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Insurgent City. Topography of another Florence
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James Holston coined the term "spaces of insurgent citizenship" for spaces subtracted from the modern and planned domain of a city: "the realm of the homeless, networks of migration, neighborhoods of the Queer Nation, constructed peripheries ..., ganglands, fortified condominiums, employee owned factories, squatter settlements, suburban migrant labor camps, sweat-shops, and the zones of the so-called new racism". Holston considers spaces to be insurgent if they "disturb consolidated histories" of a contemporary city according to a meaning of the term that is perhaps too vast (and contradictory, including both places of conflict and creating opposition and places of new exploitation and degeneration). Leonie Sandercock calls "insurgent planning practices" and resistance/transformation initiatives which are opposed to the existing city and which at the same time positively construct the first tissues of an alternative city. Friedmann connects these initiatives with the dynamics of expanding citizenships and with the progressive broadening of democratic spaces. The new citizenships create a plural and creative context, a true and genuine multiple/city, in which forms of concrete achievable utopia become feasible in the direction of a fuller blossoming of human beings.
Although it is worth taking these recent contributions into account, the term 'insurgent' rings bells for me that go back farther in time and are even more interesting connected with the thought of Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford to which we refer. A sort of

"insurgent urbanism" can perhaps be founded on the work of Geddes as an idea of transforming a city capable of putting "the forward movement of life" into motion, "its insurgence and its expectancy". Mumford wrote that insurgence was in fact the "ability to overcome, by power or cunning, by design or dream, the forces that threaten an organism". Insurgent individual and collective practices are therefore a biological and existential fact and only secondarily political: an elementary manifestation of the right to life and to the city for its poorest and most deprived inhabitants.
The very movements of bodies in a city, of organisms that want to survive and hope for the future are insurgent. The molecular movements, the trajectories of bodies in the public scene of a city in search of chances of life and of happiness and the associated movements, the interactions between bodies, reciprocal help, the altruism of friendship and working together, organised networks of resistance and action such as new communities taking root in spaces, in the process of construction or the transformation of places and settlements and in the bottom up production of public policies are all insurgent. Today, the life practices of new citizens, the small anthropologies of daily life, the histories and micro-histories of individuals and groups, personal or collective experiences, even the manner of consuming and doing must be located at the centre of research. The insurgent city is not therefore subversive nor revolutionary. It is, however, a field of forces, tensions, desires, conflicts and projects. It is a set of actions of complete or partial transformation, of little utopias that are created

or of simple survival actions, of manifestations of resistance and struggle, of individual or collective conquests and of diffuse micro-powers. It is "unpolitical practices", often bad and bastard and perhaps that is why they are the only effective policies. To use the Geddes metaphor again, we sought to reconstruct the branches of the web of life in our research, the new citizenships expanding in the districts of Florence. The subject matter of our portrait was to be precisely that seething world of the insurgent city: a city of liberated subjectivity, of citizenships in expansion and movement, a fluid and dynamic field inhabited by a plethora of actors and initiatives. The materials to be portrayed did not therefore consist of objects but of a web of human relations, of new relations between actors and of their difficult and controversial relationship with the morphological and organisational structure of the city. We therefore thought of a polymorphous, de-centralised, plural atlas which attempts to portray "the space between the points of view" of the emerging city, its full extension and complication, an atlas of voices and relations, routes and testimonies.
The universe of emerging subjectivity is not yet capable of producing an organic and structured change to the city. The insurgent movements give rise to pinpoint modifications, to micro-transformations and sometimes only deposit symptoms of presence. They leave traces of passage. We sort to detect those phenomena which, to use an expression of Bourdieu, can be called the "place effects" of new collective actions. We took account of the many ways

of making a mark on physical and social space in an attempt to record that very vast field of the effects of new social practices: changes of use and function, processes of resignifying buildings and public spaces, the re-creation of collective places, the 'coloration' of urban space (writing, changing the decor, the sounds and signs of social life, markets and fleeting presences), the reconfiguration of urban time (different organisation of the night of the city's rhythms, etc.), projects participated in, the alternative occupations of the ether and intangible space, occupation and the self produced change in the character of properties and urban spaces and in some cases the creation of true and genuine social construction sites of transformation (the Isolotto yesterday, the Piagge today), capable of leaving a more substantial mark on the organisation of the city. Perhaps the most accurate definition, that summarises the effects of place on new citizenships, is that which defines urban space as "contested space", public places, squares, zones and abandoned buildings and outdoor areas in general, parks, public gardens, marginal and connecting areas, abandoned areas and buildings. They are places contested between different options for use, trajectories of life and different expectations and city projects: Homi Bhabha called them "third space", interstitial, in between, in which differences are evident, life is negotiated and existence is bargained over and played for. No ordered classification is possible with some sort of hierarchy of actions and movements. There is no uniform logic and top down planning in the 'other' city. It would be wrong to place planning or rebellious

actions in an ascending line of importance. Many small actions that are repeated can leave a greater mark on urban space than one large organised initiative. In reality, one important trait of the world we explored was precisely the mixture of significant things and their unpredictable emergence in different places in the city, in a simple individual biography, or in the politically managed experience of a squat, or tje participated transformation of a property or neighbourhood.

The threatening outline of a city hostile to these emergyng citizenships can be glimpsed in all parts of the urban explorations portrayed. We called it the "gated city": prohibited city, city under surveillance, the city that rejects and closes itself, in an attempt to bridle and contain these alternative urban energies: a paranoid and "securitised" vision of urban life which contrasts with the deeper substance of the idea of city itself.