Aporia of Participatory Planning: Framing Local Action in the Entrepreneurial City

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Since the 1970s, planning reforms have on the whole been responsive to local demands for greater citizen involvement in politics, following decades of contentious renewal programmes that had effectively ousted community voices from citywide decision-making processes. No longer, in consequence, are the affairs of municipalities unilaterally brokered by that same circle of paternalists and highwaymen Jane Jacobs famously railed against a half century ago. On the other hand, never has the project of urban planning been so fractious as it is today, as a result of the growing tensions and inefficiencies caused by greater fragmentation of the political process. As more actors make their way onto the political stage, consensus becomes all the more difficult to achieve. Further contributing to this complexity has been a sharp concentration of capital investment in cities, which, over time, has led to a veritable shift in the way local governments both orient and orchestrate themselves. Today's answer to top-down, state-led bureaucracy, it would seem, is side-to-side, market-driven bureaucracy; which of course begs the question as to how effective such horizontally dispersed management models can be in an environment marked simultaneously by the rapid retrenchment of central government and the aggressive rebounding of private finance. What the localist element in politics has no doubt won over the years in terms of achieving greater representation, democracy and transparency in matters of governance, it has also arguably lost in terms of its capacity to protect these achievements in the face of an increasingly pervasive economic sector, which has by now all but reduced the managerial role of the city to that of its entrepreneurial partner.[1]

While there continue to remain notable variations in terms of the actual content and implementation of urban policy frameworks worldwide, there can be little doubt on the whole that decentralist and partnership strategies over the last three decades have disproportionately set the tone of local leadership mandates - most noticeably in the Western territories.[2] That the sovereignty of city-regional governments has generally foundered due to a chronic persistence of budgetary deficits, structural unemployment and diminishing state support - to say nothing of the recent waves of economic stagnation imparted by still ongoing financial crises in Europe and the US - is surely a reflection of the long-standing (read: post-Keynesian) liberties enjoyed by speculative capital and its reckless, unpredictable and uncontrollable path-trajectories. In such a context, indeed, it matters little whether local policy makers *actively choose* to articulate market-based ideologies in order to solve current fiscal and regulatory dilemmas, so far as in all cases they will still be confronted by a deeply entrenched, ultracompetitive and crisis-prone operating environment.[3] Cut off from all other conceivable revenue paths, the only way forward would appear to consist on the one hand in a differential rolling-back of various public initiatives (i.e., collective redistribution and social welfare provision models) and on the other hand in a rolling-out of new, capital-intensive growth strategies geared towards the total marketisation of

city space and privatisation of municipal resources.[4]

A word on generalities

That a certain degree of abstraction is needed to chart the vast institutional landscape in which cities operate, testifies to the extreme global exposure local policy networks are now compelled to face. No less compulsory for theory, alternatively, is the need to anticipate the constantly shifting character of this landscape - whose contours vary precisely to the degree that they are historically, geographically and culturally embedded. In truth, it is no longer possible or desirable to adopt a single, monolithic concept of 'the city', nor for that matter of 'city planning'. Rather, in enlisting such terms it is understood that we are here working less with ideal types than with distinct varieties of a pervasive and enduring global phenomenon - namely, the rationalised projection and institutionalised management of social and urban infrastructures. While the idea of planning does suggest a certain ubiquity to the extent that it deploys a largely *disciplinary* narrative of the city, it is nonetheless significant that the 'actually existing' territorialised manifestations of this narrative are unevenly constituted across space and in time. Accordingly the real historical-material base of planning will differ depending on whether one is addressing North American, Western European or Asian contexts.[5]

To the extent that modern planning regimes work toward an ideal of undistorted communication, some form of rationalism must be said to inhere in each of its localised versions. Such a general rational insistence, so far from being anything like a sovereign spirit or omnipresent *logos*, is what makes possible in practice the coming together of a loose group of city-specific agencies - formed of various elected officials, urban planners, policy makers, legal practitioners, advisory experts, administrators and so on - as well as what enables a broad set of spatially dispersed practical acts, occurring at multiple territorial levels and reflective of a wide variety of interests, to converge in more or less concentrated fashion. It follows that the full remit of planning's agency, while directly *inclusive* of local leadership structures, is not by any means *exclusive* of other, openly formative influences. This means, crucially, that in addressing questions of consensus-building and decision-making in local city contexts one must also examine how these dominant discursive processes intersect with existing hegemonic institutions and power configurations. To speak of the agency of planning is thus also to speak of the wider set of agencies that play a direct facilitating role in shaping current valuations of urban space. In many cities of the industrialised West, for example, one finds a greater significance accorded to the notion of the 'stakeholder' as an effective category in local development approval formats. Hence a large corporation that owns property in the city centre, while legally barred from participating as a citizen in the planning process, is still considered a major stakeholder and so obtains a higher, even privileged, standing under that rubric.[6]

This distinction, between the contingent relativity of cities and the confluence of hegemonic logics that bind them, stands in our view as paramount. For only at this conjuncture is it possible to ask whether the more salient features of what we are here calling *urban entrepreneurialism* - understood as the natural extension of market ideals, partnerships and competitive discipline to regimes of urban management - do not owe themselves precisely to this deep collusion of political and economic imperatives at the rational-justificatory level. In what follows we shall try to examine what becomes of local citizenship practices in such a context, beginning from the standpoint of real structural factors intrinsic to modern regulatory forms and institutions - which, as we shall see, tend to project a permanent 'blind spot' with respect to certain valuations and points of view - and ending with a summary of the new challenges facing localism in an era in which City Hall has all but lost its capacity to project a coherent

path for communities in the face of prevailing market forces.

