THEME SECTION

**Elusive promises:
Planning in the contemporary world**

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Introduction: Anthropologies of planning— Temporality, imagination, and ethnography

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Abstract: Recent anthropological approaches to temporality and spatiality can offer particularly important insights into established planning theories. In this introductory essay, we consider planning as a manifestation of what people think is possible and desirable, and what the future promises for the better. We outline how plans can operate as a particular form of promissory note, and explore how plans may be seen to perform a particular kind of work, laying out diverse kinds of conceptual orders while containing a notion of the state as an unfulfilled idea. The task of the ethnographer is to chart the practices, discourses, technologies, and artifacts produced by planning, as well as the gaps that emerge between planning theory and practice. We consider the changing horizons of expectation and the shifting grounds of government in different phases and forms of neoliberalization that are characteristic of planning in the contemporary world.

Keywords: neoliberalism, planning, policy, promise, temporality

Planning, in its most elemental form, is a way of conceptualizing space and time, and the possibilities that time offers space. As such, planning is an inherently optimistic and future-oriented activity that takes many different forms. Yet the future promised in plans seems always slightly out of reach, the ideal outcome always slightly elusive, the plan retrospectively always flawed. This elusive promise still holds an extraordinary allure, and planning is becoming increasingly ubiquitous as a way of managing the present, of governing and organizing the relationships between the state, citizens, and other organizations whether private, commercial, or public. In this theme issue, we explore con-

temporary planning instances in a variety of geographic locations, with ethnographic accounts of land restitution in South Africa (James), urban invasions in Peru (Lund); river and port management in India (Bear); and what is built and demolished in contemporary Malaysia (Baxstrom). These instances reveal considerable similarities and differences in the ways in which planning in democratic states articulates concerns about agency, space, time, and politics, as well as questions of government and development, regulation, and entitlement.

There are many ways to describe the field of planning. Planning as the general activity of preparing in advance is something that most

people do in various forms. We imagine the future—whether it is lunchtime, harvest, initiation, or European interest rates—and then act on our desire for that future to take a particular shape. Within this extremely broad outline of planning activities, certain forms of planning have taken on the status of professional disciplines intrinsic to state activities. In this still quite wide field, town planners, architects, welfare bureaucrats, and economists are considered experts in particular types of state planning. They usually have counterparts in corporations, private and public, and their planning activities enroll a range of actors into their realm through the requirement to abide by planning and building regulations, the need to conform to the categories of state welfare provision, or the organizing of financial affairs to best advantage. What these various forms of planning share is a concern with the transition over time from current states to desired ones. Given the ubiquity of planning as a concept with different significances and practices today, it makes an important anthropological subject. In this themed issue, we are interested in planning as a manifestation of what people think is possible and desirable, and what the future promises for the better.

Conventional histories of planning

Planning studies, planning theory, and planning history have consolidated a story of planning as the ordered preparation for development, with its roots in the modern invention of bureaucracy. For many authors, planning as a mode of statist intervention found its ultimate expression in the Soviet planned economy, whose new cities were laid out to serve state ambitions. For others, planning arose as a response to failures of public hygiene (Boyer 1983), or as the attempts of the state to organize the citizenry (Selznick 1949: 220). Yet attempts to organize citizens and the laying out of cities in an orderly manner did not begin with European or American modernity, and this presents us with a conundrum. Are we to separate architectural

order from social order, and treat them as distinct modes of planning? Should we regard state planning as of a different order from philanthropic gestures, and should we treat the organizational activities of monarchies in the same way as those of popular republics? Or should we limit our definition of *planning* to those patterns of state-organized welfare that arose in response to the contradictions of capitalism in the nineteenth century? Or perhaps we should restrict *planning* to the bureaucratic side of development?

Since planning as a set of ideas and concepts risks becoming all-enveloping, we choose here to consider the state planning of at least nominally democratic capitalist states. In this way, we can trace the changing forms of a particular set of bureaucratic practices that are common to a wide range of contemporary countries. In choosing to focus on the regulation of land use—what we might call the spatial aspects of planning regimes—we wish to highlight the temporality that we argue is characteristic of all planning regimes. Planning regimes, or systems, have their own particular sociohistorical trajectories and details. But within the practices of day-to-day planning, in the ethnographic detail of the relation of plans to places, things, and people, we can bring new insights to the existing literature of planning studies by uncovering the different notions of temporality implicit in the promise that planning seems to offer.

