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## **INTRODUCTION**

We live in an age characterised by the urbanization of responsibility. By this, I am referring to the ways in which urbanization is increasingly seen as causing or contributing to all sorts of compelling problems – carbon emissions and global warming, overconsumption of energy, obesity epidemics, the exploitation of labour, and so on; and, at the same time, cities and urban scale institutions and practices are presented as having a special part to play in addressing these sorts of issues and problems. This chapter reflects on some of the political implications of thinking about responsibility in ways which foreground the ‘political agency’ of material objects, urban infrastructures, and the inherited legacies inscribed in built environments. It addresses the question of how best to conceptualise public action once it is acknowledged that infrastructures, practices, habits and routines might act behind our backs in certain ways to generate various harms, injustices, or problems *for which we might still be held responsible in certain ways*.

In addressing these issues, the chapter engages with a set of literatures and concerns drawn from fields of practice (e.g. urban and regional planning, environmental management) and social theory (e.g. actor network theory, theories of practices). It is animated by a sense that the *politics of cities* is not necessarily equivalent to the *politics that goes on in cities*, which is contained within particular territorial scales. Conventionally, the political agency of the city has been understood to arise from some combination of three analytically distinct attributes of ‘the urban’: as a material configuration generating contradictions, interests, and axes of struggle; as a site of sociality, cooperation, and cultural dynamism; and as a site of political authority and legitimacy and a community of shared interest. The urbanization of responsibility reveals how each of these aspects of urban agency helps to shape more expansive styles of locally embedded public action with potentially extensive spatial reach (Barnett, In Press).

### ***The discontents of competitive urbanism***

Models of urban policy, spatial planning, or environmental management are often based on a set of assumptions about the constraints faced by place-based actors. On the one hand, it is assumed that the mobility of capital leads to a situation in which places are trapped in a competitive struggle for investment which severely constrains their scope for discretionary action. On the other hand, local policymakers are assumed to be dependent on local business interests for sustainable sources of revenue. Between these two sets of pressures, towns and cities find themselves compelled to pursue economic development strategies that reflect the imperatives of capital in a competitive struggle for investment which

severely constrains their scope for discretionary action. Theories of 'urban regimes' and 'urban growth machines' focus on how these imperatives are played out in political conflicts and accommodations between public officials and business interests, to the detriment of largely marginalised popular interests.

This pattern of development is reflected in the widespread adoption of local policies that seek to encourage economic growth by pursuing policies designed to attract external investment – policies such as lower taxation rates; property-led urban regeneration schemes, often focussing on a combination of office and retail space development; policies aimed at enhancing urban land values. The pursuit of increasingly 'entrepreneurial' styles of spatial governance is credited, by both proponents and critics, as following necessarily from the heightened competitive pressures facing localities in an era of highly mobile, footloose and flexible capital investment. For critics in particular, this style of 'neoliberal' urban governance leads to a steady diminution of the 'welfare' functions of urban policy and planning focussed on the provision of services and facilities such as housing or amenities to whole populations on an equal basis.

One of the most easily identified manifestations of this type of competitive, property-led style of urban policy in the UK is the growth of what has been called 'clone-town Britain'. For critics, the resulting homogenization has various ill-effects, not restricted to an aesthetic attachment to 'diversity', including a weakening of the local economic resilience and creativity as skilled labour markets are lost and local entrepreneurs are squeezed, and health impacts related to the emergence of so-called 'obesogenic environments'.

In the UK, supermarket development has become the symbol of this particular model of spatial development, one in which local planning systems are skewed to promote of land use changes which favour large retail developments. These trends are increasingly challenged through myriad campaigns by local communities. For example, in the spring of 2011, the opening of a Tesco store in a neighbourhood of Bristol called Stokes Croft generated national news when local protesters confronted police – the proposal to open the store in this area had provoked visceral opposition the previous summer. Stokes Croft is a very distinctive area, undergoing regeneration after years of neglect and decline. It is also the hub of a vibrant 'alternative' community of artists, local businesses, and charities servicing homeless and other marginalized communities.

