

IBG 2010 - Geographies of rationality

Time-Spaces of irrationality

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Behavioural economists, neuroscientists and 'neuro-economists' are actively reshaping contemporary accounts of the human subject. Such work – largely coming from a US context – attempts to measure and understand the role of heuristics and bias in decision-making (Tversky and Kahneman, 1979), the emotional driving forces behind action, the importance of social influence and 'animal spirits' (Akerlof and Shiller, 2009), and the impact of the "predictably irrational" subject on the global economy (Ariely, 2008). Furthermore, these post-rational accounts of human behaviour are frequently used to justify new libertarian paternalist modes of governing in the UK (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008; Osborne and Thaler, 2010). Thus, attempts within the public policy arena to design 'fool-proof' decision-making environments are gaining in prominence (Cabinet Office 2004; Cabinet Office 2008). So-called 'nudges' are deployed in the design of everyday spaces, technologies, temporal experiences and administrative procedures in order to better govern irrational subjects. This paper will examine how public policy makers intervene in the intersections between perception, action and conceptualisation in order to shape spaces of irrationality. We examine empirically how libertarian paternalist policies represent and work through the different spatio-temporal imaginations that are associated with irrational and rational behaviours. Beyond debates over the manipulation of time-spaces by neoliberal economic interests, our paper seeks to explore what other conceptual resources might be available to human geographers interested in thinking through the relationship between time, space and irrationality.