What characterizes these planning regimes is their role in mediating some of the central tensions in capitalist nation-states. American planning, for example, grew out of a frustration among philanthropists with the increasingly appalling conditions in rapidly urbanizing American cities in the late nineteenth century (Boyer 1983). Urban “improvers” sought social stability and the amelioration of unsanitary conditions, while industrialists and capitalists sought a rapid turnover of potentially disposable cheap labor within easy reach of factories, docks, and other workplaces, and easy access to natural resources. American urban planning thus arguably emerged as a contest between welfare and capital. In even this brief summary, it is impos-

sible not to see the echoes of Engels's and Marx's agitation at the conditions of workers in the first great metropolitan industrial capitalist city of Manchester. Engels's descriptions of the conditions of workers were themselves echoed in campaign literature, in novels (notably those of Mrs. Gaskell), and in the political movements of the trade unions and Labour and Cooperative movements in the UK. These did not work in isolation, though. Urban utopianism among Methodists and Quakers, inspired by the associations between work and dignity in the face of the indignities of capitalism, brought the UK's first industrial ideal villages and towns: the company settlements at Rowntree in York and Cadbury in Birmingham, among numerous others. These were not the doll-house ideal villages that helped to bring down the aristocracy, as at Versailles, but earnest attempts to bring order and stability to working people. We should not romanticize these developments, though. They were equally designed to ensure the stability of a cheap labor supply through company loyalty, and to maximize the working lives of their inhabitants—in hours per day as much as years per life. Yet they in turn became the inspiration for the influential planning movements that Britain exported around the globe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The utopian garden cities and suburbs of Ebenezer Howard's influential design (Howard 1902) sought to undermine the conflict between capital and labor by capturing improvements in land value¹ from the landlord and redistributing it to the people. In his ideal city, the land should be either donated or bought at agricultural prices, and the ground rents on the new developments should be put towards providing facilities and welfare for the residents. Howard's program of city planning was not merely an aesthetic fantasy. Yet it was the very economic *raison d'être* of his city-beautiful that fell at the first hurdle: enticing landowners and investors to his project. Refusing to countenance giving away their potential profit for the welfare of inhabitants, the radical plans for garden cities collapsed into the best organizational layout of facilities such as houses, gardens, fac-

tories, shops, libraries, roads, and paths. The new towns of the early twentieth century were key to the campaigns that secured town planning as a key duty of local government, but it can be argued that this land-use planning became defined by a preoccupation with the correct layout of facilities, and lost the ambition to reorder society more justly. The UK planning system thus remains a weak regulatory system that swings between favoring the "environment" and "development" (Murdoch and Abram 2002).

Yet the movement for rational urban layout was inspired not only by the desire for improved social conditions. Quite explicitly, the Hausmannization of Paris aimed to clear away the urban rabble, to make Paris legible, not only from above, but for the military. No more would the streets be so easily barricaded as they were during the 1789 revolution. That the opening up of public space to the military also made it available to protesting masses was perhaps inevitable, if inconvenient for the ruling classes. Well laid-out suburbs also ease the tasks of tax collection and surveillance. Planning has many faces, including welfare, repression, civilization, militarization, accessibility, exclusion, and exploitation (Yiftachel 1998).

In contrast, Scandinavian planning regimes have pursued an ideal of comprehensive holistic planning that integrates economic, welfare, and spatial planning. Flourishing in the period following the Second World War, these planning regimes saw the state as a benign, quasi-parental force that sought to achieve quality of life for the whole population (see Vike 2004). The famed Norwegian egalitarianism was built on a three-way compromise between the state, capitalists, and trade unions, when all three recognized that by moderating their aims in respect of each other, they could gain benefits (Barth, Moene, and Wallerstein 2003). Allied with a pervading religious puritanism and material modesty, Norway achieved a degree of social leveling that was unparalleled in Western Europe, and was echoed in architectural rationality and spatial accessibility. The written plans and drawings that secured the transition to ideal communities

were strikingly humanitarian, in contrast with British urban plans, for example, even while the regional development plans directed from the capital Oslo contributed to the kind of classic failures of state-level development (Brox 1966) so widely recorded by Scott and others (see Ferguson 1990, Mosse 2005, Scott 1998).

Anthropological approaches

One of the aims of this collection is to unite quite disparate strands of anthropological research on the contemporary state, politics, and development into what is gradually becoming a sizable body of research related to planning. Early anthropological analyses of politics, policies, and the state focused on the models of power adopted in different societies, on the discrepancies between such models and actual state practice, or on the ways in which political institutions became total social facts in colonial or postcolonial contexts. Only a few such early studies (e.g. Richards and Kuper 1971) offer precedents for closer studies of bureaucracy in local government.