Incompatible discourses

It is necessary to emphasize, in the first place, the role of legality in directing the terms of meaningful, that is to say consequential, engagement in cities. To the extent that the system of law lays the legislative framework for processes of urban governance and development to take place, every localised act, in order to achieve political efficacy, must be carried out in strict conformity with this framework. Thus a factor of formality is immediately implied by the notion of civic participation, *vis-à-vis* its subordination to instituted legal norms. This formalism ensures that legal accountability, not to say risk, is evenly and manageably spread across all sectors of urban life, such that every act, every decision, can be accounted for. The essence of planning lies precisely in this transfer of formality from one level, the rational-juridical, to another level, the daily concrete interactions of the city. Only to the extent that rational ends can be successfully translated into material reality by way of their formalisation into discrete, administrative steps, can their actuality as ends be secured. This suggests likewise that any individual form of conduct carried out in the public sphere can be equally legitimised or de-legitimised depending on its degree of compatibility with the various legal mechanisms, that is to say, on its potential for rational-juridical integration, which in turn demands that an overall adjustment of forms of conduct take place - so as to meet the criteria for compliance. Whatever end is to be expressed must bow to the predetermined categories that cover it; no expression outside of these categories is permitted, if indeed the mandate of total accountability is to be fulfilled. What counts above all are those aspects of everyday existence that can, in the final analysis, be called to account. In this way planning aspires to a complete, determinate reflection of the built environment *vis-à-vis* its socio-legal projection.

Contemporary affirmations owing to the flexibility and dynamism of new planning regimes do not make the rule of their supervising bureaucracies any less strict. This holds especially true where so-called subjective descriptions of the metropolis are concerned, in other words those accounts of everyday urbanity in which the contingency of identities is held as central. Examples of such a discursive orientation range from local phenomenologies of place to ideologies of cultural heritage; from notions of performance and place-based art practices, to discourses of urban flanerie or psychogeography. Each of these specific modalities speaks to what Ben Highmore calls 'the traces [or] remainders of the overflowing unmanageability of the everyday', or again what John Roberts has defined as 'the space where non-instrumental possibilities can be tested and defended.'[7] Invariably such a trace/remainder must elude the myopic outlook of planning, whose predilection for procedure leaves it quite unable to broach let alone comprehend such an epistemological stance. Indeed whatever exists in the mode of the qualitative or experiential can carry but little weight in the rational schematisations of planning. That such questions should resist any easy identification with the categories of management is no doubt due to the impossibility of their being framed in strictly manageable terms.

This positivistic slant, and the one-sided evaluation it leads to, cannot but severely impede the efficacy of local politics, if that politics is not already disposed in advance to planning's rational-administrative outlook. Rather, the value of citizenship practices can only be undermined where institutional norms and procedures are found to set the terms of the discussion before it even starts. Already we have seen that the essence of participatory action - which is tied intrinsically to values of self-determination, place-bound identity and direct democracy - is ever at odds with the heteronomous, already-instituted character of planning. As a result, the integration of forms of participation demands

that action conduce to reaction, that is, to passive, procedural compliance. This, too, suggests that the desire for autonomy at the local level is already crucially compromised by its reflection at the instituted level, a reflection that invariably entails a distortion. Owing to the explicit abstraction at work in every planning decision, participatory motives must find themselves not only practically subordinated to this logic, but tailored in advance to its expectations. What is local, if it is to be communicated at all, is compelled to be general. This 'presumption of equality,' Peter Berger explains, is not simply a technical requirement of planning, but a basic axiom of bureaucratic ethics; strictly speaking it is the basis of its claim to legitimacy.[8] By its own nature planning tends towards the production of abstract generalities, even where it points to particularities.

While it is true to say that recent reforms to planning have afforded greater protection to localism, such efforts must find themselves systematically disappointed as a result of the enduring universalism inscribed within planning's objective-procedural outlook. That planning seeks above all to streamline the totality of events occurring within its jurisdiction, that is, to formalise them, so as to guarantee for each and every instance a maximum of certainty and a minimum of risk - this inborn tendency is itself seldom recognised as a potential source of tension within the field of city-community interactions, even where consultation with the public is expressly encouraged. On the contrary, forms of concrete individuality are always tacitly expected to be translated into and made compatible with the anonymous terms deemed appropriate for the bureaucratic universe.[9] The practical effectiveness of planning is thus consolidated by the extent to which the totality of means and ends that it oversees is freed in advance of all subjective, qualitative and contingent factors, thus paving the way for general consensus at the political level - and more importantly, a path for development which has the appearance of being decidedly non-controversial.

