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Rethinking urban public space: accounts from a junction in West London

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There has been remarkable enthusiasm for redesigning and reanimating urban public spaces in recent years. Yet geographical and urban research has tended to interpret these changes through a relatively limited set of concerns related to exclusion, encroachment and claim-making. This paper seeks to extend engagement with the concept of public space. It does so by arguing for the need to attend more closely to the generative capacities of public spaces and to the material and practical affordances they can offer. Following a project of intervention in a public space in West London – where a troubled crime hotspot underwent a programme of transformation – we suggest that there is much to be gained from broadening attention to the ways in which everyday spaces of public life are assembled: to different ways of inhabiting public space, to atmospheres that are produced, and to the ways in which material interventions enable and constrain the potentialities of spaces and their publicness. Our aim in doing so is to foster attention to, and develop an understanding of, the many instances where cities might become more inclusive, more convivial and generally better for the people that inhabit them.

key words public space London conviviality materiality atmosphere inhabitation

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Introduction

The term 'public' has long been a key concept for interpreting and shaping collective human life. With roots in Ancient Greece, it has played a constituent role in the development of modernity from the 18th century onwards. In a sphere of publicness, citizens are said to develop their deliberative capacities and identities, make claims for recognition and transform multiple self-concerns into a recognised common interest (Arendt 1958; Habermas 1962; Sennett 1977). Such abstract ideas have long tied concepts of publicness to the urban. Indeed, the linguistic root *civitas* can be found in citizen, civil and city, and the term public is closely connected with all three (Sheller and Urry 2000). Classic conceptions of public space have been those of *citizens* gathered in the *city* in an ideally *civil* manner: the agora in Ancient Greece; the piazzas of Renaissance Italy; the streets and coffeehouses of the modern city. A certain passion and romance for these urban locales has endured in the social imaginary along with the discursive power of publicness as a concept.

However, these enduring views of what public space is about may be restricting our ability to make sense of what is going on in much of contemporary urban life. The actual, day-to-day, public spaces that make up the great majority of our cities fall short, often woefully short, of the kinds of ideals espoused in the urban cannon. Further, the weight of historical, political and normative concerns tends to limit the capacity of scholars to properly account for the importance of a whole universe of mundane and prosaic activities that give urban life its texture. Owing to this, in this paper we suggest that engagements with actual spaces of urban publicness in geography have reached somewhat of an empirical and theoretical impasse. A relatively narrow orientation towards particular problematics has led to a literature that feels increasingly repetitive and predictable.

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Scholarship in geography and urban studies around public spaces has highly developed skills in diagnostic critique, but is often not very good at knowing what *does* work or *how* when it comes to intervening in public spaces.

This paper attempts to push past these limitations, drawing upon a detailed analysis of one space in London during a period of transformation. Our interest is to explore how scholarship might attend more carefully to how public life in cities is put together. A number of scholars have begun this work by reconceptualising what constitutes public space (Barnett 2008; Crawford 1999; Iveson 2007; Sheller and Urry 2003). More recently, geographers have offered novel explorations of communal urban life, yet not in ways that are immediately recognisable as concerned with publicness per se (Bissell 2010; Kraftl and Adey 2008; Laurier and Philo 2006; Middleton 2009; Rose *et al.* 2010; Wilson 2010). What we want to advance are ways of attending to the concept of public space that draw careful attention to the materialities, modes of inhabitation and atmospheres that shape experiences with them. Our broader aim is that through attention to these elements we might help engender more pragmatic conceptions of public spaces and the challenges involved in their ongoing assemblage. Driving these arguments is a belief that until we can expand our understanding of what takes place in contemporary cities, we are limited in our capacity to develop imaginative solutions to some very real challenges within them.

Introducing the Prince of Wales Junction

Since one of our main arguments is the need to pay more careful attention to the actual life of public spaces, we would like to organise our discussion around an ethnographic account of a relatively unknown site in London, a city known for some spectacular public spaces. The Prince of Wales Junction is a five-way traffic intersection along a commercial section of Harrow Road in West London (Figure 1). Situated in the affluent borough of Westminster, the ward immediately surrounding the Junction is marked by significant socio-economic hardship. Of the six 'super output areas' that comprise the ward, three rank among the top ten per cent nationally for indices of multiple deprivation, crime and disorder, disability and health concerns, and low income affecting children (ONS 2007).[1] The Junction may seem an unconventional

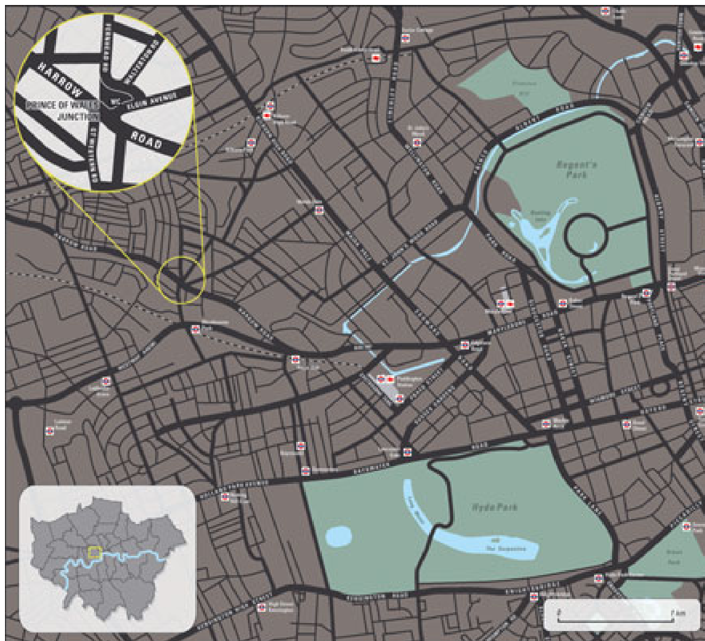

Figure 1 Prince of Wales Junction, West London

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place for thinking through larger issues of public space, but recent transformations there are illustrative of the sorts of challenges and possibilities that are very much a part of contemporary urban life.