Much of the work within anthropology that does address planning has emerged from a very central concern with what is generally glossed as Third World (or “Southern”) development, or Development with a capital D. With the rise of development studies from the 1960s onward, it seems fair to say that *development* came to connote mostly socioeconomic development and the transition to capitalist modernity (Robertson 1984: 43). Development studies have forcefully argued against using “the West” as a norm to which others should aspire (notably Escobar 1995). Scholars have also been turning their gaze towards Western countries themselves and the multifarious development processes happening there day by day (e.g. Abram and Waldren 1998). Importantly, studies of routine development have highlighted the links between colonial and postcolonial development and “western” governmental practice. For example, Peattie (1987) argued that a particular ideology of progress underlying the planning of

Ciudad Guyana led to a shift of resources toward larger corporate bodies. But her long-term perspective on this city also makes it sufficiently clear how different disciplinary approaches and interactions among US advisors, planners, and local officials come to frame and reframe the way problems are perceived over time. Robertson’s *People and the state* (1984) offers a thoroughgoing social-science critique of government development practice through a detailed ethnography of Malaysian national development in the postcolonial period. And Rabinow’s *French Modern* (1989) argues that the forms and norms of urban planning that emerged in nineteenth-century France were partly generated in the colonial encounter, and tried out and tested in the colonies before finding their way back into the metropole.

More recently, the focus has moved to the state itself as central organizing authority (Corbridge et al. 2005, Sharma and Gupta 2006), as well as to political parties (Salih 2003, Shore 1990), to central states or superstates (Abélès 1990, Bellier and Wilson 2000, Shore 2001), and to state peripheries (Das and Poole 2004). A convincing body of anthropological work, largely inspired by Foucault, explores the quotidian practices and rituals, technologies and discourses that together make up politics, policy, democracy, and the changing forms of local government found in (multi)national states (e.g. Abram and Waldren 1998, Boholm 1996, Gupta 1995, Hansen and Stepputat 2005, Navaro-Yashin 2002, Shore and Wright 1997). They demonstrate how, even in acts of resistance, people find themselves implicated in systems of government and power (L. Abu-Lughod 1990), and increasingly analyze how local systems of power are woven in the first place. Such studies include the examination of the practices of citizenship (Neveu 2003), new participative practices in democratic states (Appadurai 2002, Holston 2008, Neveu 2007, Paley 2001), the management of spaces, public and private (Holston and Appadurai 1999, Rutheiser 1996, Weszkalnys 2010), and environmental activism (Berglund 1998) and anticapitalist resistance (Williams 2008)². From this work, a focus on

contemporary state planning has emerged that is only now being consolidated, in part through this theme section itself.

Neoliberalizing states

According to numerous social theorists and free-market economists, the rise of planning regimes tied to welfare states in the postwar period led, by the 1970s, to citizen dependency and the inhibition of entrepreneurialism. The neoliberal revolutions initiated by Thatcher and Reagan sought to turn the tide against welfare; their fetishization of entrepreneurship and consumer capitalism was particularly visible in their attacks on existing planning regimes. Their battle cries of unleashing capital from the reins of “red tape” have been a staple of planning arguments for nearly half a century, as democratic states swing between favoring citizens and encouraging businesses. If that were all neoliberalism meant for planning, then we might have little new to say, but two further aspects are crucial. First, increasing amounts of capital were moving into global corporations beyond the reach of states. As global corporations have become increasingly willing to move their activities offshore, states have competed to attract their investment. Planning regimes have changed from havens of rationalist idealists (Lilienthal 1944) to regional development agencies competing to attract footloose capital, only to collapse again once incentives dry up. Behind them, citizens are left with the detritus of industrial development: depleted resources, unemployment, monopolistic economies, and welfare crises. In fact, the very conditions that provoked the invention of urban improvement in the nineteenth century seem to have returned, in a different order. Second, one of the largest growth sectors was that of management consultancy firms, and once listed on the stock markets they needed new areas of expansion. By the 1980s, they realized that the public sector promised just that potential. A massive expansion into the public sector materialized with the introduction of constant reorganization as a

feature of public-sector management, under the banner of privatization and outsourcing, and pursuit of the grail of marketization, in what came to be known as the New Public Management (see Ferlie 1996). These are the aspects of neoliberalism that have most profoundly affected planning practices. Like many local government functions, planners have been faced with the task of regulating developments desired by large international corporations that, in practice, have the option of overpowering small, relatively powerless and impoverished local government organizations. Their methods include threatening to counter rejected planning applications with legal appeals too expensive for local authorities to defend, and “land banking”—acquiring ownership or options on large swaths of land for potential development. As such, it is not only government that is governing, and increasingly governments are drawing back into weak regulatory modes while corporations pursue their own interests. We see these effects as the changing conditions for local planning, with planners yet to devise a response. It can be seen as the clash of two temporal trajectories, the modernist seeking ideal conditions, and the capitalist seeking complete exploitation of the markets.

