

Shiny Objects, Galaxies, and Bodies of Planning Theory

Diagrams of Positionality and the Field by Emerging Scholars

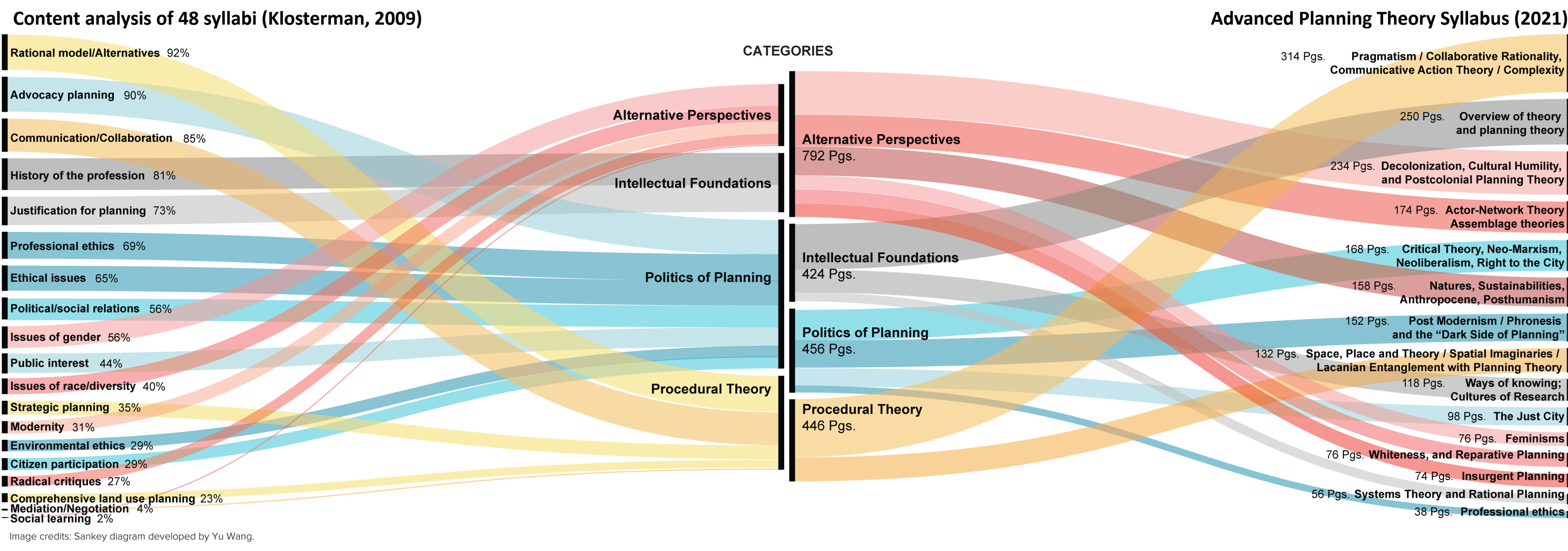
A "MAGPIE" PROFESSION AND PLANNING THEORY

The planning profession and planning theory have been compared to the "magpie" (Sandercock, 2000; Barry et al, 2018). The metaphor implies the diversity, inclusiveness, and multidisciplinary nature of planning as a field and as a body of theories, which must respond to the complex needs of communities and regions globally. Similarly, students of planning theory could be likened to magpies, gathering the shiny objects of planning theory (shiny as judged from their own perspectives) and building them into their own nests of research and self-development. In fact, the shiny objects presented as planning theory have been in continual flux. In an Advanced Planning Theory Seminar, a set of emerging scholars set about to explore this magpie nature.

This poster provides a set of graphical representations of the personal intellectual journeys, fruitful tensions, contributions and limitations to the research endeavors, practices, and lives of doctoral and master's students. Students and instructor set out to explore the boundaries, edges, lineages, canons, imaginaries, master signifiers, actors, networks, and assemblages of planning theory. What can observations of emerging planning scholars tell us about the field of planning theory?