On a sunny Saturday in late June the persistent traffic and jostling footpaths along Harrow Road are busy as usual. The good weather has lifted spirits and smiles are visible on many faces passing by. Unlike most days at the Junction, a large number of people have gathered. On this site, the newly opened 'Maida Hill Market' is in full swing for its sixth consecutive weekend. Eighteen stalls with cheery green and white striped awnings encircle the newly laid granite paving stones. Piles of organic produce, gourmet food, hanging baskets and garden plants, handbags and tapestries create a swirl of texture and colour. This is complemented by the smell of freshly cut flowers, frying onions and roasting pork that drift into an atmosphere already saturated with conversation and the banter of market traders. Flows of people continuously pass through. Some seem ambivalent about what is on offer; others are actively engaged in taking in the scene before them or sampling what is available. The six tables and thirty plastic chairs at the centre of the Junction are all occupied; some by people lunching on their market purchases; others by those taking advantage of a place to sit and chat or people watch; in a few chairs people are napping.

This snapshot captures an enjoyable moment on a particularly pleasant afternoon in one public space of the city. It is a small illustration of the pleasurable forms of sociality and togetherness that urban public spaces can offer. What makes it remarkable, however, is that the Junction had been notorious for generating very different sorts of experiences. The previous decade had seen it become a regular site of crack dealing, prostitution, street drinking and aggressive begging. Over the years, various attempts to improve policing and surveillance lowered instances of actual crime. However, a sense of danger and the continued presence of illicit activity had failed to shift public perceptions about the Junction. For most area residents, it was a place to avoid or pass through quickly. Despite the legal right of anyone to be there, it was a far cry from the urban public spaces of assembly valorised in the urban cannon.

The Junction's transformation from a troubled spot best known for crime to a site of conviviality raises three questions:

1. How exactly did these changes happen?
2. What was it about the new Junction that enabled it to bring people together in ways very different from before its transformation?
3. What might the Junction have to tell us as geographers and urban scholars about the ways in which inclusive, convivial spaces are assembled?

We set out to address these questions through ethnographic research conducted over a period of 3 months in the summer of 2009. This included interviews with local residents, police, planners, business owners and community actors involved in the redesign of the site, as well as attendance at neighbourhood partnership meetings. Along with an extended observation on the site itself, one of the authors assisted a market trader at his stall for a period of six weekends.[2] Before considering the details of these findings, we want to first examine some of the scholarship in geography and urban studies around the topic of urban public space to see what they might offer our account.

Thinking about public space

In the 1990s, urban public space emerged as a key focus of geographical concern. Empirically, scholars became attentive to how the ongoing reconfiguration of all sorts of public spaces was linked to wider processes of urban transformation. These changes ranged from the large scale and spectacular, such as the redevelopment of whole urban areas or the invention of new urban forms such as mega-malls or edge cities, to seemingly prosaic shifts in the design, management and financing of urban space. Geographers also began to draw upon figures as diverse as Sennett, Fraser, Young, Berman, Foucault and Lefebvre to develop frameworks for making sense of how these transformations impacted public life. From this, public space as an analytical term came to be understood as a concept that functions in three overlapping registers. Firstly, public space operates as an ideal type. That is to say, it functions as a kind of aspiration for democratic civil society. Secondly, public space defines a set of criteria, more or less explicitly spelled out, against which actual places or the process of transformation can be evaluated. Thirdly, public space is understood as an arena of ongoing contestation and negotiation wherein different

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groups' rights to the city are defined. While much work has been concerned with articulating these registers theoretically and empirically, more generally the concept of public space is deployed to evoke a set of concerns about what is going on within our cities. We will briefly trace three that are most central.

First, there is a set of concerns around exclusion. The term public implies equality of access, yet scholars have drawn attention to the different means and processes through which various groups are restricted, dispersed or banned from certain spaces (Herbert 2008; Iveson 2007; Mitchell 2003). Most often targeted are the destitute and homeless, but forms of exclusion are also enacted in various ways on women, non-heterosexuals, the working classes, ethnic groups, immigrants, young people, the elderly, those with disabilities or outward signs of mental illness, and a host of people involved in everyday activities such as busking, vending, leafleting, protesting and loitering (Davis 1992; Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht 2009; Mitchell 1995 2003; Mitchell and Staeheli 2006; Sorkin 1992). In many cases, the strategies used to prohibit certain practices are meant to make places orderly and safe, but end up being discriminatory as a result of the specific tactics employed (Blomley 2010; Flusty 2001; Lees 1998; Raco 2003). For example, ordinances against loitering and activities such as skateboarding, along with the presence of security guards, often limit the opportunities for teenagers to gather in public spaces (Valentine 2004). Measures seeking to foster 'child safety' or 'youth opportunity' have also been shown, in some cases, to relegate youth to marginalised spaces away from city centres and commercial zones (Rodgers and Coaffe 2005). Whilst there is certainly much to be admired in the resurgent interest in redeveloping and enlivening urban spaces (Lees 2004), wedged between notions of renaissance and renewal are 'highly selective and systematically discriminating' (MacLeod 2002, 605) sets of logics and practices that determine the publicness of urban spaces (Atkinson 2003).