Twenty-first-century studies have offered a more differentiated picture of the current force of neoliberal projects sweeping across the globe, presaged by Ferguson’s critique of the disappearance of politics under managerialism (1990; see also Mouffe 2000 for a theoretical critique). For some time, anthropologists have called our attention to how practices gathered under the umbrella of neoliberalism are made sense of locally through narratives of illicit wealth and occult practices (West and Sanders 2003), often within the governments and administrations that put neoliberalism into effect. Others have noted that the term *planning* is not universal: the same word may apply to quite different practices, and similar practices may be described using different words (see Abram and Cowell 2004, J. Abu-Lughod 1975).

While Peck and Tickell (2002) suggest focusing on neoliberalization as a process—rather

than as a theoretical model or state of being—Brenner and Theodore (2002) argue that we should study “actually existing neoliberalism” in order to grasp what is happening on the ground, instead of overconcretizing ideas of neoliberalism, states, and markets (cf. Clarke 2008). This chimes with Spencer’s call for a “radical empiricism” in the anthropology of politics, with attention paid to locally recognized political actions and agents, in place of a focus on institutional politics stripped of its local and cultural meaning (Spencer 1997). Neoliberalism is not a unified and universal logic, but is shaped by the historical and cultural circumstances of its implementation (Abram 2007, Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Holston and Caldeira 2005, Latham 2006, Weszkalnys 2010). In this volume, James demonstrates how the neoliberal repertoire of government may be less monolithic than has been assumed, especially in a transitional society such as South Africa, where it coexists, if uneasily, with contradictory expectations and forms of state and planning, as well as with nongovernmental organizations. Indeed, as James points out, the same administrative staff move between state and non-state organizations, creating a range of continuities and discontinuities, tangled relations and paradoxical positions. While neoliberal rhetoric might seem to make a focus on the state less relevant, neoliberal discourses of minimal state, privatization, citizen-power, choice, or participatory government are themselves contradictory. Even highly restricted states where public services have been largely outsourced must govern these services, and the practices of audit may create a bureaucracy larger than that of a nationalized welfare state (see Miller 2005, Strathern 2000). Several of the articles in this theme section show how neoliberal governance tends to extend the reach of the state while simultaneously disengaging it from previous relations and ethics of accountability.

The more ethnographic approach outlined in this volume contrasts with that of publications in planning theory, which tend to be most interested in the perspective of planning practitioners, either in the private or public sectors.

Key texts offer insights into the practices of planning professionals (Forester 1989, 1999) and their interactions with other professionals and different publics (Flyvbjerg 1998, Healey 1997). Even the more critical assessments of contemporary planning see questions of public engagement as a problem for planning or for democracy (Alfasi 2003). We should also note, for example, the resistance to social-science critique that Reade (1987) experienced from British planning circles, in considering how or whether we can open up a cross-disciplinary debate. In contrast, French interdisciplinary studies on participatory democracy have produced valuable insights into the institutionalization of neoliberalized democratic practice through planning in local states (e.g. Bacqué, Rey, and Sintomer 2005, Carrel, Neveu, and Ion 2009, Rui 2004), but very little of this work has found its way into English-language publications. Similarly, questions of the governance of change in the fabric of urban environments have been addressed in architecture (Blundell Jones, Petrescu, and Till 2005). However, the focus has been predominantly on participative design, rather than on participative governance or citizen-governing per se, although new research based in architecture schools is moving in this direction, and using ethnographic techniques to do so (Berry-Chikhaoui et al. 2007; Deboulet 2004).

The promise of planning

Faced with the problem of unifying the variety of meanings that *planning* can have, we suggest that emphasizing the imaginative aspects of planning allows us to see planning as a kind of compact between now and the future—a promise that may be more or less convincing. As well as asking what kind of promise planning *is*, we take our cue from philosophical investigations of performative linguistics to ask what a promise *does* and, in a similar way, ask what plans do as they make promises about the future.³ This also allows us to consider why the promise of planning is so often seen to break down.

The concepts of time used in planning are not as straightforward as we might at first think. Vike (forthcoming) observes two distinct kinds of future time in the context of planning. The future of *contemporary time* is immediate and promises real solutions to problems now. *Utopian time*, by contrast, sees problems resolved in a future postponed, always out of reach. There are parallels with Ssorin-Chaikov's (2003) discussion of the promise of the socialist state, existing in continuous deferral and materialized in unfinished constructions, while Fortun draws our attention to the force of promising, which nonetheless "escapes our predictive and preemptive capacities" (2008: 109). Linguistic philosophy has approached promises as a particular kind of utterance, oral or written, that has peculiar effects (Atiyah 1981, Austin 1962, Searle 1969). Promises are not merely statements. They do more than describe: they express intention. Promising is a performance; it has effects. Specifically, it entails an obligation on the part of the promisor to fulfill his promise to the promisee. Austin (ibid.) characterizes this kind of performative utterance as a total speech act: an utterance that is tied to both context and action and cannot be understood without an appreciation of the sociological conditions under which it occurs. Promises are thus much more than "just" speech. They produce a set of relations among promisor, promisee, and the thing or action promised that should endure through time. Anthropological analyses of "the magical power of words" in ritual performances similarly show that the context of speech is all-important (Tambiah 1985, Turner 1974). Merely saying "I promise" is not sufficient to create a convincing effect. As Austin notes, there must be other conditions for an utterance to be performative. These may include the appropriate procedures and circumstances under which the promise is invoked, certain feelings and intentions that are being produced in the promisor, and that the promisor subsequently behaves in accordance with the promise. If these conditions remain unfulfilled, the utterance has not so much failed as misfired, or the process has been abused.