The so-called 'People's Republic of Stokes Croft' is perhaps a unique place, and the opposition to a new Tesco's is perhaps just a very localized incident. However, it turns out that this sort of episode is far from unique, even within the city of Bristol. A short distance from Stokes Croft, in the Bishopston area of the city, a local campaign to stop the opening of a large Sainsburys was actually successful in 2006. Bishopston is the hub of a vibrant alternative and independent retailing area, once dubbed 'The last great British high street'. The campaign was called BOGOFs – Bishopston Opposing Glut of Supermarkets. In

this case, local campaigners, drawn from a predominantly middle-class professional population, successfully argued that the new supermarket would have a detrimental effect on local businesses as well as on local residents, by increasing traffic levels.

Both of these examples of local campaigns against retail-led, property-based local urban development were mediated by the intricacies of local planning systems. In one case, local residents were successful in their demands; in the other, local concerns appeared to be less influential.

Of course, the idea of a single local 'community' off-set against the local states and big business is a little simplistic. Elsewhere in the city, another controversy around supermarket development reveals a more complex picture. In this case, Bristol City Football Club and Sainsburys sought permission in 2010 to allow the club's current home stadium at Ashton Gate to be redeveloped as a supermarket, thereby allowing the club to build a brand new stadium in the adjacent area of Ashton Vale. This proposal has generated a great deal of local controversy – plans were rejected and revised and approved and then rejected again. Proposals were opposed by some local business and local residents on familiar grounds – detrimental impact on trade and increased traffic; but they were also strongly supported by other local actors, not least by many local supporters of Bristol City, for whom the development is seen as an important step to enhancing the clubs' prospects of long-term success.

These sorts of issues around supermarket development, combining politics, planning, and protest in different ways, are not restricted to Bristol. They are a feature of many localities in the UK, and elsewhere. The Bristol example is noteworthy, however, because these confrontations between big business and local communities, mediated by local planning systems, reveal that there might be more at stake here than a trade-off between a realistic adjustments to 'global' pressures and a defensive protection of local interests. As we'll see in the next section, local mobilisations against one model of retail development and property-led regeneration have gone on alongside more pro-active campaigns aimed at promoting alternative models of local economic development and urban regeneration.

### ***Doing the politics of place beyond place***

Deterministic models of constraint have shaped both normative practices of urban economic strategy and planning on the hand, and critical theories of growth machines and neoliberal governance on the other. However, these deterministic views, whether recommended as normative models to which there is no alternative, or as critical diagnoses to which an alternative must be found, might over-state the degree to which local actors are constrained by their placement within a web of external relations (see Imbroscio 2003). Place-based actors are also empowered, albeit partially and differentially, by the inside-out relationships that constitute them – there are opportunities arising from these

relationships for the development of what Doreen Massey (2007) has called 'the politics of place beyond place'. Massey is one of a number of scholars who have sought to re-imagine the relationships between places and spatial processes in ways which draw out the feasible possibilities for alternative, more pro-active styles of urban or place-based decision-making (see Graham and Healy 1999). These approaches illustrate how different *causal* accounts of processes of place-making can open up alternative understandings of the sources and sites of effective urban *agency*. And these academic accounts run alongside practical experiments in remaking cities in new ways.

For example, in 2005 Bristol was certified as a Fairtrade City by the development charity and campaign organisation, the Fairtrade Foundation, after a public campaign over the previous two years. Fair Trade is an international movement for social and environment justice that develops alternative economic spaces of production, trade, retailing and consumption. The fair trade campaign in Bristol was galvanized initially by the City council's sustainable development department. It was also supported by the corporate procurement unit of the local authority, whose responsibilities included for delivering sustainable and healthy food services at value for money. Beginning with these key local authority professionals, Bristol's Fairtrade City campaign steering group quickly brought together a range of other activists and interests from around the city. These included faith-based activists from Christian Aid, Traidcraft and Oxfam; ethical business interests representing local food retail outlets; locally-based national interests such as the Triodos Bank and the Co-operative; and representatives from school and university groups. A key objective of campaign devices like Fairtrade towns and cities, or fairtrade schools and fairtrade churches, is to govern collective systems of provisioning by mobilizing the collective authority of local authorities, boards of school governors, and the like (Barnett et al 2011).