Second, there is a concern with encroachment. The past 25 years have seen a proliferation of innovations in how the spaces of cities are governed. Much of this proliferation speaks to an ongoing interest in communal or public life. Simultaneously, it is also often animated by a desire to ensure that spaces are safe, carefully regulated, predictable and tightly defined. Writing about the aesthetics of New York's Central Park, for example, Nevárez (2007) describes how the privatisation of the funding and management of the park since the early 1980s has created a space where social action is tightly scripted and proscribed (see also Madden 2010; Perkins 2009; Zukin 1995). Similarly, the development of Business Improvement Districts and other forms of public–private partnership has placed into question the degree to which spaces such as downtown streets can be understood as public (Kohn 2004; Miller 2007; Ward 2007). Here the issue is not necessarily one of access, but rather of the extent to which liberties can be safeguarded when ownership and management is distanced from democratic forms of control. State involvement in fostering these transformations is coupled with new forms of social regulation (Fyfe *et al.* 2006) and punitive models of 'law and order' governance that include the use of zero-tolerance policing, surveillance and legal technologies such as anti-social behaviour orders (Chronopoulos 2011; Helms *et al.* 2007).

Third, there is a concern with claim-making. Public space is frequently understood as a symbolic projection of a 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1996) and as space through which that right is produced and secured. As Mitchell reminds us, the protection of rights have not been freely given by the state, 'they have been won, wrested through moralism, direct action, cultural politics, and class struggle, from the state and those it ''naturally'' protects' (2003, 25–6). A great deal of work on public space has highlighted such moments of conflict and struggle (Iveson 2007; Low and Smith 2006; Mitchell 1995 2003) as well as the more subtle processes through which the boundaries and meanings of public space are constituted (Lees 1998 2003; Miller 2007; Watson 2006). Other work has examined a range of ongoing tactics though which urban inhabitants transgress norms or appropriate public spaces through practices of play (Stevens 2007), mourning (Franck and Paxson 2007), street vending (Jimenez-Dominguez 2007) and congregating socially on streets, sidewalks and squares (Domosh 1998; Law 2002).

Each of these concerns – exclusion, encroachment and claim-making – offers a distinct way of attending to contemporary public spaces and the transformations that shape them. With each of them in mind, let us return to the Junction.

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Making sense of the Junction's transformation: part one

The official grand opening of the new Prince of Wales Junction was a festive occasion, enlivened by a steel drum band, circus clowns and great bunches of balloons. In the centre of the market, about 50 people crowded around a giant gold ribbon stretched between two stalls as photographers and school children edged their way to the front. Local resident and Labour Member of Parliament Karen Buck stood before the group with a microphone and a pair of scissors:

> I just want to say … that this is the community in action. This is people living in this area and running businesses who have been saying for several years 'we have had enough of this Junction being an area that is a focus for trouble and drugs'.

After a round of applause, she continued:

> Yes! And I'm not going to tell you that we're going to wake up and it's all going to be an earthy paradise around here. Because that isn't the case. This is a tough inner city area and we're always going to have to keep on fighting. But thanks to the residents, and I can't list everybody … we've got this corner looking great. We've got the market, we've got the police team, we've got lots of you involved and everyday we've got to keep on fighting for what we've gained to make this a place we want to bring our kids up in. Thank you everybody.

The scissors were then passed to Gloria Cummins, director of the local carnival group Flamboyan whose headquarters sits atop the Junction. As Gloria thanked the crowd for their part in 'the long struggle' that brought the market to fruition, she cut the ribbon and declared 'Maida Hill Market is officially open for business!'

Ironically, the market had been 'officially' opened earlier in the day by city council cabinet member Brian Connelly. The mistake in scheduling was realised earlier in the week as council officials and media were told of a 12:00 pm start while in the local area 4:00 pm had been widely advertised. Some local organisers expressed annoyance at this conflict, yet at the Partnership meeting the day before it was agreed that rearranging things might decrease publicity. In his speech, the Conservative Councillor for Economic Development described how the market would be a boost to owners of small businesses and would contribute to badly needed economic regeneration of the area. Like the speeches later in the day, his was met with enthusiastic applause. While both 'grand openings' were primarily staged photo opportunities – one by and largely for the Council, the other by and for local residents – their unnecessary duplication in many ways echoed a long history of disconnection and marginality in the surrounding ward.

Since well before the 1950s the area around the Junction had been populated predominately by recent immigrants and the white working class. From the 1960s this social profile was reinforced by the Conservative council's housing policies that placed large numbers of sheltered accommodation facilities within the reliably Labour-voting ward. Signs of dereliction along the high street reflect a steady decline from its heyday in the 1960s and 70s when it was host to prominent national chains, five large banks, two supermarkets and a cinema. The neighbourhood was at the centre of the 'Homes for votes scandal' in the 1980s and 90s that saw neglect and an intensified relocation of disadvantaged people to the area.[3] By the mid 2000s, along with a 20 per cent vacancy rate, retail had shifted almost exclusively to low-end convenience stores, fast food outlets, betting agents and pound shops. Today, while much of West London has been gentrified, Harrow Road has not. Nowhere is this more evident than at the five-way Junction at the centre of the ward.