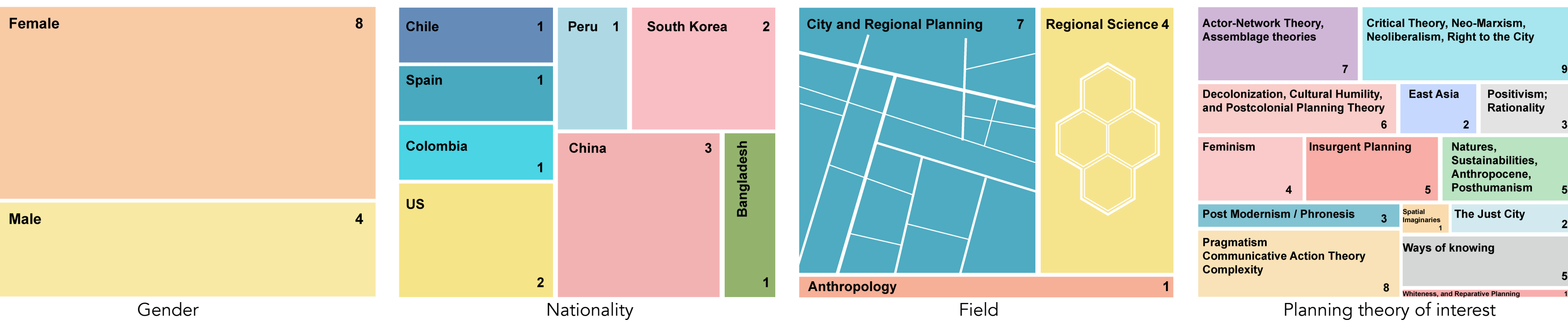
1. THEORETICAL ROOTS AND STREAMS OVER TIME

John Friedman's (1988) diagramming of two centuries of planning theory sheds much light on canonical texts. Since then, there has been much debate as to how to characterize the corpus of theory and its relationship to planning practice. A growing number of scholars have challenged planning theory to embrace lessons from a wide variety of perspectives. The Sankey diagrams below depict the content of planning theory seminars from the scan of syllabi in 2009 (Klosterman, 2011) and in the 2021 seminar. Using an existing typology of planning theory (Forsyth, 2021; Klosterman, 2011), we categorized the topics covered in the *Advanced Planning Theory Seminar*. In each diagram, the thickness is linearly proportional to relative importance of the topics in 2009 and 2021. This captures a shift in focus of the seminar from politics of planning and procedural theory to bringing alternative perspectives and a growing diversity of topics.



2. DIVERSE IDENTITIES AND THEORETICAL OBJECTS OF INTEREST

The treemap charts depicts the identities and theoretical interests among the students in the seminar. We believe the demographics reflect the growing diversity of scholars in many programs. The diversity of ethnic identities, nationalities, and experiences and knowledges students brought with them enriched our conversations.



3. RIFTS AND FRUITFUL TENSIONS

Constructivists VS Positivists

Working at the scientific frontiers of policy analytics, I seek to employ scientific methods and rigorous design to discover true relationships and make policy recommendations. I'm most comfortable with setting clear goals, coming up with alternatives, running simulations or modeling, and validating or evaluating policy decisions. In this planning theory class, I have learned many weaknesses of this approach... I will be more cautious and complement it with more diverse approaches.

Yating

Storytelling is necessary and valuable as it enriches the participatory processes. Acknowledging the stories of minority and vulnerable groups, which are full of meaning, is the most relevant.

Andrea

Global South and Global East

My positionality in the area [is acknowledged] by recognizing myself as a Latin-American woman from the South. It's necessary to recognize new approaches in the discussion and engage with discourses that challenge conventional views of capital accumulation and the association between society and the environment, which the world is bidding.

Andrea

The concept of "epistemologies of the south," advocates for non-western worldviews that can enrich our understanding of the transnational world we belong to. In addition, planning processes in the Global South are characterized by a myriad of fragmented stakeholders and therefore call for careful balance.

Yousuf

Lacanian concepts have been used to reexamine the planner's role in conceiving idealized urban futures. Thus, the planning process can involve the manufacturing of imaginary gaps between urban reality – a chaotic network of actors and processes in constant flux - and our ideal – one that often embodies the needs and ambitions of very powerful few.

Natassia

While planning and planning theory had good reason to challenge the rational planning of the 20th century, the rational planning of the 21st century may be significantly more able to plan for a complex world of wicked challenges. New tools and powerful technologies might prompt a re-evaluation of rational, empirical planning in the coming decades.

Courtney

International students often return to their countries and apply their learnings to practice. As planning theories and practices closely formulate each other, planning theories should accordingly be able to guide representative shares of international students. Despite such needs, studies of planning theories in the Global East context have almost been absent (Muller and Trubina, 2020).