Austin suggests that promissory utterances cannot be false. Rather they are unhappy—they can become "infelicities" where a procedure is erroneous or misinvoked. Promises are infelicitous when given in inappropriate circumstances, such as where the giver does not have the authority to make the offer, or where a procedure is not valid or does not extend to the particular case. Promises may be given using the wrong procedures, or may be offered without being followed by the action. However, a different kind of problem or infelicity emerges where the sincerity of the promisor is in doubt. Does the promisor intend to fulfill the promise? Is the promise made in what we might call "good faith"? Or, as Searle asks, has the promisor been placed under an obligation to the promisee to do something that he or she would not have done in the normal course of events? Only outside the ordinary scheme of events does the promisor have to make an effort to fulfill the promise, and does it become a meaningful contract.

Significantly, what these philosophers do not explicitly address—but what is important when considering the promise of planning—is, for example, alternative dimensions of promises, such as those made for rhetorical purposes, or for parody or other stage effects. Philosophers would also find it hard to account for the kind of infelicity—common in planning, if rarely theorized—that stems from the obduracy of procedures, tools, and the very materiality of that which is to be reformed and transformed: it may positively refuse to be reshaped by the plan (Hommels 2005). Nor have philosophers considered explicitly the situation where promisor or promisee are corporations of sorts, rather than particular persons.⁴

Robertson (2006a, 2006b) has pointed out that the corporation—the transcendent, metaphorized body that has been the making of modernity—is the central principle on which both governments and commercial enterprises are constructed. By definition, a corporation is authorized by law to act as one individual, separate from the actions of its members. Corporations, institutions, administrative bodies, and

similar collectivities have continually to convince us that they are effective, that they have some control over their and our collective futures, and that they exist in fact as well as in the eyes of the law. Plans are published as the product of the council-as-individual, and municipalities spend increasing amounts of time and energy promoting their individuality, both as distinct from other municipalities and as corporate entities. Faced with the neoliberal attack on their autonomy, it has become increasingly imperative for municipalities to present themselves as though they were effective actors despite having lost a considerable degree of both control and accountability. Such self-representation, therefore, may be the only means left of producing legitimacy in the eyes of both actual individual citizens and other corporate entities such as third-sector organizations, external businesses, or contractors, as well as in relation to central government.

Ways of talking and practices of self-representation by the participants in the planning process and their observers may help this process. By proposing a plan, or by making a promise, the producers of the plan are constituting themselves through indexical self-reference: a performative act presumes performers, and by performing the act of “I promise,” they index themselves as such performative persons (Benveniste 1966, cited in Lee 2001: 169). We are all familiar with the ways that the various bodies, officers, politicians, and advisors doing the planning are referred to as though they formed an undifferentiated entity (“the municipality,” “the state”) with a personality of its own (Stapley 1996). The plan may be presented as a personalized product—as in the Norwegian context, where documents produced by the administration are presented as the advice of the *Rådmann*, the council’s advisor (who in the UK would be called a “chief executive”). Or they may lose their “personality” altogether, as with the German “construction plan” (*Bebauungsplan*) which, once approved by the relevant political agencies, becomes law “persisting into eternity” (Weszkalnys 2010: 101). In the process, the complex relations among planners, de-

signers, and different levels of local and state administration, public and private, which the construction plan involves, are effectively elided.

To some extent, the promisee of planning, too—the public or the citizens—is rendered as a quasi individual, resulting in processes of abstraction and reduction that anthropologists and citizens themselves often find difficult to stomach. In the context of democratic decision making and techno-scientific expertise, the public has an increasingly important legitimizing function (Nowotny, Scott, and Gibbons 2001). The public is often treated as though it were an empirical entity, when it is better imagined as being called into existence in the planning moment (Weszkalnys 2010: 115; cf. Gal and Woolard 2001, Warner 2003). Anthropological studies reveal how planning rarely takes account of actual people in their radical variety, nor does it use particularly detailed taxonomies of social groups. When attempts are made to differentiate the public, they reveal how complex and unmanageable it really is.

