[2], and the creation of an "us versus them" dynamic. Simultaneously, there is a strong appeal to order, or at least the illusion of order created by the suppression of dissent.

This eliminates the need for rational discourse or imaginative thinking, as answers to societal conflicts are given *a priori*, and dissent is deemed redundant or unwanted. Moreover, all who don't comply with the image of the "real people" or disagree with the new status quo are "enemies", rather than opponents, and are frequently de-humanised so their claims become irrelevant or undesirable. Fascism stifles dissent and frequently translates into mass movements that override people's sense of self to create an ideal exclusive identity connected to nationality, race, religion, or other tools for manipulation at the disposal of authoritarianism.

As one of the most powerful political organisations in the Western World, the American Republican Party, slips into authoritarianism (Rohac et al., 2018), it likely reflects the fears and biases of citizens who have all but lost the ability to dream of a positive desirable future that is inclusive and democratic, instead flirting with dark depictions of an "American carnage" (Cheadle, 2017; Pilkington, 2017). In this perspective, "real Americans" must fight the invasion of hordes of new barbarians at the gates of a crumbling Empire, or already pushing down real estate prices in American inner cities. The profoundly negative, divisive, and racist vision of the future offered by this new and exclusive American nightmare frames a never-ending and seemingly pointless war against "woke," or liberal identities that define themselves in opposition to this dark vision and who are the "others" in this

1 "Gemeinwohl" is a German concept that is often translated as "common good" or "common welfare" in English. It refers to the collective well-being and benefit of the entire community or society as a whole. In the context of spatial justice, governance, and democracy in spatial planning, the concept of "gemeinwohl" would likely align with the idea of fostering equitable and sustainable outcomes that benefit all members of a community. It underscores the importance of considering the broader societal welfare in decision-making processes.

2 The process of "othering" refers to the social and psychological phenomenon where individuals or groups are perceived, labelled, and treated as fundamentally different from oneself or one's own group. This process involves the creation of an "us vs. them" dynamic, where the "other" is often devalued, stigmatised, or portrayed as inferior in some way (Rohleder, 2014).

disturbing othering exercise. But while some argue that American democracy is crumbling, others point to the resilience of institutions at the current stress test they are experiencing (Balz & Morse, 2023; Cassidy, 2020; Huq & Ginsburg, 2018). But identity wars, violent polarisation and a descent into authoritarianism and fascism have their roots elsewhere. In the next section, I explore the roots of this descent into irrationality and the reduction of democratic spaces by neoliberal governance.

The reduction of the spaces of democracy by neoliberal governance

All is seemingly not well on the opposite side of the political aisle either. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that many progressive individuals are also disillusioned with democracy (BIPP, 2020; Paller, 2013; Wike et al., 2019), which many identify with liberal economics and, most especially, with American imperialism. When the US is seen as exerting dominance and disregarding the sovereignty of other nations, it raises doubts about the authenticity of its commitment to democratic principles. This is particularly significant given the US's influential role in promoting democratic values, even as allegations of hypocrisy persist due to its shortcomings in ensuring rights and prosperity for many of its own citizens.

Regardless of perceptions about the sincerity of American democracy and its commitment to social justice, democracies around the world have widely adopted neoliberal forms of governance that have shattered old social contracts since the Reagan era in the 1980s and "Reaganomics", which promoted tax cuts, deregulation and a general retrenchment of the State. While these policies led to short-term economic growth and a booming stock market, they also contributed to widening income inequality, ballooning national debt, and the erosion of social safety nets.

Those democracies adopting principles of neoliberal governance seem unable and unwilling to stop increasingly more obscene inequalities, unable to stop the deregulation of labour, the growth of the "gig economy"[3] and the financial insecurity it brings, unable to contain speculation in housing and urban land markets, unable to contain commodification of every aspect of life, so that even some who identify as liberal, or progressive, seem to reluctantly doubt democracy as a viable political pathway.

Talking about his book "Tyranny, Inc.," Sohrab Ahmari (2023) argues that neoliberalism differs fundamentally from liberalism, insofar as classical liberalism emphasises individual freedoms, limited government intervention, and the importance of free markets in shaping economic outcomes. In contrast, neoliberalism assumes a notably more radical and, in Ahmari's words, "sinister" character, defined by its intent to replace the realm of politics with the market (Sohrabi in Illing, 2023).

Neoliberalism seeks to do so by advocating for a fundamental shift in the allocation of resources and decision-making processes. Rooted in the liberal belief in free markets and limited government intervention, neoliberalism views markets as efficient mechanisms for resource allocation and as regulators of all human exchanges, eliminating the need for politics. According to this perspective, the market's competitive forces are seen as superior to political decision-making, as they are believed to respond more swiftly to individual preferences and demands.