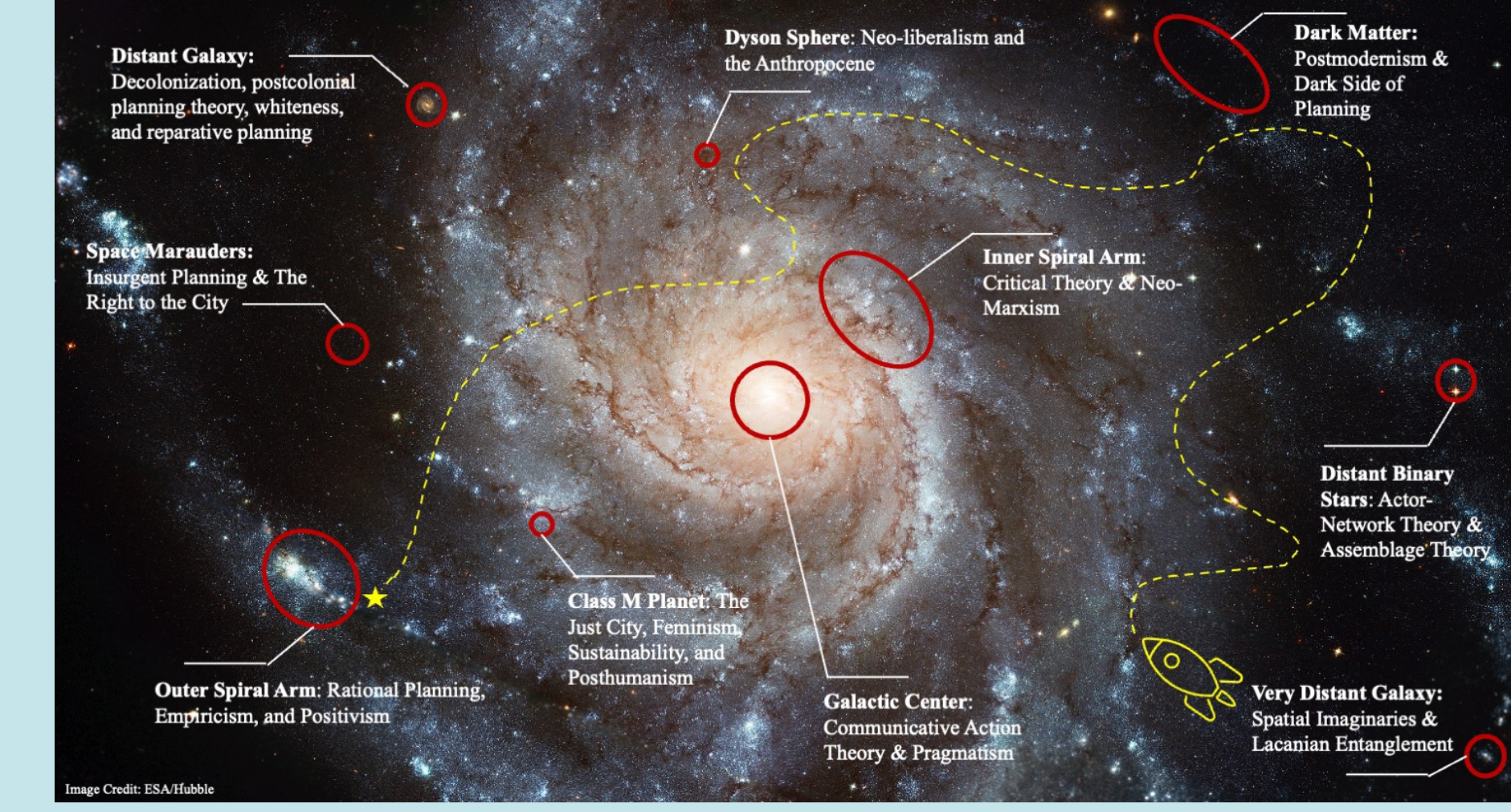
Gina

Adding details to planning practices in East Asia can greatly help planners' ambition to expand the scope to more people, regardless of their culture, ethnicity/race, and socioeconomic status, more non-human creatures, and more space outside the human residence.