The Bristol Fairtrade City campaign illustrates the different sorts of agency that can be ascribed to urban spaces (see Ivesen 2009). This campaign problematized the city as an *object*, in terms of its historical associations with the Atlantic slave trade and the contemporary entanglements and the responsibilities that arose from these. But it also used the city as a *venue* in which to address residents in order to raise awareness amongst a broad general public and generate media attention. And it used the legitimacy and authority of political structures at the local *scale* to enroll whole networks of support into the campaign, as well as to reconfigure whole systems of provisioning .

Bristol is just one example of this sort of campaigning. In other places, the ways in which fair trade town or city status was pursued or achieved would look different. Likewise, similar looking campaigns around, for example, transition town status would look different too. One distinctive feature of these sorts of 'alternative urbanisms' is the way in which they illustrate a style of practical thinking in which the material fabric of urban living is thought to provide opportunities to communicate messages, configure behaviour, and shape conduct in new ways.

In this respect, the Bristol case is a particularly good example of a fundamental ambivalence which lies at the heart of contemporary practices of experimental urbanism:

On the one hand, there is a strong sense that spaces and practices can be reconfigured in order *to do things to people* which, when aggregated, will enhance some collectively defined objective. Having to drink fair trade tea at coffee at Bristol Zoo – you have no choice in the matter as a consumer – is a benign example of a much broader rationality of ‘paternalist’ intervention in which spatial design is thought of as a means of delivering ‘behaviour change’ in relation to, for example, pro-environmental objectives or public health goals such as reduced smoking or alcohol consumption.

On the other hand, the fair trade city campaign, with its strong emphasis on raising awareness and community involvement, illustrates a more participatory aspect to experimental urbanism, in which ‘experiments’ are understood as occasions for mutual learning and dialogic communication. This is more consistent with a strong emphasis on the pre-figuration of broader strategies of change.

The next two sections delve deeper into the issues raised by this ambivalence in spatial theories of decision-making, in order to draw out the ways in which different understandings of the relationships between space, practice and action lie at the heart of contemporary challenges of ‘changing cities’.

### ***DESIGNING THE SPACES OF BEHAVIOUR CHANGE***

The Bristol fairtrade city campaign is just one example of example of contemporary urban experiments which address the intersection between ‘global’ issues and the inherited social practices and material configurations of local places (e.g. Evans 2011). In discussions of climate change all the way through to discussions of obesity, the patterns and rhythms of urban built environments are often identified as generating various problems which require concerted policy interventions. In these fields, people are identified as being detrimentally affected by urban living in ways that escape their own volition or cognition, generating aggregate outcomes that require the reconfiguration of urban infrastructures, and thereby justifying various paternalist styles of behaviour change intervention.

### ***Rationalities of spatial design***

The rise of interest in ‘nudging’ and models of ‘libertarian paternalism’, indebted to behavioural economics and certain styles of social psychology, is perhaps the most obvious example of a wider shift underway in the ‘governmentalities’ that problematize the relationship between space, practice and action in practical fields of decision-making (Jones, Pykett, Whitehead 2011). In classical models of planning, it was assumed that reconfiguring and redesigning could help to bring

about various forms of desired change. Increasingly, in contemporary models of decision-making, a logic of 'planning' has been augmented by a logic of 'anticipation'. This is perhaps most evident in the emergence of programmes of urban resilience and adaptation or of 'urban ecological security'. The aim of such programmes is not to pursue a linear model of progressive social change or economic growth, but to bolster the capacity of urban environments to withstand change from the outside, as it were – various shocks, whether global financial instability, terrorist attack, catastrophic physical disaster, or impending 'transitions' such as climate change or peak oil (Hodson and Marvin 2009).

