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STRANGELY FAMILIAR: PLANNING AND THE WORLDS OF INSURGENCE AND INFORMALITY

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It is a privilege to introduce readers to this special issue of *Planning Theory* that deals with the themes of 'informality' and 'insurgence'. The issue brings together two panels hosted by *Planning Theory*, one on 'insurgence' at the 2006 World Planning Schools Congress, Mexico City, and the other on 'informality' at the 2007 Association of European Schools of Planning Conference, Naples, Italy. Here we present some of the articles presented at those panels. But why do such themes matter for planning theory and why bring them together? What do the worlds of informality and insurgence, when placed in conjunction, contribute to planning theory? To answer these questions I must return to how the panels were organized and particularly to the role of Jean Hillier. For it is Jean who insisted that the Editorial Board consider and discuss themes that stretch the familiar boundaries of what currently constitutes planning theory. Insurgence, politics, social movements, citizenship, poverty, informal spaces were all part of the lively debates that thus unfolded, via a flurry of emails. At first glance, our self-defined mandate seemed simple – to bring into the fold of Euro-American planning theory unfamiliar issues, those related to urban planning in the developing world; to thereby expand the geographies of planning theory; to thereby make visible the cities of the global South and their particular experiences. This was to be a way to shake up the perceived parochialism of planning theory, a theory which derives from the experiences of North America and Western Europe but often exceeds its location and acquires universal scope, a theory that becomes *the* Theory. But in fact the enterprise was more ambitious and complex. For it was acknowledged and recognized quite early in the editorial board discussions that such themes, notably those of insurgence and informality, while rooted in the global South,

were equally relevant for a planning theory concerned with the global North. They were in fact strangely familiar. Thus, in her short concept note for the informality panel, Jean Hillier wrote:

> For instance, the dynamics of urbanization in cities of the South may locate informality within the broader politics of populist mobilizations, state power and economic dependency, as in access to employment or housing opportunities. In the North, the informal may perform as the shadow of the formal, with, for example, hidden transcripts of rule-transgression, conflict and resistance.

And so let me return to my opening question: What do the issues of informality and insurgence, when put next to one another, contribute to planning theory? The answers lie in the articles presented in this special issue.

The idea of insurgent citizenship has been most forcefully articulated in the work of James Holston. In his essay for this special issue, Holston explains the concept thus: 'By insurgent, I mean a counter-politics that destabilizes the dominant regime of citizenship, renders it vulnerable, and defamiliarizes the coherence with which it usually presents itself to us.' In Holston's work, both in this essay and elsewhere, insurgence can only be understood in the context of 'differentiated citizenship', the uneven cartographies of access and power within which the periphery is at once marginalized and yet able to put forward a counter-politics. Building on Holston's work, Miraftab crafts the idea of 'insurgent planning', arguing that these are 'planning practices that respond to neoliberal specifics of dominance', those that are 'counter-hegemonic, transgressive and imaginative'. While Holston and Miraftab emphasize the 'defamiliarization' wrought by insurgence, Perera emphasizes 'familiarization' as a quiet but effective insurgence. Familiarization is the process by which the subaltern citizen comes to inhabit, reshape, and rewrite the spaces of the colonizer. Perera writes: 'The room for familiarization is afforded by the incompleteness of formal urban systems . . . these have gaps, cracks, and depend on exceptions.'

The second theme of this special issue is informality. This term has many different and divergent connotations. The common sense meaning is one that associates informality with landscapes of poverty, the 'shadow cities' (Neuwirth, 2004) constructed by squatters; Third World megacities that are now a 'planet of slums' (Davis, 2006). By contrast, in planning circles the term has been recently used by Innes et al. (2007) to mean planning strategies that are 'neither prescribed nor proscribed any rules . . . The idea of informality also connotes casual and spontaneous interactions and personal affective ties among participants.' In this use, informality becomes an element of communicative rationality, a Habermas-lite if you will. The articles in this special issue present a conceptualization of informality that contradicts both these connotations. In my article, I present informality as a mode of production of space defined by the territorial logic of deregulation. Inscribed in the ever-shifting relationship between what is legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorized and unauthorized, informality is a state of exception and ambiguity such that 'the ownership, use, and purpose of land cannot be fixed and mapped according to

any prescribed set of regulations or the law'. Similarly, in his article, Yiftachel presents the concept of 'gray cities' – 'urban spheres lying between full state sanction and expulsion, destruction or death'. As explained later in this introduction and more fully in the articles, it is this logic of 'grayness' that drives urban development, shapes distributive outcomes, and cements the power of the state. It is in this sense that informality is an idiom of urbanization.

In the articles, the worlds of insurgence and informality are entangled. Insurgence often unfolds in a context of informalization where the relationship between legality and illegality, the recognized and the criminalized, the included and the marginalized, is precisely the cause of counter-politics. And the territorial logic of informality is often challenged, even halted, by social protest and mobilization. This entanglement is not unique to these essays. It hearkens back to longstanding traditions of urban research, notably the seminal work of Castells (1983), which demonstrated how the territorial logic of informality is linked to a politics of urban populism, one where there is dissent and mobilization but rarely structural change.

What can planning theory learn from the worlds of insurgence and informality? Are not insurgence and informality outside the bounds of what we may consider planning? Indeed, do they not represent the failure of planning to regulate, manage, map, and control the 'other' that eludes planning? Perhaps for these reasons, planning theory has rarely ventured into these worlds, deeming them unfamiliar territory. I believe that the articles in this special issue demonstrate the relevance of the themes of insurgence and informality to planning theory. Indeed, these worlds may turn out to be 'strangely familiar' after all. In particular, the articles highlight two topics that could be much more at the fore of planning theory: space and politics, and planning as a state of exception.