In 2004, things came to a flashpoint. Street drinking, drug use, drug dealing and prostitution had become prominent at the Junction and were of growing concern to many local residents. In the spring, an elderly woman had her handbag snatched and was badly injured as she was knocked to the ground. The incident sparked outrage, with anger expressed in phone calls, leaflets, media reports and letter campaigns calling for the council to take action. Meetings involving councillors, police, social housing providers and neighbourhood groups were held to discuss possible interventions. Around the same time, national funding streams were targeting areas with significant social deprivation through Local Area Renewal Partnerships. In December that year the Harrow Road Neighbourhood Partnership was formed. Funds initially provided for three full-time staff and an 18-month process of local consultation and coordination of existing social programmes. In the process, 28 different events – public meetings, forums and festivals – were held to develop an

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action plan. Improving conditions on the Junction was identified as a key priority.

A governance group was established to bring together key actors to develop and implement a viable plan for change. Policing was given first priority. Funding was allocated to increase patrols and a programme of community support officers was established. Additional CCTV cameras and civic watch forums were put in place. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) were given to at least 10 people convicted of drug dealing near the Junction, barring them from being within a set radius for a period of 4 years.

The action plan also called for the creation of a 'quality civic space' to improve aesthetics and 'create a destination' for a greater cross section of the public (HRNP 2007). Options considered included compulsory purchase of adjacent buildings, along with incentives to attract a developer into a public–private partnership in hopes of bringing a community centre, library or supermarket to the area as well as mixed-income housing or commercial office space. Yet with the onset of the 2007 financial crisis it became unlikely that private investors would be attracted to financing large-scale redevelopment. The idea of a market on the Junction had been a favourite in neighbourhood consultation and among members of the governance group. Following a feasibility study and a wide range of consultation events, a plan to re-design the Junction was drawn up. The new Junction quadrupled the paved area. The northern section continued to be a traffic loop but curbs were removed as part of a 'shared space' concept that attempts to reorient the usual segregation between automobiles and other uses of road space (see Hamilton-Baillie 2008). The centrepiece of the project was a market licensed to operate Thursday through Saturday and for special events. Geraud Markets Ltd, a subsidiary of a company running 600 markets throughout the UK and Europe, won the bid on a 3-year contract making them responsible for its daily operations. Funds were also earmarked to facilitate temporary uses of the space, and the partnership hired a member of staff for a 3-month contract to organise event licensing and promote activities. After nearly 5 years in the making, in June 2009 the new Junction and the market were ready for their grand opening (Plate 1).

In all sorts of ways, this story of the Junction demonstrates how public spaces are produced through processes of ongoing conflict and negotiation. It is also clear that exclusion plays a key part here. Broad forms of socio-economic exclusion account for the marginality of the ward's residents and contribute to the prevalence of heavy drinking, drug use and prostitution. We might understand their practice in such a visible location as a form of resistance to desperate conditions. Or, it may just be said that those involved in illicit activities had gained the upper hand in making claims on the space. This seemed to be the case, at least until other residents began to forcefully agitate for the council to 'do something'. In responding to claims of concerned residents, the partnership's first step was to set in motion a machinery of exclusion and dispersion for those involved in illicit practices. Persons issued with ASBOs even had their names and photographs posted on a display near the site. The subsequent regeneration efforts can be viewed as an attempt to further leverage power in an alternate direction; a 'fight' as the opening speeches articulated it, to establish new claims on the site, or perhaps more accurately to re-establish old ones

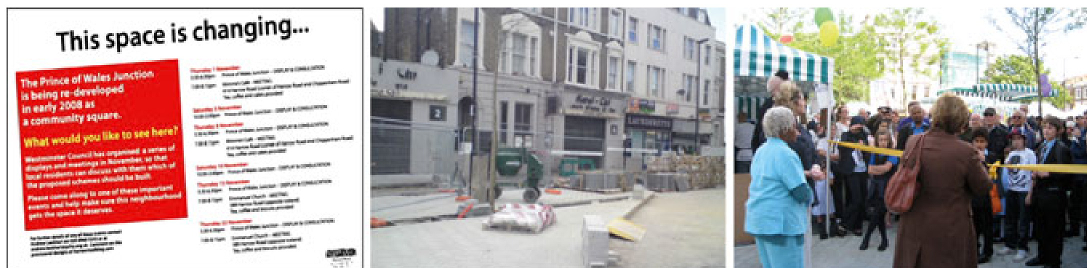

Plate 1 From left to right: Following extensive consultation, months of construction and grand opening celebrations, the redeveloped Prince of Wales Junction and Maida Hill Market opened in June 2009
Source: Photographs by authors

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that had been lost. The end result, in the words of MP Karen Buck, is a tale of 'community in action' wherein the rights of a larger group were asserted in re-constituting the Junction as space for more respectable forms of social and economic exchange.

The sense that the story of the Junction is largely a positive one about a public space reformed needs to be tempered by an acknowledgement that this is also a story of encroachment in certain respects. To start there is the inability of key public bodies to imagine the process of public regeneration as possible by any means other than commercial investment. Were it not for the 2007 financial crisis the Junction almost certainly would have been handed over to private developers. It is hard not to imagine the current arrangements as a temporary fix awaiting a return to more favourable market conditions. Even the small-scale investment needed to bring about the market was preceded by heightened policing and surveillance. These encroachments largely go unnoticed, of course, when the market is in operation. Paraphrasing Zukin (1995; also Allen 2006; Atkinson 2003), we might say that the Junction has been 'domesticated' by market stalls. This sort of domestication, as Allen (2006, 454) describes it, is a 'more subtle, but no less insidious' form of power that works to produce a staged version of publicness in which inclusion can be monitored, encounters can be managed and options can be curtailed.