One feature of planning in this expanded sense is a long-standing attachment to particular assumptions about the causal power of the spatial forms, built environments, and designed settings in which action takes place (Huxley 2006). For example, sometimes it is assumed that the design, classification, and ordering of spaces and environments can comport individuals or whole populations to conduct themselves in particular ways. Traditionally, this assumption has been associated with attempts to control disorderly practices, to design out crime, to uplift people culturally. Or, alternatively, sometimes it is assumed that particular spatial configurations or environments generate forms of disorder, decay, or disease. Both of these sets of assumptions ascribe causal power to spatial patterns of forms. Combining both of these sets of assumptions, in turn, leads to a further 'spatial rationality', one in which spatial design is associated with pro-active attempts not just to control or order people and things but to actively re-shape them for 'progressive' ends, where this has referred to notions of racial health, national well-being, or welfare.

Particular understandings of the causal power of spatial forms, spatial relations, or environmental configurations inform institutionalised attempts to manipulate, design, and manage spaces and environments for different ends. These spatial rationalities are not restricted to urban and regional planning narrowly defined. The same sorts of 'causal postulates' can be identified across a range of policy fields in which 'space' is presented as a medium for acting on people's actions. These theories might even be thought of as theories of communication or communicability, as much as they are theories of spatial and environmental causality. That is why ideas about design, spatiality, media, and communication have been able to converge around shared sets of understandings of 'behaviour change'.

### ***The silent politics of place***

One feature of the close association between behavioural models of social welfare and the public good on the one hand, and contemporary spatial rationalities of planning and anticipation on the other, is a shared emphasis on the degree to which individual action does not conform to models of highly reflective, rational utility maximization. 'Nudge' models of policy intervention seek to design so-called 'choice architectures' to generate preferred aggregate outcomes without directly engaging each and every individual in a rational

calculation of their own preferences or interests (see Barnett 2010). Choice architectures might refer to the sequence in which questions are asked on a form asking you whether or not you want to donate your vital organs in the event of untimely death; but they can also refer to the built environments in which human action is contained and circulated. We have already seen examples of fields of policy and governance in which urban infrastructures themselves are configured as 'political' agents, in so far as they are designed with the intention of affecting aggregate changes in behaviour that will impact on public interest issues of health, pollution, or finance.

These forms of urban governance and spatial management have recently become the object of a distinctive style of critical spatial theory, that focuses on what it calls the 'affective' dimensions of spatial practice – those aspects of action which are reproduced without conscious thought, shaped by deeply felt but perhaps barely articulated emotional commitments of attraction or repulsion towards types of spaces, types of smells or sounds, or types of people (e.g. Thrift 2007). This strand of urban and spatial theory represents the sceptical flip-side of theories of behaviour change. It draws attention to how the design of spaces can background and habituate a set of preferences and pathways of action and interaction. In this strand of spatial theory, urban space emerges as a medium for the inculcation of various hateful, hopeful, desirous, or respectful dispositions.

According to the geographer Nigel Thrift, the lesson to be drawn from such research is that we should attend to how "affective response can be designed into spaces" (Thrift 2004, 68). In this view of contemporary urbanization, professionals such as advertisers, planners, or architects are able to marshal expert knowledge of 'affect' in order to actively manipulate and engineer particular outcomes from spatial interaction. Urban space becomes a surface to affective manipulation through the deployment of various 'lively devices', such as software, proliferating performative spaces of the screen, or various calculative technologies. Together, these help constitute the 'technological unconscious' of contemporary urban living. This approach to spatial theory is concerned to think more carefully about 'the silent politics of place', which refers to the imperative to bring into view the commitments and preferences that are effectively backgrounded into designed spaces of urban living (Thrift and Amin 2006).

