I

Insurgence[i]

Natalie Osborne[ii]

spanner, spade, seeds

     seedbombs, Signal

shouts, sirens, songs

the plum margins

     of the city

flow in to the

     centre and out

Capillaries

     to arteries

Currents unseen

     Until the city bleeds

-

Shadow places may bear, or midwife, insurgencies — transgressions, subversions, destabilisations, counter-imaginaries, and insurrections in, for, and against urban space.[1] Insurgencies reveal and contest (and in some cases, replicate) the injustices on which cities sit, survive, and reproduce themselves. To understand geographies and expressions of insurgence, we must attend to the long and varied urban shadows. The forgotten, neglected spaces of cities, the sacrifice zones, the zones of exclusion and alienation, are not inert. In such spaces, wild things can grow, and things can grow wild. When shadow spaces are still, they may be understood as dormant, not dead. They are filled with latent potential of emergence — immanent insurgence.

The word "insurgence" may suggest a sudden rupture, an eruption, a breaking forth, a letting loose of what and who can no longer be contained. Insurgence: when the margins become uncontainable and erupt into the centre. Indeed, the insurgencies that manifest as guerrilla warfare and street confrontations often seem thus. But, in the context of shadow places, perhaps it is generative to pay attention to more everyday expression of insurgencies.

Indeed, what appears still or dormant may in fact be a thriving, humming countertopia — perhaps beyond the understanding of an outsider — keeping and creating whole other ways

---

[1] Miraftab, "Insurgent Planning: Situating Radical Planning in the Global South."

of living and dying together, alive in shadowy illegibility. Insurgence is existence-as-resistance, living and loving and reproducing in defiance of genocidal regimes.[2]

The explosive, erupting insurgencies do not come from nothing, but in focusing on them we perhaps prioritise and privilege in our imaginaries the revolutionary moment that many of us may long for. In doing so we render yet more marginal, or more invisible, the "thousand tiny empowerments",[3] everyday acts of resistance, refusal, resurgence, restoration, reproduction, recreation, revolution, rewriting, reinscribing, reimagining. Everyday practices of insurgence may be practices of survival, but they are also resistance, when practiced by those who the powerful intended should not survive, or thrive, in the spaces where they are.

"We dwell

in the secret places

of this town

in the tangled, perplexing spaces

between your toolshed and the back fence

on the cusp of domesticity" – excerpt from "Reminder" by Jonathan Sri, with Rivermouth.[4]

The shadows that may provoke or foster insurgencies may be cast by repressive interventions, and violent occupation. Here, in so-called Australia, repressive shadow places — the carceral institutions of prisons, jails, watchhouses, and detention centres — are some of the most explicit and violent denials of a right to the city. But carceral logics also form the settler-colonial city in more subtle ways; move-on orders, homelessness, gentrification, the ongoing displacement and dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples through the tools of urban governance.[5] When it comes down to it, when insurgents rise and organise against dispossession, unjust and/or unsustainable developments, planning decisions are enforced by armed police. And yet, despite enlisting many forms of state and capitalist violence in its service, the colonial project remains incomplete. First Nations Peoples continue to survive in the shadows of settler geographies — their presence and vitality is configured as insurgence by the presence of occupying forces, whether they are in open revolt or not. Survival is resistance, thriving is insurgence, and one day, the monuments will fall.

"The revolution is for those who will carry on, regardless. For those who will care & laugh & love & grieve, and for those who would rather undo a border than construct it. For those who live in this world as it is, *who face towards it, knowing its histories, failures and promises. For those who use this knowledge to offer us the other world, outside of it."*[6]

Insurgence may also be a property of shadow places of refuse and neglect. Settler-colonial, extractivist, capitalist cities are built and policed on logics of disposal and disposability, of waste products, spaces, people. As powerful as colonial forces are, they are always incomplete, and must constantly be reasserted in this place.[7] Capitalism is only proclaimed

---

[2] See, for example, Scobie, "Blak Parenting: Existence as Resistance."

[3] Sandercock, *Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities*, 129.

[4] Sri, "Reminder."

[5] Latimore, "Indigenous People Are Being Displaced Again – By Gentrification."

[6] Riddle, Jenkins and Ramirez, eds., "Crowd the Revolution."

[7] Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty.*

the winner at the end of history because it can't see past the end of itself, even as the ruptures and fissures yawn wider.[8]

Vibrancy, conviviality, sharing of stories, knowledges, know-how, care, cultures, languages, practices, and art, of and by those people and non-human beings cities make little room for, or actively exclude, can be understood as everyday insurgencies. The spaces we create around us in which to be and imagine otherwise are our countertopias, and some of them are sited in and draw strength from the wastespaces of hegemon-urbia. These are insurgencies in their own right, and they are also how we keep the fight for still possible cities alive, hold open the spaces of possibility, and build the pressure and capacity for future eruptive and disruptive insurgencies and the futures that follow. The cities and spaces sought and produced by insurgencies are not necessarily just, emancipatory, or equitable,[9] but it also seems true that we will not have just cities without insurgence.