Rethinking public space

So that is one way of starting to tell the story of the Junction, foregrounding concerns for exclusion, encroachment and claim-making in public space. But bear with us for a moment because we think it is also an account that is insufficient in some crucial ways. We say insufficient not because it is wrong, but because of how much it leaves out. These limitations point towards what we are trying to open up for the analysis of public space more generally. To move in this direction we would like to return to the three questions we posed at the conclusion of 'Introducing the Prince of Wales Junction'.

The first of these questions was, 'How exactly did the changes happen?' Drawing on the literature around urban public space, we were able to formulate an answer that traced the power dynamics at work in the Junction's transformation. However, the heuristics provided leave us ill-equipped to register the extent of the changes from opening day forward. Attending to exclusion or focusing on who is not in the space, for example, does not really help us understand how inclusion happens. Similarly, focusing on encroachment draws attention to what has been lost, but at the expense of examining what exactly has been gained or added-to as result of an intervention. Of course, another way to answer the question might be to think about the process of claim-making; considering, for example, who 'won' or 'lost' as a result of the transformation. The idea of claim-making is rooted in an understanding of public space as a manifestation of the discursive and legal publics involved in its making. But what we want to argue is that in some ways this idea offers a limited way of understanding how space is constituted. It tends to discount – or overlook – the many and variegated ways in which public spaces are made through emergent patterns of use (Berman 2006; Degen *et al.* 2008).

This leads to our second initial question, 'What was it about the new Junction that enabled it to bring people together in ways very different from before its transformation?' The exclusion of certain activities and people played a part (as 'Making sense of the Junction's transformation: part one' outlined), but there is clearly more to the story. It is also a story of *inclusion*. A great deal of effort was paid to facilitate new activities and draw in a broad range of people to the site. To provide an adequate account of the Junction as a public space, it is important to register how such efforts unfolded. Yet, like many contemporary accounts of urban transformation, the story we have set out so far stops at the point where the Junction is being newly populated with a range of different bodies matter and relationships. The inclusive, light-touch sense of pleasurable urban togetherness that marked the Saturday afternoon described in 'Introducing the Prince of Wales Junction', we suggest, could be characterised as one of *conviviality*. Conviviality is gaining traction as a concept to make sense of qualities of collective life marked by openness and accommodation of difference (Fincher and Iveson 2008; Peattie 1998). The concept offers a way of thinking about material-practical arrangements organised not with an aim of 'making present' the excluded, but rather toward nurturing the capacity of individuals to thrive in combination with others (Amin 2008; Hinchliffe and Whatmore 2006).

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'What might the Junction have to tell us as geographers and urban scholars about the ways in which inclusive, convivial spaces are assembled?' was our third initial question. Our contention is that attending to these qualities, along with how new uses are being established, might help us to better grasp the generative aspects of the changing site. We also think that by attending to these features we can help to extend and invigorate our understanding of urban public space. To point towards how we as geographers and urban scholars might go about doing so, we want to offer some alternative ways of thinking through how public spaces are made and remade. Specifically, we want to put forward the following three heuristics with the aim of expanding the registers through which public spaces are interpreted.

1. *Materiality*. Physical public spaces are made through the gathering together of a diverse range of materials. We suggest a need to attend more carefully to them in our analysis. Bringing material configurations together involves numerous political processes and power structures – who does the planning, designing, building, managing, owning, profiting? These are widely recognised as critical questions for urban scholars. But we also need to consider materiality in a more radical sense: it acts – or better, is entangled in action – in all sort of ways (Amin 2007; Bennett 2010; Kärrholm 2008; Latham and McCormack 2004). Public space, as a context for action, is made of constructed surfaces, arranged objects, architectures, demarcations, infrastructures, hard and soft technologies, amenities and provisions, aesthetic devices and shared material practices. These materialities play into the types of public action or address as well as the collective actors (publics) that come together within a given space (Degen *et al.* 2008; cf. Iveson 2007), and they do so in ways that are often unanticipated. We can better understand publicness in this multidimensional sense, then, by thinking through how different materials are put together, accounted for or – as is often the case – overlooked to generate particular material ecologies. Analytically we might start by offering 'the material' a more symmetrical position alongside 'the social' or 'the discursive' in our accounts (Latham 2002; Latour 2005).
2. *Inhabitation.* To think about the stuff of public space is also to be reminded that physical public spaces are lived in. They become public not only through law or discourse but through corporeal practices and embodied routines. Processes of 'mutual recognition' and 'working out differences' might take place in them; civic inculcation is great when it happens, but fundamentally we need to be cautious about idealised notions of squares, streets, sidewalks (or junctions) as being exemplary models of publicness or democratic action (Amin 2008; Barnett 2008). This is not to say that there is not a great deal taking place within them. As publics, we are embodied beings in action; we are on foot, in cars, on public transport; we are sharing tables, buying food, carrying bags, pushing prams, queuing for things. In public, some of us are at work, others at leisure, some of us are just trying to get where we are going next. In attending to these practices of inhabitation, we want to stress the importance of these practices in and of themselves. We need to think more carefully about how they are woven together, and how the presence of certain practices offers affordances for certain kinds of inhabitation and not for others (Thrift 2005; Whyte 1980). What we are trying to advance here is a way of thinking about publicness that gives greater recognition to the fact that inhabitation always and already exists prior to publicness as properly political.
3. *Atmosphere*. Public spaces swirl with a whole range of relational intensities. In their materiality they are also constituted through what are often thought of as immaterial things like feelings, emotions, memories and meanings. These bring a prevailing mood or tone to a space, and often they generate forms of expressiveness independent of or beyond individual human subjectivity (Bissell 2010; Dewsbury *et al.* 2002; Latham and McCormack 2004; Massumi 2002). The concept of atmosphere offers a way of starting to think about this collective expressiveness, the sense of 'push' that gives the world its liveliness (Thrift 2004, 64). Atmospheres contribute to the generation, maintenance, circulation, rupture and amplification of all sorts of 'affective economies' (Ahmed 2004). These affective economies can in some ways be as important as political and symbolic ones. Public spaces can be experienced as crowded, empty, lively, mundane, slow, fast, quiet, dangerous, inviting and so on. Each of these can