Counterculture as index of immediacy

We have just seen that questions involving subjective concerns do not figure easily into the official deliberations of planning, on account of the latter's misapprehension of the former as a result of a deep, discursive divide. Instead, we find that there is a tendency on the part of planning to construe culture in terms of the official, organised event, whose controlled and pre-programmed character, to be sure, stands a world apart from the spontaneous and improvisational practices of everyday, so-called vernacular cultures. What's more, the increasing focus on business and tourist users in many of these administered events tends to diminish any local sense of ownership or involvement in them. As such they tend to give off the air of a highly mediated proceeding, passively attended and actively supervised. One may well be concerned, indeed, that culture's consolidation at the official policy level threatens to erode what is in truth cultivated about culture, so much as even the slightest determination *ex supra* should signal the transposition of local customs into lawful conventions, of rituals into rules. Such a contradictory result is in fact found to obtain wherever culture and its administration come to a head. One readily observes, for example, how the diversity inscribed in multiculturalism is continually checked by the singularity of the liberal politico-institutional model that contains it,[10] or again how local valuations of cultural heritage tend to belie the 'rooted cosmopolitanism' endorsed by global conservation mandates and doctrinal charters.[11] Such familiar frictions testify to what Paul Ricoeur has called 'the unfolding of a single experience of mankind,' which makes necessary, on the one hand, the administration of local experiences 'in order to make a decision possible,' and on the other hand the organisation of discussions 'in order that the largest possible number of men can take part in this decision.'[12] Bureaucracy, or the

rationalisation of power, for Ricoeur, is inextricably tied to the universalisation of democracy. 'No kind of criticism of technics will be able to counterbalance the absolutely positive benefit of the freedom from want and of the massive access to comfort.'[13] And yet this rationalising tendency, at the same time, would seem to betray a contrary development, insofar as 'the phenomenon of universalisation, while being an advancement of mankind, at the same time constitutes a sort of subtle destruction.'[14] Even Ricoeur does not deny the double-edged significance of rationalisation as it pertains to the organisation and institutionalisation of the cultural. What Marcuse calls the 'irrational rest' does well to epitomise what is at stake in this overreaching of regulations into previously non-regulated sectors of social life.[15] That there is in fact a manifest disconnect between the real spaces of culture and the rational space of planning, again points back to the supposition, stated earlier, that there is something intrinsic to cultural experience that leads the latter to reject, unequivocally, the 'one-dimensional' logic of its organisation; that its very affinity with the manifold textures of everyday life should demand a strict partition be installed at their terminus, safeguarding them as it were from being smoothed over.

In his essay 'Culture and Administration', Theodor Adorno speaks of the aporia that must constantly prevail between the absolute purpose of the cultural and the absolute rationality of administration.[16] Culture's institutionalisation, for Adorno, merely represents an 'external affair by which it is subsumed rather than comprehended'.[17] For culture to fend off the ever-present threat of subsumption, rather, it must continually adopt an oppositional stance with respect to the status quo. As legitimate culture is unable to fully capture what is specific to culture, so must there always be a remainder, as the index of individuality - or in Adorno's language, the nonidentical - which escapes all organised attempts to assimilate it. Seemingly arising, then, as a general expression of nonconformity with administered forms of life - owing ostensibly to the inadequacy of the latter's offerings, which in any case usually carry a price tag - such a residuum or 'alternative' culture, far from being a noncommittal set of diversions from the real world, indeed appears, at least prior to its recuperation by the mainstream, to have much in common with the participatory ethos. Whereas the former assigns centrality to the idea of *self-expression*, the latter posits a need for *self-determination*. Both dispositions, however, are effectively allied in terms of their refusal to accede to the equalising presumptions demanded by the dominant discourse. For what is called 'alternative' with respect to culture is no less than culture's vital protest against compulsory integration, just as the autonomous strand in localism opposes its own incorporation via planning's community engagement protocols. The relentlessness with which planning pursues the subsumption of both culture and community is thus matched by an equal and opposite counterthrust to such initiatives.

Quality assurance

Quality from the standpoint of culture is something that must be opposed to all forms of standardisation, for standardisation is what denies any possibility for distinction. Yet this is precisely what the system of planning calls for, namely, that the notion of quality be recast as something that approaches a universal checklist of equivalences. Quality thus conceived is to bow strictly to the order of technical criteria, which last encompasses everything from design and production specifications, to performance-based protocols targeting areas of utility, efficiency, and more recently, sustainability. Here, too, planning aspires to a complete determination of the practical field in order to gain a maximum return on certainty. As concern for quality resolves increasingly into the one-to-one fulfilling of technical demands, however, questions aimed at raising a more profound awareness of quality become decidedly rare. Indeed the official disinterest met by citizens wherever they would aspire

in a public setting to challenge this kind of managerial outlook, suffices to ensure that such efforts, where they cannot otherwise be reconciled with the practico-technical paradigm, are either quietly dismissed or quickly brought back into the realm of the expedient. The resultant frustration of citizens in having their opinions systematically dismantled by a discourse geared to the demands of disinterested experts and/or interested speculators - who again, by virtue of the eminent reasonableness of their respective positions, find themselves automatically privileged by the pre-established platforms - means essentially that other avenues for activism must be sought, lest 'consultation' become a euphemism for NIMBY-networking, and 'quality' synonymous with the simple raising of averages.

