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Daedalus' revenge: the phenomenological shortcomings of urban planning and design.

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Abstract: Urban design and planning have played dominant roles in framing efforts to revitalise downtowns or CBDs. The effectiveness of revitalisation efforts around the world has been patchy. Through an analysis of the efforts of Townsville, a small regional city of 200,000 persons on Australia's north-east coast, to revivify its CBD, the performative gap between the promises of urban design and planning and actual results paint a story of dashed hopes and unrealisable ambitions. The diagnostic frame that privileges abstract impressions and codifications cannot adequately account for the messiness of the embodied world and temporal city realities. A phenomenological lens provides insights into these shortcomings. The temporal dynamics of cities, grasped through the appropriation of Henri Lefebvre's implosion/explosion dialectic is introduced to ground the analysis (2003, *The Urban Revolution*). The lesson to be learned is that provided by Daedalus to his son Icarus: it is time to suspend the hubris of being "voyeur-gods" and develop an empathy for the messiness of embodied (urban) life (de Certeau, 1998, *The Practices of Everyday Life*). More stylised and abstract urbanism is unlikely to overcome the historic shortcomings of contemporary urban design and planning.