This style of spatial theory extends a high degree of credulity to the same 'causal postulates' about designed spaces that underwrite more paternalist styles of behaviour change initiatives. Amongst both proponents of 'behaviour change' strategies, and amongst critics of the manipulation of affective response through urban design, there is a shared sense that spaces and practices can be reconfigured in order *to do things to people*. This is one side of the ambivalence of experimental urbanism: the emphasis on using urban infrastructures to achieve outcomes behind the backs of people's explicit intentions. It appears to raise all sorts of 'ethical' questions about the propriety of intervening to covertly shape people's choices in directions they might not otherwise have taken.

However, it might actually be worth spending a little more time questioning whether the efficacy ascribed by proponents and critics alike to attempts to govern through less-than-rational engineering of spaces and environments of action is actually really deserved (e.g. Leys 2011).

### ***PRACTISING URBAN TRANSITIONS***

Theories of behaviour change as well as theories of affective spaces converge around a shared understanding of the spatial rationalities through which people's actions can be governed and shaped, investing heavily in models of the non-reflective, less-than-rational dimensions of action. They both generate 'ethical' worries about whether it is appropriate to seek to generate change by manipulating the infrastructures and backgrounds of everyday life. They both lead to the temptation to think that rather than addressing people directly, change can be best affected by tinkering with 'choice architectures' – by designing certain preferred pathways into mediating infrastructures. This understanding has a long heritage in traditions of spatial planning. It is an understanding popularised in 'nudge' models of behaviour change, and one which underwrites linear models of the relationship between Attitudes, Behaviour and Change that predominate in sustainability discourse as well (Shove 2010).

It is also worth considering whether the efficacy, not just the ethics, of affecting change through managing spatial patterns and routines might be thought of in different terms. One of the reasons for taking more notice of urban experiments such as fair trade city campaigns, or the transition town movement, or the slow food movement, is that one finds in these examples distinctive understandings of the relationship between practices and spaces which make more room for dialogic, participatory forms of social learning than theories of behaviour change or of 'nudging'.

A feature of recent debates around this set of policy and campaigning issues is an emphasis on theories of 'practice' – on theories which give an analytical privilege to what people *do* (e.g. Jackson 2004, Spaargaren 2011). These theories often draw on understandings of the emotional, less-than-rational motivations shaping people's engagements with their environments; and they are often informed by theories that emphasise the importance of material infrastructures in mediating and coordinating complex social activities. Theories of practice are important because they suggest that a policy focus on lifestyle choices, behaviour patterns, and individual choice as the key drivers of, for example, unsustainable or environmentally damaging patterns might miss the degree to which the things people do with things is shaped by the commitments inscribed in social practice. Likewise, it also suggests that focussing too narrowly on the affective attachments individuals have to particular objects or commodities – their cars, or their mobile phones – might miss the degree to which these objects mediate fundamental relationships, such as family life or friendship.

Two things follow from a practice-based perspective on the challenges of urban transition. First, efforts to change patterns of behaviour or aggregate outcomes which focus on individual actions in isolation from broader contexts of practice and meaning might well not work so well after all. And, second, it might be quite difficult to bring about desired changes precisely because any single action is embedded and entangled in a web of relations with other. Recognising the priority of practices in shaping people's actions, including the degree to which many actions are performed without thought, more or less automatically, might lead us to think that changing people's behaviour might be more difficult not less: practices are sticky, precisely because they are embedded in material architectures, but also because all sorts of emotional commitments are inscribed within those material patterns.

### ***Mundane urban governance***

In order to avoid some of the problems associated with behaviour change theories – which might over-estimate the efficacy of 'design' solutions, and also raise some difficult ethical issues – it might be helpful to think a little more about the ways in which our actions are mediated by material infrastructures. One place to start is with scholars working in science and technology studies (STS). This is one style of thought that might inform the task of rethinking cities and urban life 'through objects' (Carter et al 2011). Research in this area focuses on the ordinary and routine objects through which many activities are mediated. What is distinctive about work in STS on this topic is an emphasis not so much on manipulation and control, but rather on accountability – the ways in which objects and mediating technologies are used to reconfigure normative relationships of obligation, fault, and responsibility in everyday life.