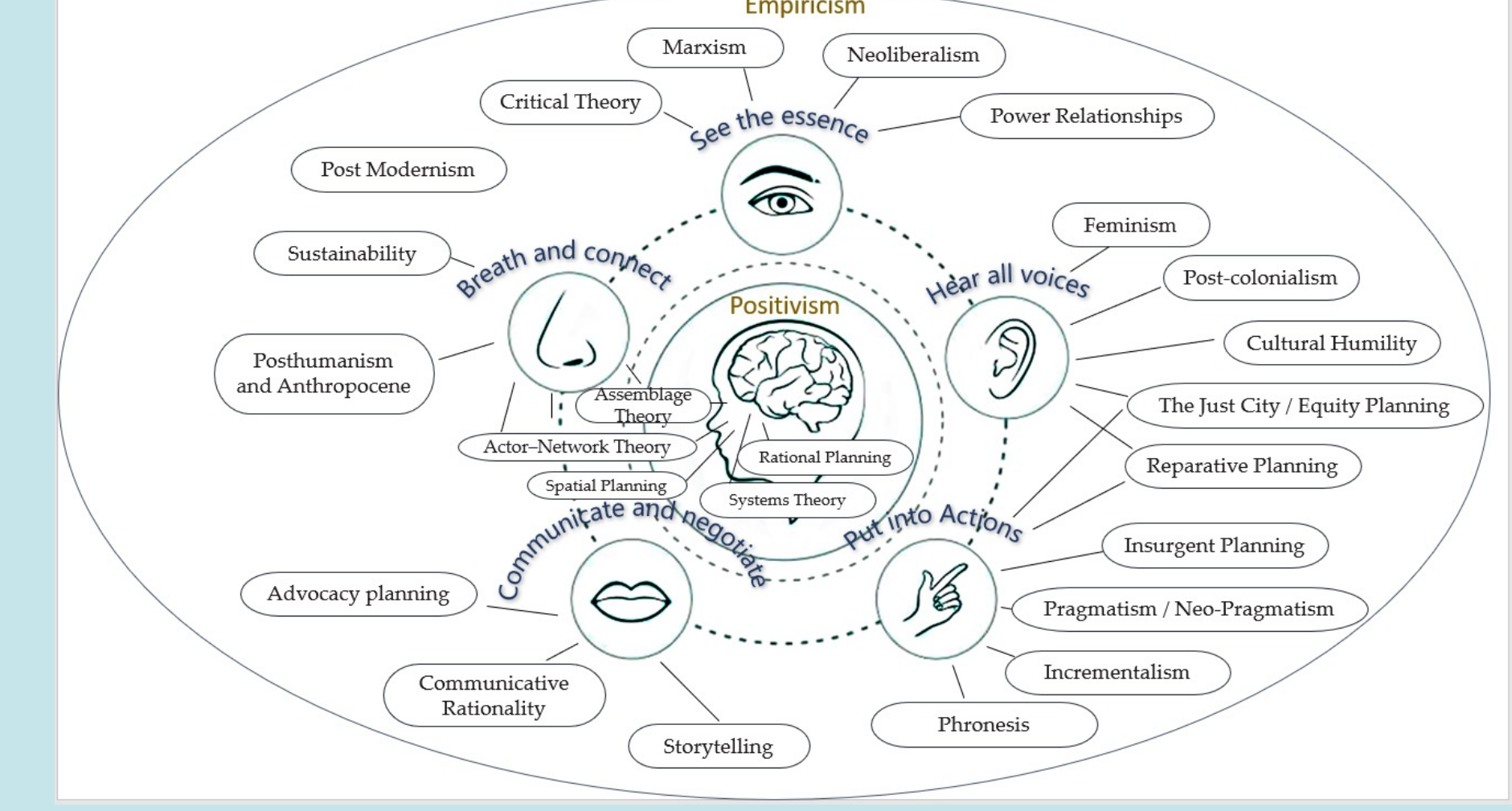
Zoe

4. DIAGRAMS STUDENTS CREATED TO ILLUSTRATE THEIR POSITIONALITY

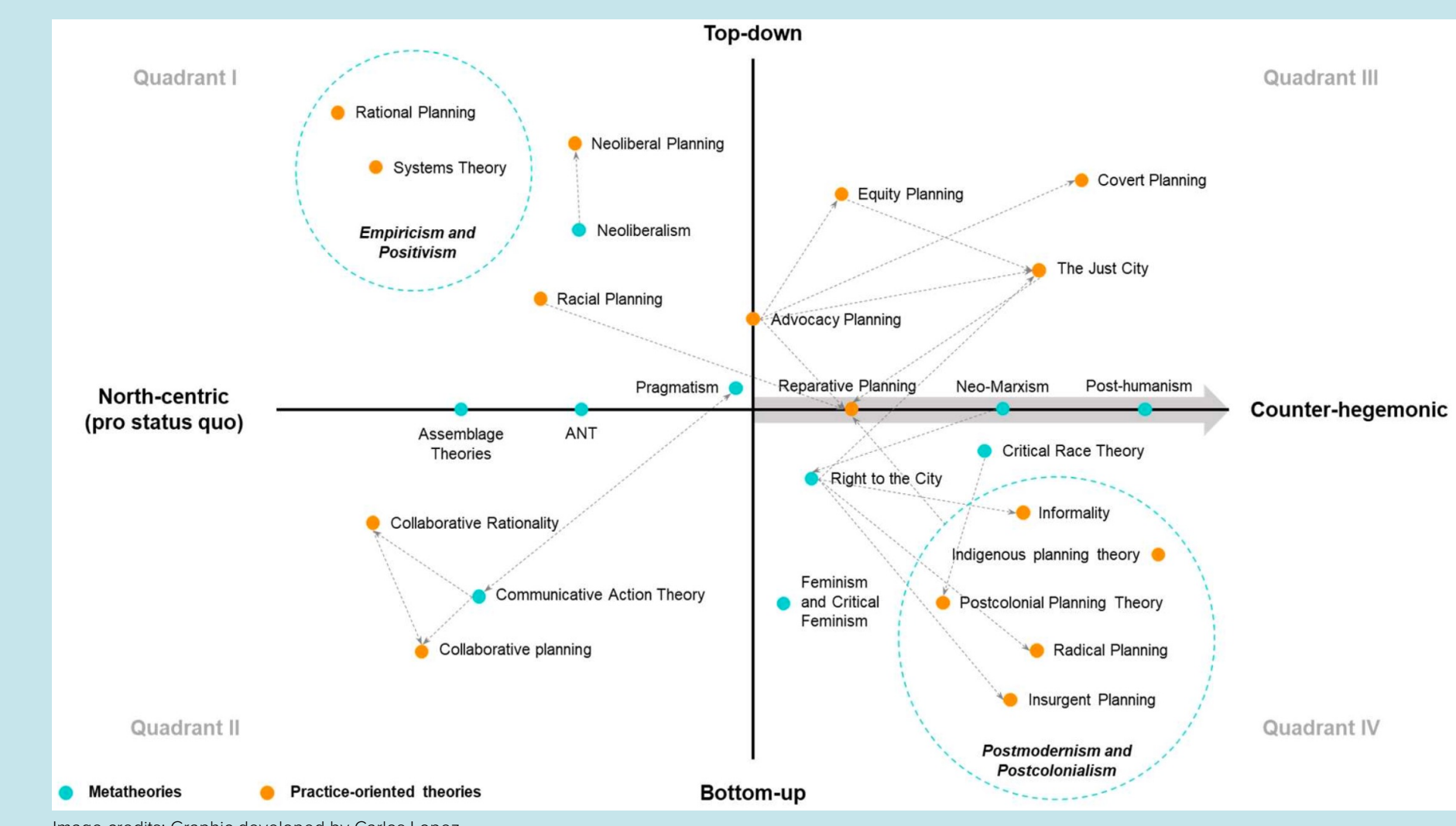
In a final project paper and presentation for the seminar, students were prompted with this: "In your future, there will be advanced planning theory -- how will you navigate it? What will you create with it?" What follows are a sample of responses to that prompt.



"The universe is a massive expanse, composed of so much diversity, possibility, and importantly, wonder. Planning theory, and its parent discipline planning, is fascinating precisely because it is multidisciplinary, arguably transdisciplinary."



"As a human, I use all parts of my sensing system to experience all dimensions of the world. As a planner, I will also try to employ a wide set of theories to learn all aspects of the planning issue and come up with my action."



"I synthesize planning theory as the intersection between two sets of tensions. The first portrays the competing visions of planning as either a state-led affair or as a practice involving more diverse actors. The second tension is the clash between the origins within Western modernity and the multiple efforts to break away from Northern-centered epistemologies."

