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Planning Through Debate: The Communicative Turn in Planning Theory

Patsy Healey

This essay is about what *planning* can be taken to mean in contemporary democratic societies. Its context is the dilemma faced by all those committed to planning as a democratic enterprise aimed at promoting social justice and environmental sustainability. The dilemma is that the technical and administrative machineries advocated and created to pursue these goals are based on a narrow and dominatory scientific rationalism. These machineries have further compromised the development of a democratic attitude and have failed to deliver the goals promoted. So how can we now support a renewal of the enterprise of planning? What must be its forms and principles?

During the 1980s and early 1990s, alternative conceptions of planning purposes and practices have been increasingly identified and debated in planning theory. One route to imagining alternatives has focused on substantive issues, moving from material analyses of options for local economies exposed to global capitalism to concerns with culture, consciousness, community, and "placeness."¹ Another focus has taken a "process" route, exploring the communicative dimensions of collectively debating and deciding on matters of collective concern.²

The problem with the substantive route is its *a priori* assumptions of what is good or bad, right or wrong. Local economic development is often presented as good, and national economic intervention as oppressive, or bad. By what knowledge and reasoning have we reached these conclusions? If such principles are embodied in our plans, will we not have fallen yet again into the trap of imposing the reasoning of one group of people on another? Does the process route offer a way out of this dilemma of relativism that treats every position as merely someone's opinion, and hence the dominance of a position pursued through plan-

ning strategies and their implementation as nothing more than the outcome of a power game? I believe that it can.

The Idea of Planning and Its Challenges

As with so much of Western culture, the contemporary idea of planning is rooted in the Enlightenment tradition of "modernity."³ This tradition freed individuals from the intellectual tyranny of religious faith and from the political tyranny of despots. Such free individuals could then combine in democratic association to manage their collective affairs. The application of scientific knowledge and reason to human affairs made it possible to build a better world, in which the sum of human happiness and welfare would be increased. For all our consciousness of the errors of democratic management in the past two centuries, it is difficult not to recognize the vast achievements that this intellectual and political enlightenment has brought.

The modern idea of planning, as John Friedmann⁴ has described in his authoritative account of its intellectual origins, is centrally linked to concepts of democracy and progress. It centers on the challenge of finding ways in which citizens acting together can manage their collective concerns with respect to the sharing of space and time.

In this century, Karl Mannheim's advocacy of a form of planning that harnessed systematized social scientific knowledge and techniques to the management of collective affairs in a democratic society proved inspirational for the influential Chicago school of rational decision making.⁵ A procedural view evolved which presented planning as a progressive force for economic and social development in a world where democracy and capitalism were seen to coexist in comfortable consensus.⁶ This modern view challenged populist "clientelism" (as in Chicago in the 1950s)⁷ as much as idealist totalitarianism.

But as with any progressive force, procedures developed with a progressive democratic intention may be subverted for other purposes. In the early 1970s, this subversion was identified with the power of capitalist forces to dominate the public's life opportunities. Environmental planning, it was argued, put the needs of capital (through regional economic development and the implicit opportunities for land and property markets created by planning regimes) before citizens and the environment.⁸

However, a more fundamental challenge to the Mannheimian notion of planning was gathering force through the critique of scientific

reason itself. German critical theorists and French deconstructionists elaborated ideas which challenged reason's dominance of human affairs. Reason, understood as logic coupled with scientifically constructed empirical knowledge, was unveiled as having achieved hegemonic power over other ways of being and knowing, crowding out moral and aesthetic discourses. Further, rationalizing power dominated the very institutions set up in the name of democratic action, the bureaucratic agencies of the state. Following Michel Foucault's analysis, planning could be associated with the dominatory power of systematic reason pursued through state bureaucracies.⁹ Evidence for this seemed to be everywhere, from the disaster of high-rise towers for the poor to the dominance of economic criteria justifying road building and the functional categorization of activity zones, which worked for large industrial companies and those working in them, but not for women (with their necessarily complex lifestyles), the elderly and the disabled, and the many ethnic groups forced to discover ways of surviving on the edge of established economic practices.

This "challenge to systematized reason," and with it, to the planning enterprise, strikes at the heart of the project of modernity. The challenge is now labeled "postmodernist," drawing on a terminology first developed in art and architectural criticism. But whereas postmodernism in architecture is primarily a critique of a particular paradigm and style *within* Western art and architecture, philosophical postmodernism undermines the foundations of two hundred years of Western thought.

The postmodern challenge to Western thought is both progressive and regressive in its potential, as was the idea of systematized reason. It is also highly diverse, with different lines of development. Only some of these claim to *replace* the project of modernity with that of postmodernity. Others, following the position of the economic geographer David Harvey and the critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, seek new ways of reconstituting the "incomplete" project of modernity. Some of the strands of postmodernist debate leave space for a collective activity in planning. Others dismiss planning as, variously, impossible, irrelevant, or oppressive.

