Selling Smartness: How Corporations Shape "Smart City" Policy
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This paper will take a critical look at some of the ways in which policies for "smart cities" are shaped, advocated, and implemented—specifically focusing on the primary role that technology corporations have in (re)constructing cities around the world. For example, in a widely cited and representative article for *Foreign Affairs,* two chief executives for Cisco trumpeted the benefits of applying the "Internet of Everything" to nearly all aspects of city infrastructure and governance (Chambers and Elfrink 2014)[1]. They promised "intelligent and efficient stewardship of growing cities" to reduce "traffic, parking congestion, pollution, energy consumption, and crime." Who could be against such a program? The only cost, the executives assure readers, would be a slight reorientation in governance and IT procurement strategies—which is based on "hyper collaborative partnerships" where the boundaries between public office and private consulting become porous. As one of their principles for making smart cities the global "norm" proclaims, "the world can't be afraid of embracing technology in new ways. This means rethinking the contract with citizens and the services IT firms and governments provide them" (Chamber and Elfrink 2014: n.p.).

The shift in political language—wherein the social contract is replaced by the corporate contract—is subtle, but crucial for understanding the politics smuggled into the technocratic policy agenda for smart cities. Like savvy businessmen, the Cisco executives recognize the asymmetry of public-private partnerships in an era of neoliberalism. When top managers at firms earn many multiples of top civil servants, the latter readily allow the private sphere to reshape the public sphere in its own image. Just as important as material motives and career ambition, the *narrative* of the smart city, as an interpretation of technological systems, rationalizes these urban transformations. Corporations can afford a phalanx of economists, designers, attorneys, and public relations specialists, all skilled in presenting one possible future for the city as a technocratic *pensee unique.*

Technology critics often portray these unexpected developments in technological control as a kind of Frankenstein's monster or sorcerer's apprentice, one that "we" have unleashed via thoughtless adoption of technology. But critical analysis must push the question of causation and agency further, identifying the powerful *actors* who remain above the fray of consequences, weaving a web of forces that increasingly constrain the time and space of city dwellers and set the terms of engagement for city governments.

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[1] Chambers, J. and Elfrink, J. (2014). "The Future of Cities." *Foreign Affairs,* October 31. URL (consulted January 2014): http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142324/john-chambers-and-wim-elfrink/the-future-of-cities