5. WHAT DO THESE MAPS OF POSITIONALITY AND THEORY TELL US?

- Students demonstrated their "magpie habits" by collecting shiny objects from planning theory and neighboring fields to construct their own "nests".
- At times students expressed moments of self-doubt, unease, or disequilibrium in the face of theories that challenged long held beliefs or research questions. At times they questioned the value and relevance of theory. Ultimately each found their way and value in deep exploration.
- Students observed that some theories felt quite separate from the everyday practices of planning and there was a range of views on how much theory should diverge from everyday experiences of planners. Some felt that the text of theory was in its legitimacy to planners, while others felt that theoretical explorations in planning should have open boundaries, more permeable to theories that might not have immediate applications.
- The inclusion of different voices, stories, emotions, rationalities, and knowledges was crucial for these emerging scholars to locate their academic identity, reflect upon their research purposes and implications, address challenges involved in planning, and discern ways to contribute to social equity.

Sources

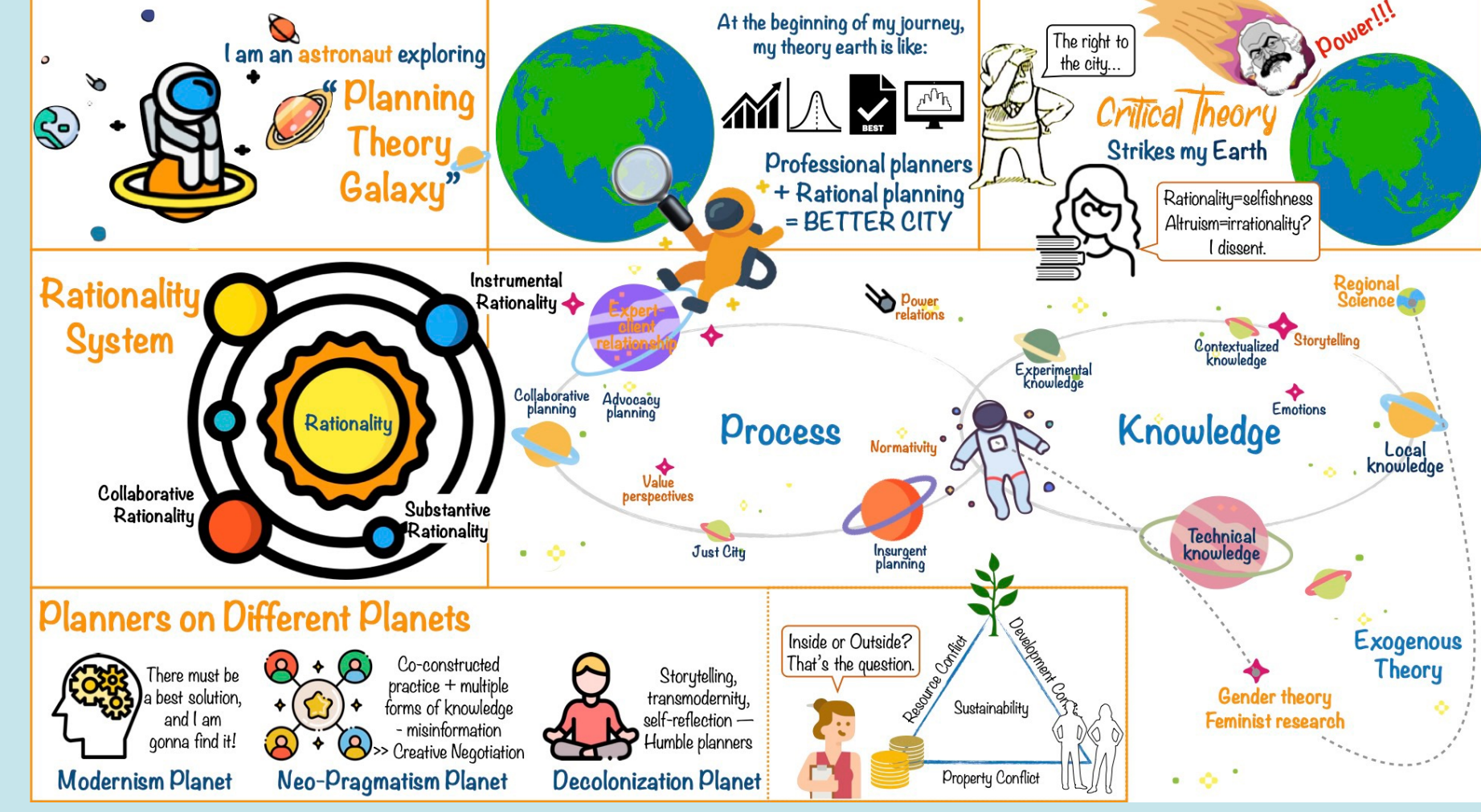
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AUTHORS