An important theme in this strand of research is the idea that material objects and technologies are, literally, instrumental in governing everyday actions. But the emphasis is not simply on the idea that relations of governing are thereby hidden away, sequestered into background infrastructures. Rather, STS stresses the ways in which attributes usually ascribed to individuals – like responsibility, duties, failings, rights, obligations – are redistributed across stretched out, mediated practices and systems. So, for example, while speed cameras might deter people from driving too fast, they are also one part of extended systems of surveillance, data collection and storage, and monitoring in which accountability is stretched across different 'moments'. Everyday objects which we encounter and engage with in everyday life are not simply mute or passive actors that guide our activities in certain directions. They are actively gathering information and data about our habits, what we spend, where we travel to, and what we watch: information that is made available in turn for further use, perhaps by us, perhaps by commercial companies, perhaps by public agencies of different sorts (Greenfield 2011).

The importance of urban infrastructures to this sort of mundane governance of accountability reminds us that there are different public values at stake in this

type of system. The mundane objects of governance inscribed in urban space – like speed cameras, traffic lights, pedestrian crossings – combine three different relationships of accountability: they take as their object interactions between people and objects *in* public spaces as occasions for trying to enforce accountability; they seek to enforce the accountability *of* the public by making particular types or groups of people subject to monitoring or accounting systems; and they are implemented in the name of enforcing accountability *for* the good of the public, in relation to various public ‘goods’ like road safety, public health, (Woolgar 2007).

This perspective, which emphasises the ways in the material infrastructures are configured to enrol people into new relationships of accountability and responsibility, suggests a revision of both technocratic models of behaviour change and critical theories of the ‘silent politics’ of place. By enrolling us into systems of accountability, these material infrastructures in turn provoke occasions when these relationships are themselves subjected to scrutiny, debate and deliberation: the fairness of speed cameras become a public issue; or local people actively campaign to have speed bumps put into their residential streets in the name of keeping children safe.

The literature on mundane governance and pervasive networked urbanism draws out the ambivalence that lies at the heart of contemporary experimental urbanism: a tension between recognising how human activities are mediated by all sorts of material objects and technologies, and interpreting this in a loosely behavioural way as providing insight into how better to paternalistically shape people’s conduct for their own and the general welfare; or recognising that this mediation reconfigures, perhaps even extends and deepens the range the activities in which questions of accountability and responsibility are liable to become public concerns. Acknowledging this ambivalence is central to appreciating the opportunities and limitations of using spatial strategies – from designing liveable spaces through to land-use planning – to bring about changes to urban living.

### ***Performing urban space***

The previous section focussed on the way in which urban life is conceptualised in STS because this tradition helps us negotiate between an over-optimistic and overly-pessimistic interpretation of the materialities of urban life. It is an approach that restores to view the sense that urban life involves an ongoing interaction between embodied, thinking, fleshy people and more or less active, more or less passive objects and materials designed to engage us in all sorts of different ways.

Using the example of shopping centres in ordinary towns and cities like Milton Keynes and Bedford to further develop this approach, geographers Monica Degen, Gillian Rose and Begum Basdas (2010) point out that people experience these archetypal designed spaces as part of different practices: sometimes they

are there to do specific, focussed tasks, like the weekly shop; sometimes they are there just to hang-out, or perhaps to socialise; sometimes they are there as part of their caring responsibilities getting the kids out of the house, going for a walk with the baby in a pram. How urban spaces are experienced, and how they configure their users, will vary according to which of these practices one has in view.