Planning rarely provides an accurate description of current circumstances, but rather adopts mechanisms to conjure worlds that are within its scope of action. The plan takes the place of the performative utterance of the promise: it must be performed according to the correct procedures, produced at the correct time, approved by the correct committees, announced according to the correct mechanisms, and subject to the correct kind of scrutiny, and it should ideally produce concrete and measurable effects. If it does not fulfill such procedural niceties, it lays itself open to challenge. If its content is inadequate or its ambitions weak—for example, if it only offers to do what would happen anyway—then it might be criticized as “just talk.” If the context in which a plan is issued is incorrect or infelicitous, the actions arising from it can be challenged either through due process or on the ground. Finally, if the promises it contains are not fulfilled, it will be considered invalid, or may be adapted in retrospect to reflect the changing circumstances, or deemed altogether illegitimate.

The plan as promise is thus much more than simply true or false, a success or a failure. It conjures relations of obligation, which are themselves elements of more long-standing relationships that the promise may help maintain. However, for the plan to become a promise with an obligation on the part of the promisor, it needs sincerity. Baxstrom's study of Kuala Lumpur (this volume) is just one example where this sincerity seems to be missing: plans for urban restructuring appear to legitimize action in the present rather than make a promise about the future, and are often thought of as bordering on the illegitimate. Baxstrom goes so far as to suggest that in contemporary Kuala Lumpur, the plan functions as an "instrument of momentary action," and in effect evacuates the future. This has a profoundly paradoxical effect on people's experience of time: in this city that is in constant flux, people's expectations are continually overturned while they try to keep up with the fast-changing pace of planning.

In other cases, notably in the context of democratic or at least putatively democratic states, the plan has been turned into a total linguistic act by drawing participants—such as potential consultees and advisors as well as municipal officials and elected representatives—into relations that are both social and material. These include, yet go beyond, the original promise: they have histories and constitute transactions with future implications in their own right. Indeed, they may exhibit "hypercomplexity," as Boholm (forthcoming) outlines in the development of railway planning in Sweden. This scale of planning involves a high degree of inter-organizational communication, co-operation and co-ordination among a multitude of public and private actors, decision-makers, stakeholders, and members of the public, all bringing their own perspectives, values, beliefs, and diverging interpretations to the negotiations. Importantly, plans can also be an extraordinarily effective way of coordinating action, achieving outcomes, and concretizing our imaginative fictions about the future.

In other words, the promise entailed by planning can entail varying degrees of concreteness

and institutionalization. Planning can be a "mere" expectation, an instruction, a policy, a project, an exercise of democracy, a blueprint, or law. It may not be a vow, but always includes some element of moral obligation that ties present to future, and occasionally the past too.

Planning as a promise

This philosophical account should not be taken to suggest that planning is somehow timeless or non-historical. Beyond the conventional account of the rise of bureaucratic planning, we see a further narrative that makes planning a particularly characteristic form of modern practice. If we examine the planning that began to emerge in the nineteenth century, we can identify it as part of a turbulent period of conceptual realignment that saw the adoption of managerial techniques such as the forecasting of trends by statistical means (see Hacking 1990). Barbara Adam (2005) suggests that new scientific prediction techniques accompanied a sense that the future became a kind of empty space that would be amenable to being shaped by rational plans and blueprints. What characterized this transition to modernity? Wittrock (2000) takes a notably ethnographic approach in searching not for specific institutions, such as the democratic nation-state or liberal market economies—since these did not emerge consistently in different countries—but for the practices that marked the transformation into extensive capitalism. He highlights conceptual changes that were materialized in the form of promissory notes. These notes "point to desiderata that can be formulated about a range of achievements that may be reached by the members of a given community" (ibid.: 37). These were not vague desires, but explicit states of affairs implied by deeply held values and expected to be met. They lent themselves as common reference points in public debate and as the basis for changing identities, affiliations, and institutional forms, founded on "radically new presuppositions about human agency, historical consciousness, and the role of reason in

forging new societal institutions” (ibid.: 39). This process also included a reformulation of the relationship between society, civil society, and the body politic, and new forms of inquiry into the constitution of society. Key categories formulated at the time to conceptualize society are among those we still use today, including the “economic-rationalistic,” assuming society to be a compositional collective; the “statistical-inductive,” where society is a systemic aggregate; the “structural-constraining” and its corresponding image of society as organic totality; and finally the “linguistic-interpretative,” positing society as an emergent totality (ibid.: 45).