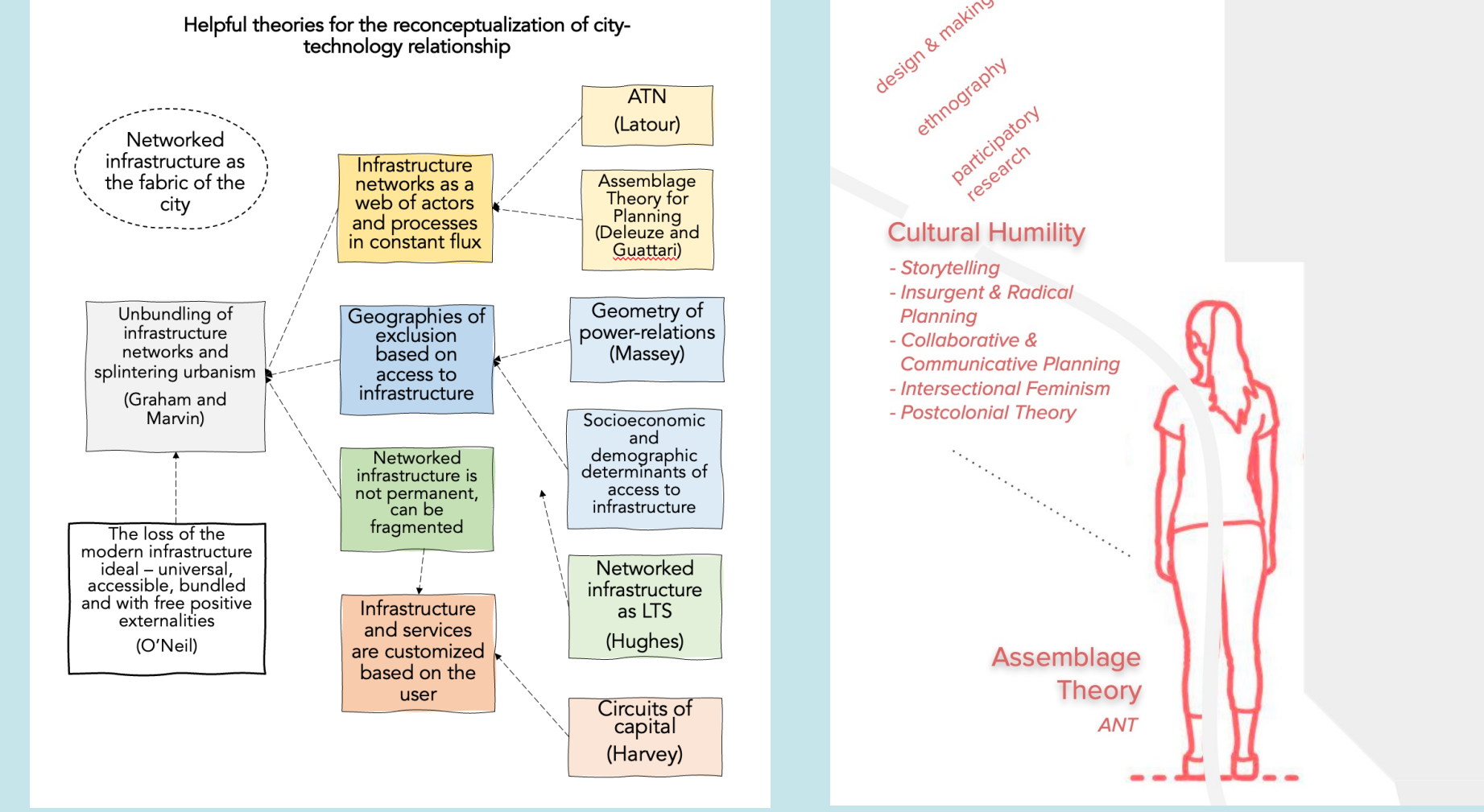
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THANK YOU!