It is clear that the ambiguity surrounding extra-rational categories like 'quality' and 'character' does not sit well with the bureaucratic imperative for complete, conceptual transparency. That planning should sooner be prompted to omit such language from its ambit than attempt to redefine it on its own terms, is naturally to be expected. One outcome of such efforts to secure a 'subjective fix', as it were, is the design guideline, whose function as a quasi-legal planning tool is to open a path to qualitative questions - without, that is, endangering the empirical foundation on which the whole apparatus rests. As such the guideline serves as a vehicle for the grounding and legitimating of planning decisions where these cannot otherwise claim an evidential or justificatory basis for themselves. Here the underlying intention, above all, is to constitute a flexible, discretionary strategy that provides a space for the reconciliation of local interests with larger functional and economic objectives. Scale, height, setbacks, massing, proportions, materials, frontages, finishes, signage elements, sightlines, shadows, sun exposure, etc. - all such localised, area-based indicators are cited by planning as constitutive of the general character of a particular locale or neighbourhood, its 'charm' and 'sense of identity'. Taken together such details should combine to produce a set of place-specific norms, in the spirit of which, it is suggested, new development will willingly partake. By way of compliance with these norms comes the expectation that within this manageable space the sustainability of communities should be guaranteed for the long haul.

From this perspective, what makes a place evidently boils down to its capacity to be recorded, described and classified, that is, on the basis of its manifest observable properties. Indeed, on closer inspection we find that such a strategy bases itself on that same, positivist presumption that should see in *names* the perfect analogues of the *things* for which they stand. Thus in place of a haptic understanding of specific spatial and/or material qualities, one finds a closed constellation of well-sounding statements, predicated unilaterally on the assumption that concrete things-in-themselves should be fully compatible with the descriptive codes that contain them. Through this distillation of objectivity into highly-ordered taxonomies, it follows that whatever resists being made to order in this way is *a fortiori* cast out, that is, by the self-styling strictures of thought - which should call into existence only what can be safely assimilated to its concept. Consequently only those place-features which may be systematically isolated, tagged and filed away, are finally registered as character-defining - while those least amenable to formal designation are deemed unworthy of official recognition. What is encouraged is not so much a direct, spontaneous dialogue with the city as rather a mechanical recitation of its forms and surfaces. Doubtless this explains the overwhelming presence of visual or image-based descriptors in the design guidelines.- as opposed to, say, tactile, emotive or experiential qualifications, which should prove difficult if not impossible to pin down categorically. Anything that is found to elude the fixity of the definition should rather be hard pressed to find a spot on the bureaucrat's checklist. That planning should ever deign to accommodate

such unruliness, is a prospect whose first condition would be to sacrifice the safety of a sign for the indeterminacy of an impression - a compromise surely none of its representatives should be willing to entertain.

On this point Bernardo Secchi offers the counter-speculation, presumably playing devil's advocate, that 'perhaps there is something which links this effort to speak of the multiplicity of the real, preventing it from being illuminated by a rule of order, a theory, a narrative, to the idea of social fragmentation in which we are immersed.'[18] But if to *speak* for the real means in actuality *abbreviating* it, that is, insulating or bracketing the concrete from all of its sensory and material richness, just for the sake of rendering it intelligible - this effort would then be, at best, wishful thinking; at worst, self-conscious deceit. As it stands, recent attempts to enrich the techniques of planning by introducing *still more* classifications, *more* fine-grained analyses, *more* detailed descriptions - far from steering us out of the dilemma, can only lead to our further entrapment.[19] As Secchi later clarifies:

> Few are aware of the gaps which a map, a table, a drawing, a regulatory text, no matter how they are constructed, leave between the intentions and practices of those administrators or citizens who observe them; of the difficulties involved in filling a space with words or images which are inevitably ambiguous and charged with preconceived judgments.[20]

While one is advised never to stand in the way of progress, one is also all too painfully aware that not all change constitutes an advance. To the extent that the singularity of place is nullified by its reflection in description, so too does the ideology of growth come to reflect little more than an accumulation of stereotypes. Any attempt to thus foster growth 'in the spirit of' a place, can only miss the mark of that place so long as the inner motivation for change remains squarely at the mercy of abstract analytics. What planning today, on the contrary, proffers in the name of placemaking seldom amounts to anything more than a declaration of goodwill, one that is filled to the brim with enthusiasm but only infrequently lives up to the language. Here the logic of the guideline fundamentally misguides by insisting that compatibility with context can be achieved via a simple and faithful reshuffling of 'built form elements' - as if, paraphrasing Secchi, the mere intention to stay true to a place were proof positive of its practical effect.