In summary, neoliberalism asserts that reducing the role of

3 The *gig economy* refers to a labour market characterised by short-term, temporary, or freelance work arrangements, often facilitated through digital platforms and apps. In the gig economy, individuals, often referred to as "gig workers" or "independent contractors," perform tasks, projects, or services for various clients or companies on a flexible basis, without traditional long-term employment contracts or protections.

the state in economic affairs allows for greater economic growth and innovation. It contends that market-driven outcomes inherently align with individual self-interest, resulting in optimal resource distribution (Vallier, 2022). But neoliberalism goes further. "Not only should the state leave the market alone, but the state should be reconfigured to resemble the market" (Sohrabi in Illing, 2023, n.p.). Again, in this perspective, governments should be run like businesses and econometrics replace public debate. "Every element of life becomes marketised" (idem) and the successes of a government are measured by how many points the stock exchange has climbed (see Egan et al., 2021; Egan, 2022), rather than the well-being and satisfaction of citizens. By adopting increasingly more neoliberal forms of governance, liberal democracies led by the US and the UK have reduced the available spaces of democracy and citizenship, leading to a confusing rejection of liberal democracy, which is explained by the intrinsic relationship between liberal democracies and liberal economics.

For Phelan and Dawes (2018, n.p.):

> *Neither liberalism nor neoliberalism can be grasped coherently without talking about capitalism and democracy. If liberalism names the political ideology aligned to the historical emergence of 'free market' capitalism and Western-style representative democracy, neoliberalism signifies a particular regime of liberalism, capitalism, and democracy that has been globalised since the 1970s, in the form of an active state promotion of market and competition principles that critics see as antithetical to democracy.*

One of these critics is Giroux (2005), for whom:

> *It has become more difficult to address not only the complex nature of social agency and the importance of democratic public spheres, but also the fact that active and critical political agents have to be formed, educated, and socialised into the world of politics (Abstract).*

Giroux continues

> *As the vast majority of citizens become detached from public forums that nourish social critique, political agency not only becomes a mockery of itself, it is replaced by a market-based driven form of cultural politics in which private satisfactions replace social responsibilities and confessional culture become a substitute for systemic change (Abstract).*

Giroux addresses the current crisis of meaning and political agency as a fundamental challenge to educators.

For Mark Petracca (1991) rational choice theory, the theory that underpins neoliberalism, supports and perpetuates a political life that is "antithetical to important theories of normative democracy" (p.303). For Petracca, "rational choice theory offers an incoherent account of democratic citizenship and produces a political system which shows a constant bias against political change and pursuit of the public interest." (p.304).

In this sense, as I have noted elsewhere (Rocco, 2022), "neoclassic economic theory persistently undermines public reasoning and public justification, because it presents certain economic decisions as unavoidable, partly eliminating the need to justify them in terms of societal values, justice, human needs, and goals. This brings about an insidious erosion of the public sphere and has also underscored the popularisation of a misguided notion of freedom as the 'freedom to do as one pleases,' without regard to the freedoms and the rights of all others" (p. 149).

But this "freedom to do as one pleases" seems to belong in practice to a precious few, while the immense majority sees their capabilities dwindle, including their ability to lead healthy lives.

This is sadly illustrated by the alarming growth in "deaths of despair" in the US.

The term "death of despair" was popularised by economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton in their research on mortality trends in the United States. They explored a puzzling phenomenon: despite advances in healthcare and technology, mortality rates among middle-aged white non-Hispanic Americans were increasing. This was particularly pronounced among those without a college degree. The key factors contributing to this increase were deaths related to drug overdose, alcohol-related liver disease, and suicide, collectively termed "deaths of despair."

Case and Deaton (2020) argue that these deaths are symptomatic of a broader social and economic malaise, characterised by stagnant wages, job loss due to deindustrialisation, and diminishing social safety nets, all expressions of a creeping neoliberal governance. They suggest that the degradation of social capital, the collapse of communities, and the erosion of stable employment have led to a sense of hopelessness, contributing to behaviours that result in these types of deaths. In short, they conclude that "capitalism is no longer delivering" the promised American Dream to working-class Americans.

Small wonder that people who have lost their sense of themselves and a sense of community, partly thanks to the ever more commodified relationships created by late capitalism, appeal more and more to their basic emotions and get increasingly entrenched in their positions and biases, further undermining the political sphere.

Manifestos as acts of defiance and hope

In this scenario, collectively thinking about what makes a just city is an act of defiance. Far from an exercise in naïve optimism, we see the Manifesto workshops as exercises in articulating common visions that give us clarity and resolve to pursue positive political change through insurgent city-making and spatial planning. As Dr Gynna Millan Franco reminds us with her quote of Eduardo Galleano (which he borrowed from Fernando Birri), the role of Utopia is not to give us ready-made solutions but to animate us to walk the right path and to widen our imaginations towards possible futures.