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mobilise or cohere the sort of exchanges that take place, rules of acceptable behaviour, feelings of inclusion or exclusion, modes of inhabitation, and possibilities for other collectives to materialise (cf. Allen 2006; Bissell 2010; Rose *et al.* 2010). In doing so, atmospheres affect publicness in all sorts of ways, not least by generating 'feelings that become a propensity to engage in conduct considered ''automatic'' and ''involuntary'''(Thrift 2008, 230; see also Brennan 2004).

We first introduced the Junction by offering a snapshot of an afternoon in late June. Let us now return to that same day, with the heuristics we have proposed in mind, to see how the scene we first described came together. As we revisit the wider story, we hope to illustrate the potential of attending to materiality, inhabitation and atmosphere in analysing public space.

Making sense of the Junction's transformation: part two

At 7:00 am, the market manager Kevin arrives from South London. At this hour, the Junction is primarily a barren space, void of furniture, stalls or people. His first step is to get the metal tent frames, canvasses, tables, chairs, weights, chords and banners from the nearby garage to the site. As Kevin gets on with this work, Alice arrives to open her new store: the Maida Hill Gallery Cafe. Freshly painted in a bright sky-blue, it stands in contrast to the otherwise drab and mostly vacant storefronts along this stretch of the Junction. The entryway into the tiny space announces the teas, coffees and homemade cakes for sale, while a large chalkboard lists a number of upcoming events. Her first step of the day is to lay out the artificial grass that will form a patio on which Parisian-style cafe tables will be placed. As she does this, her most regular customer Gary arrives. Unemployed and a recovering alcoholic, Gary has time on his hands and has been coming every morning to help her wheel the full size piano out of the tiny store in exchange for a cup of tea and a bit of conversation. The piano is part of a participatory art project, one of 30 situated around London. A local artist has painted it to match the cafe, emblazoning it with large letters to tempt passers-by with the suggestion 'Play me, I'm yours!'

By 7:45 am several traders have arrived and are busily setting up their stalls. One of them is Clive who has travelled across the city this morning from Kent, via South London, to wholesale purchase the organic fruit and vegetables he sells. Unloading his temporarily (and illegally) parked van is the most laborious task, but setting up the stall properly requires more effort and attention. Bananas and apples will line the perimeter as they are the most colourful, plentiful and inexpensive items. Placing them down low puts them in the sight-line and easy reach of children; often leading to impulse purchases by parents. Fresh herbs go near the cash register. They have the highest mark-up and a well-timed 'so how are you going to prepare these?' will often lead to an extra sale. Today he has brought an apple press to make juice on site – a proven way to attract curious passers-by. As Alice comes around offering tea to the traders, he tells her and Kevin to come back later for a taste.

As the three of them carry on with their work, we can start to get a sense of the assembling that is going on here this morning. Most basically, it requires putting together a range of materials to make the Junction function as a market. Much of this work is mundane and has already become routine. Kevin will spend nearly an hour moving trolley loads, and at least twice as much time setting up what was taken down just last evening. Other aspects of this assembling are more experimental. Alice has never run a shop before, but has lots of ideas and is eagerly trying them out to see what works. She was quite reluctant to take responsibility for the piano. However, it has proven so popular that she is trying to keep it permanently. She knows that for the cafe to be successful, especially when the market is not on, it has to generate a welcoming atmosphere that will attract people and encourage them to spend both time and money. Clive knows this well as an experienced vendor. He is full of tricks for animating his stall and keeping customers engaged; always arranging things, putting on demonstrations, calling out with banter, making small jokes and advocating the merits of buying organic. For him, there is uncertainty over whether the Junction will be a good place to trade. He has invested £350 in today's produce and there are dozens of places across London where he could be trading instead. Knowing this, Kevin has offered him a prime spot on the corner and a discounted rate for a double-size pitch.

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The efforts we have seen this morning are in line with what the council and the partnership hope to achieve: a re-assembling of the relationships, patterns of use and atmospheres that characterise the Junction – and thereby how the local area is both perceived and experienced. So, what exactly is the council and the partnership assembling? First, they are enacting a series of policy interventions of greater and lesser coherence and recognisability. The idea of intervening in spaces by setting up a market, for example, is one that has become common among urban enthusiasts and in policy circles. They have become a sort of 'mutable mobile' (Law and Singleton 2005), a recognisable, transferable and often effective way to generate both economic activity and social encounters (see Spitzer and Baum 1995; Watson 2009). Second and simultaneously, they are trying to put together a whole range of styles and rhythms of inhabitation that were previously absent. On Friday evenings, a jazz quartet was hired to play and on Saturdays various local musicians have signed up for daytime slots. Other summer events include an Irish Festival, a Carnival costume and drum display, a local music talent showcase, Family Fun Day, salsa dance lessons and an Old Folk's Tea. Activities such as these need organising, but they also require a space where they can happen. The material re-configuration of the site to include not just an enlarged surface but new paving stones, lighting, water and electricity points makes it possible to stage such events.