Legitimacy outsourced

As to the perceived quality of the built environment - quite apart from its practico-technical aspect - neither the policy statements nor the guidelines, it is true, can be said to offer much in the way of driving meaningful dialogue on the subject. Thus in view of these limitations planning must look to other sources for *prima facie* justificatory support. Here we meet the figure of the design advisor-expert, whose role in the development process is to provide an authoritative voice for planning where it is otherwise not qualified to speak. That the rationalistic tenor of planning should preclude it from having a say where non-rational questions persist, does not stop it from deferring to the expertise of those who have special currency in such matters. To this end the advisory panel (which itself stands as a quasi-authoritative body comprised of architects and other institutionally recognised professionals) is tasked with mediating, among other things, the disorderly divide between aesthetics and technics. As planning's proxy in this regard, the panel proceeds from an aesthetic point of view to assess the merits and/or demerits of a given design proposal in purportedly qualitative terms. Evidently, questions concerning the transformation of the public realm are here offered a place in which to be raised and recognised in an official capacity.

The ideological basis of this strategy is clear enough: by way of affiliation with the discourse of trained expertise, aesthetic judgements are not only

given to assume an air of authority, but the matter-of-factness of a technical appraisal. As Pierre Bourdieu remarks, the most disinterested gaze 'has the privilege of appearing to be the natural one.'[21] Through this subtle slant, official debate over quality translates into more manageable considerations of 'appropriateness' - supervised by those select few who would purport to stand above the commons while speaking in its name. Far from enacting a mediation of aesthetics and technics, the advisory panel rather ensures their proper conflation. This insight is confirmed by the panel's disavowal of anything that deviates from mainstream practice, ostensibly to show its allegiance with the public interest. By canonising the status quo in this way, it follows that any practice running contrary or peripheral to the official line must not only find itself deprioritised as regards its status, but barred *in toto* from recognition. This structural oversight guarantees that the possibility of establishing a counterposition with respect to the prevailing standard is safely managed at the source.[22] Only those attributes that can rather be assimilated to the accepted canons, for which the panel stands as impartial arbiter, are supposed in the final analysis to be valid. This, too, has the effect of inhibiting critique from the outset - 'criticism' having been strictly identified as an internal affair for the panellists to sort out. Popular protest, where it fails to abide by the higher standards of the professional, is by pain of contrast made to look frivolous - dismissed either as ill-informed, laypersons' opinion, or else as subjective, irrational bias. The aesthetic authority of the panel, whose 'quasi-feudal' status (Bourdieu) is secured solely and effortlessly through the force of its credentials, is as such beyond scrutiny; irrational protest cannot win so long as it is pitted against the rationality of experts. On the contrary, it is by virtue of the professional qualification that a single point of view is rightfully elevated to the status of an absolute reference point. Shorn of any air of arbitrariness, of mere opinion, the panel's frame of reference is *per se* identified with pure competence. Thus to challenge prevailing attitudes from inside the system is to find one's efforts consistently blocked by the *tacit code of expectations* that should maintain the existence of the status quo at any cost. This expectation to adjust one's values, merely for the sake of passing the test of the panel, leads to a state of affairs in which the lowest common denominator in culture - the aesthetic average, as it were - is ironically declared its most advanced representative. 'By producing for a stereotype, one ends up […] fabricating a stereotype, which explains the rampant academicism of contemporary work, dissimulated as it is behind apparent formal diversity' (Buren).[23] At the same time the manifest partiality concealed beneath the veil of professionalism is never itself put to the test. For the critical voice of the commons cannot but fall on deaf ears if it, lacking all manner of credentials, should ever deign to advise the advisors.

Returning to Adorno's analysis, we learn that 'the judgement of an expert remains a judgement for experts and as such ignores the community from which […] public institutions receive their mandate'.[24] This statement rings no less true for qualitative judgements than it does for quantitative ones. The presumption of equality alluded to earlier here returns in a subjectively mediated form: what counts as valid from the prized standpoint of the advisory panel is, simply by virtue of its authoritative weight, made valid for one and all. Just as the dealer's function in art circles is to commodify the work of art, thus priming it for exchange, so too is the design expert's prime function to generate the conditions for consensus in matters potentially fraught with contention, to wit, aesthetics. Where the practical inconvenience posed by a plurality of voices would otherwise threaten to hinder the smooth course of progress, experts must be brought in to bridge the gap. From the recognition, therefore, that taste is still in need of general management - if only for the sake of streamlining efficiency - it becomes something of an open question whether today what we are seeing in the form of the design advisory panel,

by whose vested authority a spectacularly shallow vision of building culture is touted as if it were the pinnacle of urban placemaking, is not in fact simply a *soft* version of the *hard* paternalism of previous planning regimes.