Beth Moore Milroy, reviewing the development of the postmodernist debate in planning thought, identifies four broad characteristics to the challenge postmodernism presents to modernism:

It is *deconstructive* in the sense of questioning and establishing a sceptical distance from conventional beliefs and, more actively, trying both to ascer-

tain who derives value from upholding their authority and to displace them; *antifoundationalist* in the sense of dispensing with universals as bases of truth; *nondualistic* in the sense of refusing the separation between subjectivity and objectivity along with the array of dualisms it engenders including the splits between truth and opinion, fact and value; and *encouraging of plurality and difference*.¹⁰

This double challenge—to the tendency for progressive values to be destroyed by the very systems created to promote them and to the systems of technocratic rationalist thought that underpin so much of Western and Eastern bloc thinking about planning—seems so powerful as to be fatal to the idea of planning. However, as Harvey and Habermas both argue, some directions of the postmodern challenge to planning need to be actively resisted as regressive and undemocratic. Communicative forms of planning offer a progressive way forward.

Communicative Rationality

Communicative rationality is not the only direction new forms of planning are taking. Some argue for planning as a framework of rules within which collectively experienced impacts are addressed through pricing policies.¹¹ But this is merely to retreat still further into narrow rationalism. Others argue for the replacement of rationalism by some fundamental moral principle derived from religious principles, or environmental philosophy, or some other metaphysics, but it is hard to see how such an approach can advance the project of progressive democratic pluralism. A more centrally postmodern approach elevates experience and the aesthetic mode to the central dimension of human life. In this conception all experiences and individual interpretations are equally valid because there are no shared criteria for discrimination.

If planning has any role at all in this conception, it is to stake out and defend boundaries and at the same time to foster the celebration of difference. But what practices could constitute such planning in the absence of a discursive reasoning capacity? The progressive challenge is instead to find ways of acknowledging different ways of experiencing and understanding while seeking to “make sense together.”

Another approach to inventing a “new” planning has been to develop the socialist project beyond a preoccupation with material conditions and economic classes. Traditionally, the socialist project was based on scientific materialism. The new socialism of the 1980s, in Britain at

least, has been concerned with developing a pluralist understanding of people's needs, values, and ways of experiencing oppression.¹² Appreciating diversity and recognizing difference are key elements in this conception, requiring collective action to be informed by principles of tolerance and respect. There is not one route to progress but many, not one form of reasoning but many. The socialist project thus comes to focus on restructuring the control of economies and the flow of the fruits of material effort while at the same time discovering ways of "living together differently but respectfully."¹³ Planning retains its traditional importance in socialist thought, but the planning enterprise is refocused to recognize diverse forms of disadvantage.

The focus of new socialism remains a struggle for opportunities for the disadvantaged against a systemically understood capitalist world order. This provides a frame of reasoning which interprets and selects among the various claims for attention that a pluralist socialism can generate. But the pluralist socialist project is still founded on systematized rationality and scientific understanding of social structure in its conceptions of "living together" and "difference."

Communicative rationality offers a way forward through a different conception of human reason, following the work of Habermas. Habermas argues that far from giving up on reason as an informing principle for contemporary societies, we should shift perspective from an individualized, subject-object conception of reason to reasoning formed within intersubjective communication. Such reasoning is required where "living together but differently" in shared space and time drives us to search for ways of finding agreement on how to address our collective concerns. Habermas's communicative rationality has parallels within conceptions of practical reasoning, implying an expansion from the notion of reason as pure logic and scientific empiricism to encompass all the ways we come to understand and know things and use that knowledge in acting. Habermas argues that without some concept of reasoning, we have no way out of fundamentalism and nihilism. For him, the notion of the self-conscious autonomous individual, refining his or her knowledge against principles of logic and science, can be replaced by a notion of reason as intersubjective mutual understanding arrived at by particular people in particular times and places; that is, reason is historically situated. Both subject and object are constituted through this process. Knowledge claims, upon which action possibilities are proposed, are validated, in this conception of reasoning, through discursively establishing principles of validity rather than through appeal to logic or science, although

both may well be considered possibilities within the communicative context.¹⁴

In this way, knowledge for action, principles of action, and ways of acting are actively constituted by the members of an intercommunicating community situated in the particularities of time and place. Further, the reasoning employed can escape the confines of rational-scientific principles to include varying systems of morality and culturally specific traditions of expressive aesthetic experience. “Right” and “good” actions are those we can come to agree on, in particular times and places, across our diverse differences in material conditions and wants, moral perspectives, and expressive cultures and inclinations. We do not need recourse to common fundamental ideals or principles of “the good social organization” to guide us. In this conception, planning, and its contents, is a way of acting we can choose, after debate.