Utopia is also a vehicle for hope. Professor Faranak Miraftab in her contribution to the discussion on the Manifestos (Miraftab, 2022, 2023) describes the practices and thoughts of Mariame Kaba, an American activist, grassroots organiser, and educator who advocates for the abolition of the prison industrial complex. According to Miraftab, Kaba sees hope as a discipline that we must practice every day. While Kaba understands why people might feel hopeless, she chooses to think and act differently, believing that there is always a potential for positive change. For Kaba, it is important to recognise that there are more people who want justice than those who are working against it. In this sense, hope isn't the emotional hope of optimism, but a practical discipline. For Miraftab (2022, p. 36) "This framing and understanding of hope as a discipline is radical in that it is committed to everyday practices for transformative justice. It is grounded in action that people practice all the time." This speaks to the idea of hope and collective care as antithetical to the current shattering of the democratic sphere. For Miraftab, the last frontier of colonialism is the imagination of different futures. In her scholarship, Miraftab (2016) pursues the decolonisation of our imagination and of the possibilities for different futures forced upon us by rational choice theory and neoliberal governance and claims for a philosophy of hope and care in urbanism.

Hope is a driving force for positive change. People who be-

lieve in the potential for a better future are more likely to engage in democratic processes, such as voting, advocating for change, and participating in civil discourse and insurgent action. When citizens feel hopeful about their ability to influence their society through democratic means, they are more likely to actively participate in shaping its direction (Council of Europe, 2016) or, in cases where the democratic sphere is undermined by oppression and inequality, to agitate and organise to bring about change through insurgency (Miraftab, 2016). Hope is a powerful practice to keep the potential for change alive in the face of the seemingly insurmountable obstacles of savage unrestrained capitalism and pervasive political cynicism. For Miraftab (2022), this must be accompanied by a sense of care for the well-being of the broader society. Care can counteract self-centred or divisive tendencies that might otherwise undermine democratic values and speaks to collective undertakings that are profoundly critical of the current socio-economic systems of extraction and expropriation.

The Manifestos contained in this book are an exercise in imagination of different positive futures that speak to those ideas. The 82 Manifestos written by 315 students from 63 universities around the world come in the wake of a four-part workshop in October 2022, in which TU Deft together with its many partners, invites students from all over the world to listen to the accounts of leading academics and practitioners whose knowledge touches aspects of spatial justice and to articulate their ideas for what makes the just city. The scholars invited in 2022 included Professor Faranak Miraftab from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, US, Professor Clarissa Freitas from the Federal University of Ceará in Fortaleza, Brazil, Dr. Gynna Millan Franco from the Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia, Professor Vanesa Castán Broto from the University of Sheffield in the UK and Professor Hiba Bou Akar from Columbia University in New York, US. This formidable

group of women imparted their knowledge in four online sessions followed by more than 500 people. The results are incredibly varied. Students write not only from their perspectives as primarily students of architecture and urban planning but also from different educational traditions and diverse models of society that shape their ideas about what a just city could and should look like. This means that while some are bold and want to explore radical ideas, others are timid in their propositions as they tentatively try to explore new ideas posed to them. The variety in educational traditions, backgrounds, nationalities, genders and more gives us incredibly varied approaches, topics, and perspectives.

There is no selection. All manifestos submitted are published here, sometimes with some editing, as we wish to preserve the authenticity, variety, and originality of texts submitted by students around the world.

In conclusion, I transcribe the ideas articulated by Juliana Gonçalves, one of the organisers in one of the workshop sessions that led to the publication of this book. For Juliana, the manifestos are "significant for at least two reasons:

> *First, deepening inequalities and segregation in cities renew the call for social justice in the city. I believe that we need alternative visions of what a just city looks like. We need alternative visions that accommodate different ways of living in the city, and [that] these ways of living should not clash with other ways of living outside the city. Second, the manifesto is a beautiful way to describe these alternative visions. In the dictionary, a manifesto is defined as a written statement of the intentions, motives and views of an individual or a group, and I believe the exercise of writing down our intentions and views on paper gives us a sense of concreteness, reinforcing our commitments to our ideas. However (...), I also believe that both manifestos and the visions that they describe should be open for reflection and revision. This is a little bit of my manifesto for a manifesto."* (J. Gonçalves, Session 2 of the Manifesto Workshop).

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The workshop **Manifesto for the Just City** is a digital lecture and debate series composed of four online sessions with leading academics and practitioners in the fields of urban theory, urban planning and spatial justice. Upon participation in the online lecture series, teams of students are invited to draft a **Manifesto for the Just City**, expressing what their visions for cities that are sustainable, fair and inclusive for all.

This activity is organised by the **TU Delft Centre for the Just City**, and partners.

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