It is as significant as it is telling that the cultural pretentions of the design expert are not open to examination in the context of public discussions. On the contrary, it remains something of an unsaid premise that the standpoint of the design expert shall enjoy an instant and irreproachable authority over the ordinary perceptions of those actually residing and labouring in communities. To turn such authority on its head, however, would be in effect to liquidate the stock from which the design expert draws her currency, so far as this last proceeds always from a 'specially delimited territory in which everything goes without saying and nothing needs to be justified.'[25] Rather, the naturalness with which the design expert operates testifies to the internalisation of her received ideas and attitudes. Far from rewarding innovation, she merely reinforces orthodoxy by turning to self-sustaining, tried-and-tested formulae for success. Such formulae stand, as it were, 'as instances of a legitimation that has congealed and become unobtrusive'. As such the expert is 'able to forgo external justifications and thus give off the heavy scent of immanence, in which the business of art is so fond of steeping.'[26] Just as the technicians of planning seek practical reasons for their recommendations, so do design experts take to blogs and glossy magazines for theirs. That the appraisal of the expert should ever itself become the object of public scrutiny, however, is not something that one would expect to find on the advisory meeting agenda anytime soon, lest the arbitrariness announced by the prognosis immediately cast suspicion on the whole affair.

Insider city

We have seen that the project of participatory politics has seldom enjoyed an existence free of contradiction. To be sure, the grassroots uprisings in the 1960s and 1970s, on which the present-day ideology of participation is founded, had always proceeded in step with a radical critique of institutions, the reasons for which we have attempted to flesh out in the preceding sections of this essay. Once formally integrated into the system, however, the original anti-establishment imperative could no longer be sustained in practice, insofar as the bureaucratic element in society had by no means withered away, as was the revolutionary expectation, but had actually expanded and intensified. As it stands currently, the reality of civic participation finds itself caught in a tangle of paradoxes as a result of its status as an unfinished project. Urban activists in the 1960s and 1970s could hardly in retrospect have anticipated the later cycles of institutional recuperation that were to follow the earlier reformist victories, nor could they have readily foreseen the long period of political and economic retrenchment that, culminating in neoliberalism, would eventually lead to the undermining of local political platforms by the turn of the century.

No longer as a result do the old mantras of self-liberation and self-management carry an effective purchase on the municipal stage, for in recent years the socioeconomic status of the participatory class has gone through a veritable sea-change. In place of an idealism foregrounded by those the likes of Jane Jacobs, we now find the exigencies of a micro-local reactionary politics, or so-called NIMBYism, vying for centre spot on the community consultation platform. That resistance to change should now come to be defined just as much by shared prejudices and mutual concern for property, than by, let us say, an emotional attachment to place, is one of the key consequences of this gradual overturning of participatory motives since the 1970s. While commitment to place still constitutes one of the major reasons for local opposition, this sentiment remains but a faint echo of earlier grassroots movements, whose group solidarity and

coherence in protest, it is true, owed just as much to the historical failure of past planning models as it did to the personal resilience of its heroes. (Indeed the capacity of an out-of-touch modernist planning ideology to serve as a negative rallying point for communities should not be underestimated in this context.) Nevertheless, the potential for said place-values to galvanise opposition by way of emotional resonance seems in recent years to have lost much of its political stock. Where such stimulus does gain ground, it is generally short-lived on account of its ill-fated subjectiveness, a problem we have already discussed at length. The charge of idealism that today is frequently ascribed to such motives - that is, on account of their apparent lack of rational or practical incentives - is of course what leads to their current ideological sidelining as ill-informed, knee-jerk reactions, legally irrelevant and hence unworthy of serious consideration. Consequently the divided status of public participation today - divided, that is, between a protectionist politics on the one hand and a progressive social activism on the other - leaves very little middle ground for alternative notions of collective resistance, particularly as they stand to bear on aesthetic and cultural concerns. Indeed, one of the greatest merits of the 1960s and 1970s critique was its ability to incorporate subjective, qualitative and contingent demands into an overall revolutionary-utopian perspective. By contrast, the ideological dislocation of the meaning of public participation that we are witnessing today should ostensibly pose serious challenges for those seeking to defend a notion of quality in the face of culture's current capitulation to market mechanisms under an increasingly cash-strapped and overburdened City Hall. At the same time, the partial recuperation of the participatory model by an ultra-conservative constituency of homeowners at once signals a turn-around of its earlier status as a radical rallying point for local liberators - to such an extent, indeed, that in place of promoting the public consultation platform as a vehicle for grassroots innovations of all kinds, we now find it increasingly coopted as a tool for the further consolidation of the local status quo.