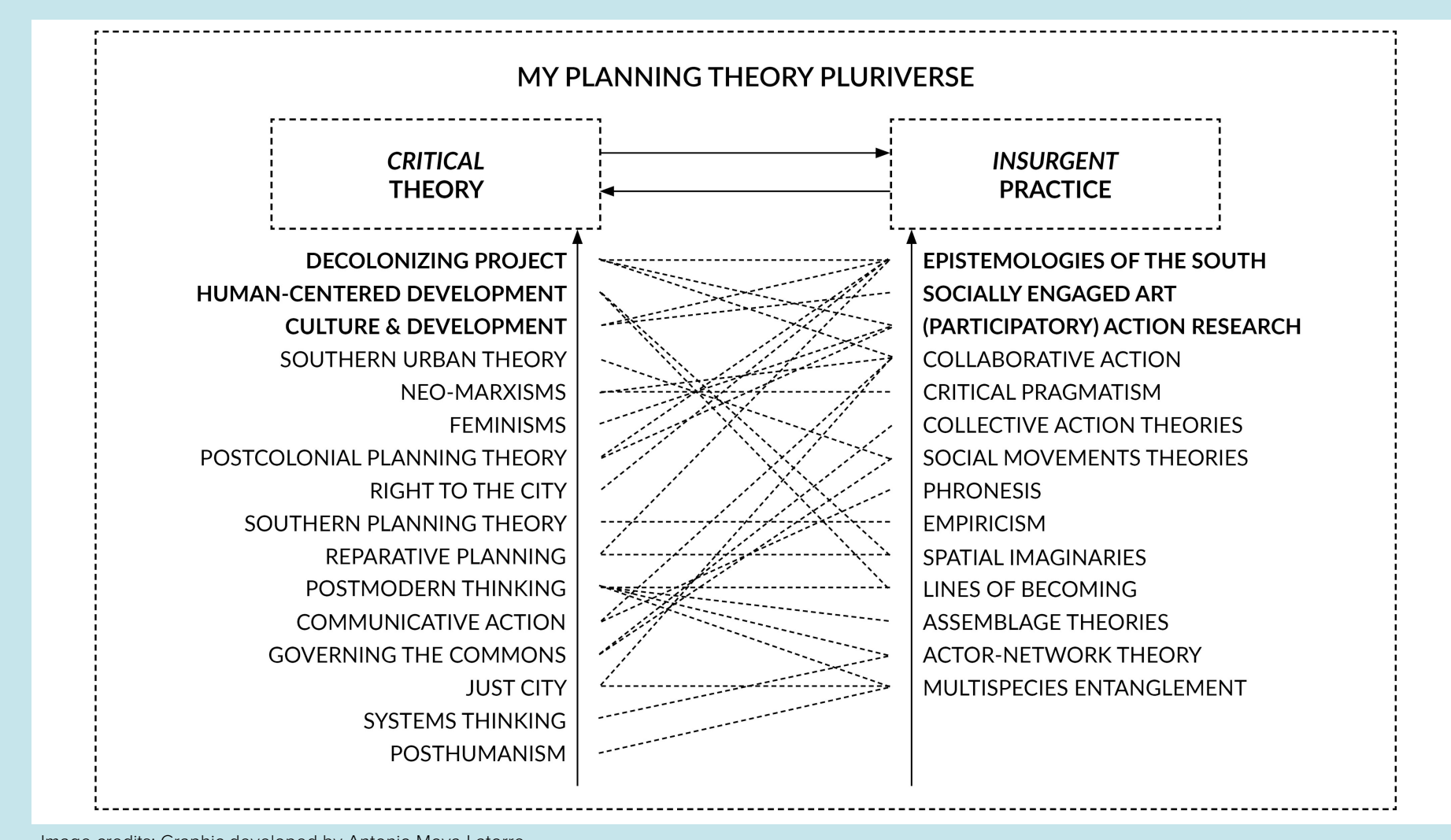
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"The journey feels like an exploration of a whole new universe to me. The dialogues between residents from various planets broke the perceptions that I had taken for granted and reshaped my worldview. They urge me to keep reflecting on my scholarly identity and career purpose."



"The diagram shows relevant strands of theory to analyze the commodification of public networked infrastructure and its role in the development of territories of exclusion."



"My research seeks to target the contradiction between structural social injustice and rich human creativity and contribute to discerning possible ways out of the still highly colonized world we are all part of. My 'planning theory pluriverse' aspires to nurture this type of emancipatory research."