What is crucial about the work of assemblage is that while new configurations or events may create new capacities, rhythms and affordances, and facilitate some new uses and users while restricting (or excluding) others, there is no certainty about what exactly – if anything – will emerge or stabilise. Thinking in this way can help us to better make sense of why it is that the Junction became such an acutely troubled spot in the first place: a lot of things came together in some surprising ways. In 1995 a Transport for London study identified the Junction as a major pedestrian hazard owing to public toilets that had been there for over 100 years. Rather than close them, the council changed the way the Junction was configured. Traffic was diverted to make room for a strip of pavement leading to the toilets, creating an ersatz piazza. Guardrails were installed along the surrounding footpaths enabling cars to travel faster, as drivers no longer had to worry about pedestrians entering the road. The road to the north became one-way with added speed bumps to calm traffic near the new stretch of pavement. Each of these physical changes may have met their intended pedestrian safety outcomes, but they also allowed the Junction to be inhabited in new ways. It was too busy with traffic to be much of a gathering space during the daytime, but at night it became a popular place for street drinkers. Before long it was also discovered to be well suited for drug dealers and prostitutes to solicit clients, as cars were forced to drive slowly past a spot where people were gathered and then had the option of heading off in any of five directions around London.

The Junction's emergence as a troubled site was not solely due to any of its inherent properties. Rather, a range of practices came together to make illicit activity more prevalent and visible. Police officers describe how stringent policing in the neighbouring borough of Kensington and Chelsea pushed drug dealing and street solicitation to the north of Harrow Road. The design changes to the Junction not only afforded these illicit activities, the surrounding area was also re-assembled as a result of their ongoing presence. For example, the convenience store on the Junction became a common spot to beg for change, often for cigarettes or alcohol – which were sold individually and after hours illegally. In 2008 the store's licence was revoked for this reason. A nearby pharmacy became a methadone dispensary and another was shut down after being convicted of illegally dispensing medication to drug addicts. The concentration of drug-related activity led to the placement of two treatment centres near the Junction and many patients were known to socialise there. As these diverse aspects came together, the Junction stabilised as a place where the atmosphere and modes of inhabitation recognisably expressed the prevalence of illicit practices while materially offering few affordances for much else.

At 9:30 this morning, however, a variety of things are taking place and a wide cross section of the public can be seen. Kevin has everything set up and the tables and chairs at the centre are arranged in clusters. Clive and the other traders have their stalls more or less complete. Thus far, people passing through have been mostly elderly residents. According to several traders 'the old people never buy anything', but they seem to enjoy people watching. The same can be said of the residents of the care home for adults with disabilities; they frequently come by in small groups and will often sit for an hour or so.

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Another set of regulars who arrive are several men who bet on horse racing. They have started using the market tables to peruse the details of the day's races before heading across the street to the bookmaker. Another table is occupied by the family of a woman selling flowers at the market. They live around the corner and spend much of the day hanging out on the Junction. They know lots of people who pass by and this in turn helps to fill the space with familiar greetings and conversation.

Our account in 'Thinking about public space' suggested that the Junction was becoming 'domesticated'. This term is generally used pejoratively by critical urbanists as shorthand for disappointment in spaces that have been disciplined and therefore lost their 'edge' (see Allen 2006; Atkinson 2003; Zukin 1995). However, thinking about the idea of conviviality, we can also consider the word in its original meaning: as a form of 'home making'. Drawing on progressive-era reformer Jane Addams and her projects of 'civic housekeeping', Bridge (2008) outlines ways in which social or physical interventions can be seen as a form of domestication with powerful and beneficial affects. In this case, efforts to make the Junction more reflective of the area's diverse population, through making it more comfortable, inviting, even home-like, appear to be working. Following Dewey, Bridge suggests that domesticated spaces can nurture habits that foster certain dispositions such as security and trust among others or towards the world. As Dewey wrote, 'through habits formed in intercourse with the world, we also in-habit the world. It becomes a home, and the home is part of our everyday experience' (in Bridge 2008, 1576). Similarly, Amin suggests that 'inculcations of the collective, the shared, the civic', stem most generally from experiences in public space where 'urban complexity and diversity are somehow domesticated and valued' (2008, 8–9). This is not the case when a site has been largely vacated by the broader public because of the predominance of, or its association with, illicit activity. In these instances, the barriers to inhabitation are largely atmospheric. That is, for most people the clear presence of hard drugs sets a tone that precludes a sense of comfort or homeliness.

By 11 am the market is the lively scene that was described in the snapshot at the start of this paper. People are laughing, buying, selling, working, resting, even sleeping. Yet there is still illicit activity around. Several people hang about drinking alcohol or smoking spliffs. A well-known hard drug user is still perched in his familiar spot as he had been the previous evening, occasionally nipping around the corner or into the toilets with certain people as they pass by. An intoxicated woman sings loudly outside the convenience store until an acquaintance arrives and begins arguing with her. Their shouting match imbues the atmosphere with tension as it appears he might hit her. None of this activity, however, stands out among the wider swirl of things and activities taking place. Clive's apple press attracts a steady flow of people asking questions and even snapping photos. Children bang on the piano outside the cafe, although occasionally someone with cultivated talent surprises with a confident performance. At 3:00 pm, the piano's lid is closed so that two local guitar players can be heard. By the end of their session, the market begins to seem a bit tired. Food that was prepared fresh is now being packed away, vendors have become less conversational, few people are buying produce or goods and the tables and chairs have mostly emptied. Alice closes up for the day. Kevin starts taking down banners and this sends the signal to vendors that trading has in effect come to an end. By 6:30 pm, the market is largely disassembled. Clive is the last to pack up. Kevin gives the site a final sweep, puts the broom inside the storage shed and locks it up. The Junction once again sits barren and void of furniture, although not empty. It is marked by the steady rhythm of pedestrians and traffic, of people heading off in any of five directions on a warm summer evening.