There can be little doubt that the systematic incorporation of radical forms of participatory action since the 1970s owes itself, at least in part, to the equally pervasive phenomenon of urban gentrification, through which the gradual buying up and pricing out of low-rent, low-density urban lands has, over time, reconstituted the very social and political fabric of cities. Here, too, we find that existing micro-cultures operating at a subaltern level are constantly under threat of being ousted by their own incubating activities. Recent sociological and geographic studies confirming the steady polarisation of income levels in so-called world cities would appear to corroborate this general, city-wide tipping of the scales, insofar as an uneven distribution of wealth across the territory should mean that individual participatory motives - that is, the personal incentives for becoming politically engaged - should, too, find themselves unevenly represented across the map, as a result of sizeable disparities in the socioeconomic landscape.[27] That the field of action in municipal politics should become less tied to public-emancipatory concerns and more to the preservation of private interests, is not in itself surprising, however, if one takes pause to consider the general postwar tendency that would see the old interventionist system of checks and balances eroded in direct proportion as state executive powers over commerce and industry start to wane. In this sense it becomes possible to see the recent private recoupment of participatory action as the local, concrete expression of a more general and diffuse realignment of political-economic forces. Subsequently the structure of citizen engagement under the current neoliberal arrangement must presuppose nothing short of a total systemwide reset, in which local lobbyists are encouraged to exchange old notions of self-initiation for new notions of self-interest. Less a civil disobedient than a committed stakeholder, today's participant finds himself ever ironically in league

with the totalising presumptions of planning - to such an unprecedented degree, in fact, that what once proved an absolute hindrance to the expression of singular values now stands as their perfect ideological complement.

Local action as nonintegrative praxis

The current entrepreneurial climate in cities has made it clear that the discursive terrain on which the formation of local identities is given to play out is, in actuality, far from neutral. Likewise it has been shown that the official celebration of pluralism in 'world-class' city economies is by no means free of hegemonic influence. We have argued that it is not just the perpetual unevenness of social relations on the playing field but the active restrictions arising from the 'rules of the game,' that continue to impede the formation of an alternative participatory politics, not to say public sphere, which would stay true to itself only to the degree that it pursues 'its own autonomous line of force, its own specific trajectory, which is also its meaning.'[28] Extending the democratic reach of these rules, on the contrary, should prove purposeful only where greater social or economic integration is seen in the first place as a worthy political pursuit - where localist arguments, in other words, find themselves perfectly amenable to discursive translation so far as they are practically and positively intended at their core.[29] Such a positive expansion of the existing lines of communication between distinct political subjectivities, however, can be of little use where notions of *nonintegration* and *noninstrumentality* are in fact the intended objects of a given social subject - objects formed, that is, in a spirit of wilful spontaneity and critical contestation (on the part of a counterculture towards a hegemonic order, for example). Here institutional integration can no more serve as an end for this subjectivity than open dialogue can reconcile the contradictions that *ab ovo* gave rise to it. For a radical participatory politics to remain viable, on the contrary, such a moment of integration or recuperation by a dominant exteriority must perpetually be held at bay. What we have earlier described as a counterposition, meanwhile, readily acknowledges the alterity that keeps it from comfortably being other within the system, and resets itself accordingly. Far from surrendering itself to the presumption of equality that should compromise its source of identity - such a position strives instead to actuate its own *presumption of singularity*, that is, on the very ground of its adversary. By way of an oppositional incursion into the dominant discursive space of the city,[30] participatory praxis conceived as counterposition aims at nothing less than the constitution of a *new* institution, a *new* hegemony - one that indeed fixes the centre of agency nowhere but in itself. Where the current orthodoxy should preclude by way of arbitrary self-privilege the appearance of any radical alternative envisioning of the city, it behoves such praxis to challenge this standard by continually heeding the critical-oppositional element within itself.

** Editors' comment: Against our standard editorial practice and grammatical revision suggestions to the author, the paper has been retained precisely as submitted due to insistence of the author.*

Notes

1. David Harvey, 'From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation of Urban Governance in Late Capitalism,' in *Geografiska Annaler, Series B: Human Geography*, 71, 1 (1989), pp. 3-17. For a more recent discussion on the subject see Kevin Ward, 'Entrepreneurial Urbanism, Policy Tourism and the Making Mobile of Policies,' in *The New Blackwell Companion to the City,* eds. Bridge & Watson (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 726-34; and Tim Hall & Bob Jessop, *The Entrepreneurial City: Geographies of Politics, Regime and Representation* (Chicester: John Wiley & Sons: 1998), esp. pp. 77-102.
2. Paul Kantor, 'City Futures: Politics, Economic Crisis,

and the American Model,' in *Urban Research and Practice*, 3, 1 (2010), esp. p. 2.