The articles presented in this special issue are centrally concerned with space, place, and territory. This may seem to be an obvious point but it is worth stating since the articles present a contrast to a vast swath of planning theory that is simply not concerned with space as materiality. There have been calls in this journal, for example by Yiftachel (2006), for planning theory to re-engage with the shaping of urban space. But what is now defined as planning theory does so rarely, and does so timidly. This problem is compounded by the fact that many genres of planning theory have also conceptualized politics as something that takes place, safely, within the formal planning process. Lost in this framework is the sheer reality of cities, regions, nations, globalization – that old-fashioned drama called political economy that saturates everything that planners must confront. How can there be a politics without political economy? And such a political economy is inevitably spatial, indelibly marked by territorial divisions and struggles. Thus, Holston emphasizes the undeniably 'urban' character of differentiated and insurgent citizenship – that this citizenship 'refers to the city as its public sphere and to right-claims addressing urban practices as its substance – claims concerning residence, neighborhood life, infrastructure, transportation, consumption, and so forth'. Politics and space are inextricably linked. Planning in Brazil is remade by new forms of popular

participation and yet this insurgent politics is made possible by 'the lived experience of the periphery'. The insurgence has its distinctive paradoxes, such that as these democratic innovations unfold so a new urban violence constituted of the 'abandonment of public space, fortification of residence, criminalization of the poor, and support for police violence' also takes shape. In such a context, it is not surprising that 'criminal *comandos*' are urban actors, 'combining terror and public works', 'not unlike the state itself', Holston notes. Is this not the face of planning in poor neighborhoods all over the world?

The relationship between space and politics also takes center stage in the essays by Perera and Miraftab. Evoking Michel de Certeau's (1984) theory of a 'practice of everyday life' where myriad tactics unravel the grid of discipline and power, Perera highlights the 'everyday acts of space-making' that 'expose the incompleteness of the hegemony of dominant classes'. Designating this as a process of 'familiarization', he sees ordinary people making space in the interstices of official plan-making and city-building. Such a process is not an organized social movement and nor does it need to be: 'the familiarization of Colombo was neither a direct challenge, nor an escape from the colonial society, but the messy result of a large number of attempts by various subjects to settle in the city and improve their livelihoods on their own terms'. For Miraftab, space-making is a complex terrain of contestation and complicity, of protest and co-optation, of the familiarized and the defamiliarized. Focusing on grassroots spaces, she draws a useful distinction between 'invited' spaces that are 'legitimized by donors and government interventions and aim to cope with systems of hardship' and 'invented' spaces that come into being through the counter-politics of the poor. It is commonplace to see such forms of space-making as outside the realm of planning – interesting but irrelevant, compelling but merely contextual. Yet, as Miraftab argues, it is necessary to see planning 'as a contested field of interacting activities by multiple actors' . . . rather than 'as a prerogative of professionals who act in isolation from other spheres of action'.

One of the most important contributions of these articles to planning theory is that they serve to defamiliarize planning. I borrow the term 'defamiliarization' from Holston's account of insurgence to suggest that these articles act as an insurgent counterpoint to dominant regimes of theory. In my article, I attempt such defamiliarization by arguing that good or better planning cannot solve the crisis that is Indian urbanization, for planning itself is implicated in the very production of this crisis. While it is tempting to envision planning as that which can and must regulate the urban crisis, as the rational keeper of the public good, my analysis demonstrates the ways in which planning itself is a state of ambiguity and exception. Informality then is not a set of unregulated activities that lies beyond the reach of planning; rather it is planning that inscribes the informal by designating some activities as authorized and others as unauthorized, by demolishing slums while granting legal status to equally illegal suburban developments. Such processes are brilliantly explained in Yiftachel's article, which puts forward the powerful concept of 'gray cities'. Central to this conceptualization is the 'stratification of informalities' – the processes of 'whitening' (condoning, approving) and 'blackening' (criminalizing, destroying)

different types of informality. Yiftachel states bluntly that the 'informality of the powerful' is often whitened while other forms of informality remain indefinitely gray or are blackened. Planning is fully implicated in such processes. His work resonates with the analysis of Aihwa Ong (1996) of cultural stratifications in the American context, of how some minorities are 'whitened' and others are 'blackened'. Not surprisingly there is an irrefutable ethno-racial dimension to Yiftachel's 'gray cities' – the ethnocratic frontier that he so diligently makes visible through his research and activism. While Yiftachel (1995) has argued in earlier work that such stratifications represent the 'dark side' of planning, his recent work indicates how such planning practices are not anomalous but rather an integral part of systems of 'urban apartheid' and 'centripetal colonialism'. I could not agree more.

For those of us with a taste for Gramsci, we acknowledge that counter-hegemony is often anticipated in the very structure of hegemony and that in turn such counter-politics often rehearses elements of hegemony. So is it with defamiliarization. Planning, when defamiliarized, is perhaps strangely familiar. The idea of strangeness is also worth recognizing, for it is a crucial ingredient of urban modernity – from the stranger floating amidst the money economy of Simmel's (1903) disorienting city to the stranger who exercises violence with great ease in Camus's (1942) alienating colonial city. Strange familiarities haunt the practices of the city, mediating distance and intimacy, and establishing the terms of identity and authority. The worlds of insurgence and informality are simply a few materializations of this urban modernity.

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