To illustrate this perspective, Degan et al (2010) provide a description of how different aspects of the built environment come into view or pass out of our attention depending on what activities we are engaged in:

Walking down the high-street to get a sandwich in our lunch break, we notice a change in the floor texture and glance down: a new pavement design has been recently introduced. Waiting for friends by the benches near McDonalds, we are aware of, but do not listen to, the repetitive jingles from the shopping mall's PA system. Taking the children with us while we are shopping, we take a look at a pair of red shoes in a shop-window while we keep an eye on our child. These are just some of the mundane things that happen in contemporary urban spaces. These moments are made possible by specific conjunctions of experiential corporealities and material surroundings. The physicality of the city constantly interacts, supports and collides with our bodies. And our bodies respond to, go along with, or ignore these environmental affordances. (Degen, Rose and Basdas 2010, 60).

Notice here, in this description, how the emphasis is not simply on how the qualities of urban spaces affect people's experiences in them. The emphasis is on the differential attention and awareness that people bring to these multiple, sensory qualities. Rather than thinking that the design of urban spaces somehow 'formats' its own uses or experiences, we might do better to acknowledge that negotiating a world of things requires a certain sort of ordinary interpretative competency. Degen *et al* (2010) emphasise that the affective qualities of urban spaces are not straightforwardly programmed in advance and automatically realised behind people's backs, but are rather dependent on the practices through which urban spaces are engaged.

The important lesson to draw from this 'performative' perspective on designed urban spaces is that, depending on what practice is at stake, certain features of an environment are more likely to be active in configuring peoples' activities, certain features more problematic, certain features active in the background, others foregrounded in front of people. This implies a very different analysis from a simple concern with 'the silent politics of place'. It requires an acknowledgement of the ways in which different spaces can provoke occasions for explicit reflection or critique, and that when some things about an environment come into explicit view, others will always fall away in to the background. To put it

in the terms of contemporary theories of behaviour change, there might be much more room for 'talk, talk' alongside 'nudge, nudge' than current debates might seem to suggest (John et al 2009; see also Fincher and Ivesen 2008).

Empirical work on spatial practices informed by materialist theories from STS, by theories of performance, and by material culture studies, reminds us of the limitations of the 'causal postulates' that often inform spatial disciplines of design, planning, architecture, through to economic models of creative cities and urban buzz. It reminds us too of the difficulties and limitations of seeking to affect peoples' individual or collective behaviour through the design and engineering of spatial arrangements and contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

A range of experimental strategies are currently configuring 'the urban' as an agent of political transformation beyond narrowly governmental functions in response to paradigmatically 'global' problems like climate change, economic restructuring, environmental crisis and securitization. Just how the ethical and practical challenges of different sorts of spatial interventions are negotiated depends in part on the causal understandings ascribed to spatial strategies: the spatial rationalities of behaviour change and nudge initiatives tempt us to overestimate the efficacy of spatial strategies; critical theories of affect tempt us to overestimate the sinister ethical and political implications of these same strategies. This chapter has recommended some theoretical approaches which gives priority to notions of practice over issues of spatial form or spatial design *per se*. And in the theory and practice of mobilisations such as fair trade city campaigns or transition town movements, the agency ascribed to urban infrastructures as platforms for bringing about transformation is not only ascribed to operations going on in the background of everyday practices, behind people's backs as it were. It is also identified as lying in the potential to configure the everyday spaces of urban life and work as communicative spaces of public education and mobilization.

Different causal understandings of the efficacy of spatial planning or environmental design play an important role in strategic models of how to develop and deliver policies and intervene in particular situations. But these same understandings of 'spatial agency' also disclose different imaginations of the scope and content of 'democratic' engagement in the challenges of contemporary urban transition. This chapter has attempted to problematize some of the most innovative examples of contemporary experimental urbanism, particularly with respect to the assumptions made about the efficacy of the materiality of urban space itself as an 'agent' of behaviour change. It is around these assumptions that the managerialist inclinations of current debates about behaviour change and 'nudging' overlap with the avant-garde imaginations of theorists of affect, emotions, and 'the-more-than-rational'. And it is at this point of convergence that the paucity of the democratic imagination of both these styles of spatial thinking is most visibly exposed.

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