3. Nik Theodore, Jamie Peck and Neil Brenner, 'Neoliberal Urbanism: Cities and the Rule of Markets,' in *The New Blackwell Companion to the City,* eds. (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), esp. pp. 16-24. See also Kantor, Op. cit., p. 6.
4. Relevant here are the North American case studies found in Stefan Kipfer & Roger Keil, 'Toronto, Inc? Planning the Competitive City in the New Toronto,' in *Antipode*, 34, 2 (2002), pp. 227-64; Tim Chapin, 'Beyond the Entrepreneurial City: Municipal Capitalism in San Diego,' in *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 24, 5 (2002), pp. 565-81; and Nik Theodore and Neil Brenner, eds., *Spaces of Neoliberalism* (London: Blackwell, 2002). For Western European examples see Philip Booth, 'Partnerships and Networks: The Governance of Urban Regeneration in Britain,' in *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 20 (2005), pp. 257-69; and Falleth, Hanssen & Saglie, 'Challenges to Democracy in Market-Oriented Urban Planning in Norway,' in *European Planning Studies*, 18, 5 (2010), pp. 737-53. See also Paul Kantor & H.V. Savitch, *Cities in the International Marketplace: The Political Economy of Urban Development in North America and Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2002). For exemplary case studies of the Asian experience see Shenjing He, 'China's Emerging Neoliberal Urbanism: Perspectives from Urban Redevelopment,' in *Antipode*, 41, 2 (2009), pp. 282-304; Bob Jessop & Ngai-Ling Sum, 'An entrepreneurial city in action: Hong Kong's emerging strategies in and for (inter) urban competition,' in *Urban Studies*, 12 (2000), pp. 287-313; and T.C. Chang, 'Renaissance Revisited: Singapore as a Global City for the Arts,' in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24, 4 (2000), pp. 818-31.
5. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson, 'Reflections on Materialities,' in *The New Blackwell Companion to the City,* eds. (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 8.
6. Mark Purcell, 'Resisting Neoliberalization: Communicative Planning or Counter-Hegemonic Movements?' in *Planning Theory* 8, 2 (2009), p. 157.
7. Ben Highmore, in *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 26, cited in John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006), p. 2.
8. Peter Berger, *The Homeless Mind* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 53.
9. Ibid., p. 48.
10. Brian Barry, 'The Muddles of Multiculturalism,' in *New Left Review* 8 (Mar/Apr 2001), pp. 49-71. See also Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (London/Cambridge, MA 2000).
11. Rob Lennox, *A Charter for Cultural Internationalism: What are the Limits of a Cosmopolitan Approach to UNESCO's World Heritage* (University of London/ York, MA 2011), pp. 15-28.
12. Paul Ricoeur, 'Universal Civilization and National Cultures,' in *History and Truth* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 273.
13. Ibid., p. 275.
14. Ibid., pp. 276-77.
15. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1964), p. 99.
16. Theodor Adorno, 'Culture and Administration,' in *The Culture Industry*, trans. by Wes Blomster (London, New York: Routledge, 2004 [1978]), p. 113.
17. Ibid., p. 112.
18. Bernardo Secchi, 'Urbanistica Descrittiva,' in *Casabella* 588 (Mar 1992), p. 61.
19. The irony of the present situation is well captured by the phrase 'flexible standard,' which, inasmuch as it allows a certain element of personal discretion into planning, pushes the bureaucratic imperative of impersonality to its breaking point. Interestingly, however, it also points to the essential arbitrariness of the (law-like) standard. If a degree of variation turns out to have been possible all along, one is able to then question the relevance of that regulation, and perhaps even test its cultural-ideological assumptions.
20. Theodor Adorno, 'Culture and Administration', p. 62.
21. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Harvard

University Press, 1984), p. 56.

22. One thinks in particular of so-called alternative spaces, or the spaces of everyday urbanism, in which the sphere of the banal or outmoded, for example, is appropriated in a deliberate spirit of contestation. It is significant that this conferral of aesthetic status onto sites or objects presumed ordinary or worthless should stand in conscious opposition to the sphere of the novel and extraordinary, in other words to the dominant logic of the official public realm. If, as Bourdieu suggests, all taste 'classifies the classifier,' then the various symbolic struggles effecting between disparate positions and identities cannot possibly find a non-partisan forum in planning, where the institution of privilege decides in advance which values are to be emphasised and which are to be overlooked.
23. Daniel Buren, 'The Function of the Studio,' in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, eds. Alberro and Stinson (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), p. 115.
24. Op. cit., p. 128.
25. Diedrich Diederichsen, *On (Surplus) Value in Art* (Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2008), p. 29.
26. Ibid.
27. See, for example, Alexander J. Reichl, 'Rethinking the Dual City,' in *Urban Affairs Review*, 42, 5 (2007), pp. 659-87. See also Hamnett & Cross, 'Social Polarisation in Global Cities: Theory and Evidence,' in *Urban Studies*, 21 (1994), pp. 389-405. For a wider perspective see Sassia Sassen, *The Global City* (Princeton University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 193-320.
28. Frederic Jameson, 'On Negt and Kluge,' in *October* 46 (Autumn, 1988), p. 159.
29. The deliberative or communicative planning paradigm, which in many respects is indebted to the Habermasian theory of communicative action, stands as a perfect example of such a fully integrative, dialogue-based planning approach. In recent years this model has rightly come under scrutiny for its inability to effectively withstand and counter neoliberal hegemonic incursions in the public sphere. See for example Mark Purcell, Op cit., pp. 140-165; and Margo Huxley, 'The Limits of Communicative Planning' in *Journal of Planning and Education Research* 19, 4 (2000), pp. 369-77.
30. Most pertinent to this idea are James Holston's notes on 'insurgent citizenship' in the context of the global south; see his *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), esp. pp. 309-13. Similar notions of the political as counter-hegemonic struggle may also be found in Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2010); and in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, 'Preface to the Second Edition,' in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (New York: Verso, 2000), vii-xix.

Biography

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