It would appear that alongside its conceptual role in regulating the contradictions of capitalist development, planning emerged as a particular form of promissory document, in response to the conceptual rearrangements of the nineteenth-century world and the formulation of “the social” as a profoundly problematic realm. Planning as a process, too, is documented in variously elaborated notes and pamphlets (e.g. Planning Guidance Notes, Forward Plans, and Supplementary Planning Guidance). Plans require a social context in which they can be produced, but they also require institutional structures under which they can be contested or enforced, and both these structures and the planning process reformulate the relationship between society, the body politic, and what has been called civil society. Planning may be seen as a primary mechanism for the colonizing tendencies of the contemporary state—primarily the tendency to colonize internally. The public good is mobilized as one of the key alibis of contemporary democratic government, and also accounts for its colonizing effects, as democratic states try to govern more people and, increasingly, more things. The expansive tendencies of the state were countered by invasive neoliberal tactics aimed at “rolling back” local states and politics. Recent changes have demonstrated, for example, how far the bureaucratic procedures of planning can be removed to third parties, as state planning at different levels has been increasingly contracted out to private agencies. In the 1990s, local authorities in the UK

began to outsource their own local planning activities. More accurately, we can say that they outsourced the administrative activities that support the political choices made through planning. Paradoxically, the progressive weakening of the preeminence of the nation-state seen in recent decades has been paralleled by an increase in global bureaucratic apparatus, in what has been called a “hollowing-out” of the state.

Such changes prompt us to ask what exactly the role of the state is. If a private commercial organization can be contracted to behave in a nonpartisan way and produce the same material documents that a permanently employed public service does (at least hypothetically), in what sense do the two forms differ? Bear (this volume) shows how the roles of public servants are radically transformed when they are no longer simply expected to carry out the regulations authored by state actors, but are obliged to adopt a transactional role themselves. While we know that low-level bureaucrats have always had to embroider together the conflicting demands of organizational loyalty and personal ethics (see Lipsky 1980), in the new regime they are free to redefine themselves as public entrepreneurs. Such changes have effects not only on the life of the public servant but on the shape of the city too. Similarly, other studies of multinational organizations (Müller 2008), global networks (Riles 2000), and consultancies and financial agents (Barry 2001) remind us that what we quaintly refer to as “local” government is not locally bounded. This brings us considerably closer to understanding how planning ideologies become global ideoscapes (Appadurai 1990) or assemblages (Ong and Collier 2005). They move us from the old security of plans as the predictable and stable world of the state’s regulatory framework to the new world of intergovernmentality, global flows, and the shifting relations between multinational organizations (public and private) and national and local states. But these changes raise profound questions for the future of planning. Where free trade includes the free movement of labor, how can housing be planned to account for unpre-

dictable levels of demand? How far should plans be made to accommodate population change, or should demand be used to regulate the flow of people? Such are the questions that trouble planners at different levels of the state, when internationalism begins to undermine the apparent stability of national planning.

Simultaneously, however, any generalization about planning needs to avoid the trap of ordering the world according to our theoretical agenda. From one perspective, the reach of neo-liberal ideology and global capital appears infinite and very present, and planning seems a universal category. Yet there are many instances where they do not apply: territories that are not governed either by democratic rule or by states at all; or movements that resist the message of good governance, transparency, and democracy with counter-pressures, conflicting views, and equally persuasive narratives. Lund's article, in particular, shows how plans can lag behind reality, seeking to regulate situations that have developed rather than preempting them in the normatively imagined planning. In the Peruvian case that Lund describes, it appears that the promise of planning is not one of a future landscape made concrete, but of actuality made legal. In this context the promise is of a regularization of the current status of invaded land, not one of a new house envisaged in the future. Even in states that espouse comprehensive planning, local authorities do not always keep up with national (or international) demands. Many, particularly smaller, municipalities in Norway and Britain, for example, fail to produce the required plans on time, or sometimes at all, and may well escape making such plans for long periods by always being in the process of catching up with changing planning regulations and demands. Similarly, some southern African cities have elaborate planning bureaucracies, yet find it hard to manage rapid urban development and instead "resort to ad hoc interventions of a 'sanitising' character" (Kamete and Lindell 2010: 890), being motivated more often by political reasoning than by considerations of the welfare of the people they affect. It is worth underlining that few states condone

the idea of leaving certain groups of people or certain geographical areas ungoverned, yet they consistently miss significant elements of the population. Illegal immigrants in the US, slum dwellers in Brazil (Gledhill, forthcoming, Holston 2008, Perlman 1976) or India (Waldrop 2004), homeless people, and travelers (Hopper 2003) all accidentally or deliberately resist the pervasive attempts of local government and planning agencies to bring them within their purview. Planned and unplanned populations coexist, and while much state activity has long been occupied with trying to incorporate the unplanned, they paradoxically re-create categories of exclusion.