The events on this day were perhaps temporary or fleeting, yet we can consider them as one set of components that have been plugged into a wider machinery of change being enacted. Even in the market's absence, the Junction has been altered by its presence. We can say that a certain 're-territorialisation' is taking place (cf. Kärrholm 2008). The illicit activities that, for now at least, continue to characterise night-time on the Junction are no longer the defining features of daytime or evening hours. The site is becoming more broadly understood as suitable for not just moving through but occupation by a wide range of people. So what has enabled this to happen? Returning more explicitly to the heuristsics outlined in 'Rethinking public space', we can offer three responses. First, the material reconfiguration has enhanced the capacity of the Junction to afford various modes of inhabitation. The space allows for the market, public events

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Plate 2 Top row: A long-vacant storefront is transformed into a space of pleasurable encounter. Bottom: Conviviality, conversation and leisure on the Junction
Source: Photographs by authors

and performances, and provides a simple infrastructure for such straightforward pastimes as sitting, reading and conversing to name just three examples (Plate 2). Second, these rhythms and styles of inhabitation work through a kind of feedback loop – a progressive adding-to that gains momentum with emergent properties marked by particular temporalities and events. Importantly, the collectives assembled are not based on some already determined or fully formed social groupings; what actually gets assembled does not precede the intervention. This indeterminacy is evident first in the Junction becoming a site primarily defined by illicit activity and later in moments of wider public inhabitation. Third, in attending to the various atmospheres we get a sense of how, at particular moments, the site has become both imbued with intensities of fear or anxiety as well as how more convivial moods or registers of affect were able to come together.

While always technically public, it is tempting to claim that the Junction is in the process of becoming *more* public. This is a neat interpretation, but one that we want to resist. Our sense of what has happened does not revolve around the quantity of publicness, but rather its qualities. In a whole range of ways the Junction is becoming more inclusive, because it is used by a greater range of people, affords a greater range of possibilities for use, and offers more effective ways of dealing with conflicting demands on the space. It has also become more convivial; it now offers many more affordances for sociality, inhabitation and exchange. In summary then, the Junction is in the process of becoming a *better* public space.

Conclusion

This paper began with the suggestion that work on public space within geography and urban studies has reached something of an impasse. Focusing on concerns such as exclusion, encroachment and claim-making, most work on public space in contemporary cities is good at certain kinds of diagnostic critique. It is less suited to making sense of the ongoing production of, and the practical challenges of intervening in, the public spaces in the cities we inhabit.

Our initial interest in the changes along Harrow Road was sparked by wondering what was involved in taking a troubled site and reconfiguring the kind of publicness assembled there. Nearly a year after the time period we have described, the materialities, styles of inhabitation and atmospheres

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at the Junction are still being reassembled in a variety of ways. The market feels decidedly less upscale and has lost its sense of novelty or newness. Many of the original traders of upmarket products, Clive included, have discontinued trading there because of poor sales. Other aspects have stabilised. Kevin is now directly employed by the partnership, which offers more local control and flexibility in terms of how it is run. Should the site prove unable to economically support a vibrant market, other changes seem more enduring. Alice has become a well-known 'public character' in the area, and her cafe a hub for information about local activities. Three permanent benches have been installed. Local celebrations and holiday activities frequently take place on the Junction. In the evenings when the site is empty, neighbourhood kids sometimes rollerblade or play cricket there. A shop worker on the corner says there are still lots of drug addicts coming into his shop, but they no longer trade openly on the Junction in the way that they used to. This ongoing machinery of assembling change at the Junction leads us to two final conclusions.

First, actively attempting to transform public space is not just complex and uncertain, it quite literally involves bringing together things and potentialities that were not there before. Therefore, analyses of public space must be adept in auditing what works and how (or not) within particular spaces. As we have tried to illustrate, some concepts and heuristics are better attuned to this than others. Second, as geographers and urban scholars we need to be more aware of the difficult task of intervening in public spaces, and attending to changes in their unfolding. Urban research may be at its most productive when it is able to mesh concerns for social justice, democracy and inclusion with a more sympathetic understanding of the demands placed on policy actors, decision-makers and the actual spaces themselves. Accordingly, our investigations might not only become more attuned to how interventions get enacted – often with limited resources and time, an imperative to act and difficult choices to make – but also become more involved in thinking through imaginative ways of nurturing the aspirations associated with public space. In tracing how the reassembling took place along Harrow Road, we have attempted to set out some different ways that this might be done. Certainly we must continue thinking about public space with reference to political and communicative ideals, but we also need to be attuned to the material and practical affordances they offer.

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Notes

1 Super output areas are statistical aggregates at the level of 1000 to 1500 persons that enable comparisons to be made using similar size population areas.
2 The names mentioned in 'Making sense of the Junction's transformation: part two' are all pseudonyms.
3 For full account of the crimes committed see Hoskens (2006) *Nothing like a dame: the scandals of Shirley Porter* and Dimoldenberg (2006) *The Westminster whistleblowers: Shirley Porter homes for votes scandal in Britain's rottenest borough*.

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