> *"If the human is a hybrid forum composed of nested sets of complex permeable bodies, this leads to a new conception of* 'bodies *politic' or a set of evolving and interlocking organic systems within systems. This can transform our imaginary of the world, our place within the world, and the responsibility we have toward the bodies in our bodies, and the bodies in the world."*[10]

Insurgence is not an exclusively human property; insurgence can be a multispecies conspiracy, reconfiguring the city through reconfiguring our relations. Our experiences of pandemia are the obvious reference point at time of writing; I could also point to locusts, to sudden explosions of what ecologists call "r" species, or the fruiting head of a vast network of mycelium emerging after a soaking autumn rain. The multispecies conspiracy is one I am still seeking entry to, and through curiosity seeking to attune myself and my attentions.[11] The insurgencies to come, the insurgencies against capitalist exploitation and for climate justice will require multispecies sustainability, multispecies solidarity, multispecies flourishing, more-than-human comradeship.[12]

We will tear up the pavement to let the soil breathe, so the rest of us might. *Sous les pavés, la plage!* Under the paving stones, the beach!

References

Fishel, Stefanie R. *The Microbial State: Global Thriving and the Body Politic*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009.

Gan, Elaine, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson and Nils Bubandt. "Introduction: Haunted Landscapes of the Anthropocene." In *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, edited by

---

[8] See Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*
[9] See Roy, "Why India Cannot Plan Its Cities: Informality, Insurgence and the Idiom of Urbanization."
[10] Fishel, *The Microbial State: Global Thriving and the Body Politic*, 43.
[11] Gan et al., "Introduction: Haunted Landscapes of the Anthropocene."
[12] Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*; Rupprecht et al., "Multispecies Sustainability"; Staal, "Comrades in Deep Future"; Tschakert, "More-Than-Human Solidarity and Multispecies Justice in the Climate Crisis."

Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt, G1–G14. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Latimore, Jack. "Indigenous People Are Being Displaced Again – By Gentrification.*" Guardian Australia*, April 9, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/apr/09/indigenous-people-are-being-displaced-again-by-gentrification-aboriginal-redfern-west-end-fitzroy.

Miraftab, Faranak. "Insurgent Planning: Situating Radical Planning in the Global South." *Planning Theory* 8, no. 1 (2009): 32–50.

Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. *The White Possessive: Property, power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Riddle, Naomi, Hannah Jenkins and Diego Ramirez, eds. "Crowd the Revolution." *Running Dog*, no. 2 (2020). https://rundog.art/issues/crowd-the-revolution/.

Roy, Ananya. "Why India Cannot Plan Its Cities: Informality, Insurgence and the Idiom of Urbanization." *Planning Theory* 8, no. 1 (2009): 76–87.

Rupprecht, Christoph, Joost Vervoort, Chris Berthelsen, Astrid Mangnus, Natalie Osborne, Kyle Thompson, Andrea Urushima, Maya Kóvskaya, Maximilian Spiegelberg, Silvio Cristiano, Jay Springett, Benedikt Marschütz, Emily Flies, Steven McGreevy, Laÿna Droz, Martin Breed, Jingchao Gan, Rika Shinkai and Ayako Kawai. "Multispecies Sustainability." *Global Sustainability* 3, e34 (2020): 1-12.

Sandercock, Leonie. *Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1998.

Scobie, Brooke. "Blak Parenting: Existence as Resistance." *Running Dog*, no. 2 (2020). https://rundog.art/crowdtherevolution/blak-parenting-existence-as-resistance/.

Sri, Jonathan. "Reminder." Track 1 on Rivermouth EP *Etchings and Scratchings*, 2013. https://rivermouthband.bandcamp.com/album/etchings-and-scratchings.

Staal, Jonas. "Comrades in Deep Future." *e-flux journal*, no. 102 (2019). https://www.e-flux.com/journal/102/283568/comrades-in-deep-future/.

Tschakert, Petra. "More-Than-Human Solidarity and Multispecies Justice in the Climate Crisis." *Environmental Politics* (2020). https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2020.1853448.

i Osborne, Natalie. "Insurgence." *An A to Z of Shadow Places Concepts* (2021). https://www.shadowplaces.net/concepts
ii Natalie Osborne is a Lecturer in the School of Engineering and Built Environment, Griffith University, in Meanjin/Brisbane, so-called Australia <n.osborne@griffith.edu.au>