Such partiality prompts the question of whether planning and local development are so central to perceptions and definitions of state-ness that their absence is equivalent to an absence of the state itself. Is the implementation of plans a key sign of state presence? Planning can and often does use violence (both symbolic and real) to enforce its "promise," to the point where the promise may become a threat. Although in practice there are many areas that escape the control of states, the idea that a state allows people to live within its boundaries yet not to have any relationship to the state—be it through citizenship, welfare, employment, illegality, or other categories—is deeply problematic not only for government officers and politicians, but for very many citizens too.

The work of planning: Temporality, spatiality, agency

To answer these abstract questions about the state, time, and locality, ethnographers turn to the actual work carried out by planners, citizens, experts, beneficiaries, and other people, and by the plans themselves. The distinctly ethnographic approach we present highlights the processes and practices, objects, and discourses that constitute this work. Three dimensions appear to us to offer fruitful conceptual traction for advancing research on planning: *spatiality*, *temporality*, and *agency*. Spatiality is probably

that which has attracted the most attention so far, not least in relation to widespread privatization of public spaces (Caldeira 2000, Davis 1990, Holston 1999, Low 2000, Sorkin 1992).

Our aim in this introduction has been to introduce anthropological approaches to temporality, recognized as constitutive of, and constituted by, human social relations and activities (Greenhouse 1996, James and Mills 2005, Munn 1992). There is also growing attention to the ways that the future is “performed” or made present in a variety of human activities, ranging from market forecasting (Born 2007) to applied academic research or the technical assistance programs of the World Bank and the UNDP (Weszkalnys 2008). Different temporalities of past, present, and future, and of state and market are embodied in any given plan. We are familiar with notions of progress and betterment embedded in the plan, and the parallel construction of the existing as outdated and in need of overhaul. Importantly, instead of regurgitating this story of teleological progress and achievement that planning tells about itself, the articles in this collection point beyond the simple discrepancies between plan and action to the multiple temporalities that are at play, including the “negative” temporalities of delay or failure (Weszkalnys 2010). One of the key factors responsible for such plan-action discrepancies may be the clash between technocratic and lived time. Modernist planning, for example, conceives of social life as a generic totality, and as transposable from one location to the next. The articles included here note the ways in which planned development is more unstable, haphazard, and fragile than often assumed, and capable of accommodating existing and enduring forms and functions, including of urban design, land-use patterns, or welfare institutions. In other words, we are interested in the ways in which time is experienced in relation to political processes that both take a long time themselves, and conjure a vision of time, continuities, and discontinuities (see also Wallman 1992). How is time performed? What kinds of social, spatial, and technological relations do such performances entail?

Finally, we note that plans may be seen to perform a particular kind of work, which frequently seems to be less about a specific content than the kind of conceptual orders that they lay out. In the practice of planning, we are confronted with an apparent gap between imagined orders and the realities they engender, between theory and practice, or what is said and what is done. Gaps are encountered at all levels of state and local planning, and constitute an object of concern for local actors and ethnographers alike. Popular participation, audit, and reporting are practices intended to make these gaps visible. The elusiveness of the promise seems to lie in these gaps, and nowhere is this more evident than in the new South Africa, where according to James (this volume), the utopian promise of land reform had foundered on both the bureaucratic work of introducing these reforms and the political confrontation with the conditions of foreign debt. The ambiguities of political change can be seen as key people shift from role to role between state and non-state organizations, and as models of distributionary and neoliberal politics rub along together. The “gaps” between ideal, ideology, and practice fill themselves with things unplanned, unexpected, inexplicable, and with things that get overlooked and forgotten. The task of the ethnographer is about charting what fills these gaps and how the gaps are elided in everyday practice. We need to understand how these gaps and mismatches are not incidental, but significant to the work of planning, and how people deal with them.

If, as Riles notes, “documents are the paradigmatic artifacts of modern knowledge practices” (2006: 2), central to the production of knowledge about ourselves, then plans may be considered those kinds of documents that both act on that knowledge and seek to predict what will be knowledge in the future. We are prompted to ask what kind of work we can see the plan perform when it is clear that it is not a blueprint for the future. The study of plans includes questions about inscription and reification, about authorship, authority, and associated responsibility, and finally about the creativity and agency of the plan itself: how it com-

pels other kinds of actions. The plan is perhaps the most explicitly future-directed and agentive document of all. Yet, as the articles here show, the relationship between spatial plans and the realities imagined in them is always fragile and multivalent; they both encapsulate and exclude worlds of imagination.

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Notes

1. The price of land increases radically when changed from agricultural uses to built developments.
2. Another set of literature addresses planning under socialism, in the former Soviet Union and Central Europe. See, for example, Alexander (2007) and Alexander et al (2007). We do not address Soviet or post-Socialist planning in this collection.
3. We are grateful for guidance from Sandy Robertson in our elaboration of this section.
4. For the importance of considering corporations, especially in relation to corruption, see Robertson 2006a, 2006b, 2009.

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