Habermas’s conception of communicative action has been criticized in the context of the present discussion on two grounds. First, by holding on to reason, it retains the very source of modernity’s dominatory potential. Second, Habermas would like to believe that consensual positions can be arrived at, whereas contemporary social relations reveal deep cleavages—of class, race, gender, and culture—which can only be resolved, some argue, through power struggle between conflicting forces.¹⁵

Habermas justifies his retention of reasoning as a legitimate guiding principle for collective affairs on the grounds that, where collective action is our concern, we need to engage in argumentation and debate. We need a reasoning capacity for these purposes. We cannot engage in aesthetic presentation or moral faith if at some point we are faced both with making sense together and working out how to act together. This does not mean that the language of morality or aesthetics is excluded from our reasoning. Habermas argues that our intersubjective practical reasoning draws on the store of knowledge and understanding of technique, morality, and aesthetics. In this way, our collective reasoning is informed by, and situated within, the various “lifeworlds” from which we come to engage in our collective enterprises.¹⁶ Our intersubjective arguments may involve telling stories as well as analysis.¹⁷ Thus the narrative mode should accompany and intersect with experiential expression and the analytical mode. But in the end, the purpose of our efforts is not analysis, telling stories, or rhetoric but doing something; that is, “acting in the world.” For this, we need to discuss what we could and should do—why and how. There is an interesting parallel here with Michael Walzer’s notion of principles of justice for different spheres of social activity.¹⁸

But does not the process of collective argument merely lead to a new and potentially domatory consensus, as the agreement freely arrived at through argument in one period imposes itself on the different conclusions of the next? Habermas proposes to counteract this possibility through criteria to sustain a dynamic critique within the reasoning process. Claims should be judged by their comprehensibility, integrity, legitimacy, and truth.¹⁹ John Forester has since developed these criteria as heuristic questions for planners to use in critiquing themselves and others as they search for a progressive, power-challenging planning.²⁰

The mutual understandings and agreements reached for one purpose at one time are thus revisable as the flow of communicative action proceeds. Habermas himself would clearly like to see stable societies built around principles of mutual understanding. Several planning theorists have also proposed the development of a communicative "metalanguage" or a "metadiscourse" for planning discussion.²¹ Such an enterprise parallels the search within the New Left in Britain for forms of a democratically pluralist participation.

But a metalanguage, however full of internal principles of critique, unavoidably contains domatory potential. It could all too easily settle into assumptions of understanding and agreement detached from those whose ways of being, knowing, and valuing are supposed to be reflected in the agreement. To be liberating rather than dominating, intercommunicative reasoning for the purposes of acting in the world must accept that the "differences" between which we must communicate are not just differences in economic and social position, or in specific wants and needs, but in systems of meaning. We see things differently because words, phrases, expressions, and objects are interpreted differently according to our frame of reference. It is this point, long understood in anthropology²² and emphasized in phenomenology, which underpins the strength of the relativist position. It is here that I would part company with Habermas and recognize the inherent localized specificity and untranslatability of systems of meaning. We may shift our ideas, learn from each other, adapt to each other, and act in the world together. Systems of meaning or frames of reference shift and evolve in response to such encounters. But it can never be possible to construct a stable, fully inclusive consensus, and the agreements we reach should be recognized as merely temporary accommodations of different, and differently adapting, perceptions.

The critics of modernity argue that the system of meaning proposed by scientific rationalism has dominated and crowded out all other systems of meaning. If communicative action is to transcend this domina-

tory threat, its concern should rather be to develop understandings and practices of interdiscursive communication, of translation rather than superimposition. For, as Clifford Geertz argues, no system of meaning can ever fully understand another.²³ It can merely search for ways of opening windows on what it means to see things differently.

Developed in this way, communicative rationality offers a new form of planning through interdiscursive communication, a way of "living together differently through struggling to make sense together." Its openness, its exteriorizing quality, and its internal capacity for critique should counteract any potential to turn mutual understanding reached at one historical moment into a repressive cultural regime in the next. Communicative rationality offers the hope that progress, a "project of becoming," is still possible. This direction, in my view, holds an important promise and challenge for planning and for democracy generally, as Forester argues.²⁴

Planning as a Communicative Enterprise

Planning, and specifically environmental planning, is a process for collectively, and interactively, addressing and working out how to act with respect to shared concerns about how far to go and how to "manage" environmental change. Mannheim argued that scientific rationalism provides the central resource for this enterprise,²⁵ but the collapse of the unidimensional domination of scientific rationalism has demolished this possibility. Any recourse to scientific knowledge or rational procedures must now be contained within some other conception of democratic acting in the world. Habermas offers an alternative which retains the notion of the liberating and democratic potential of reasoning but is broadened to encompass moral appreciation and aesthetic experience as well as rational-technical forms of reasoning. This wider understanding of what we know, and how we know it, rooted as much in "practical sense"²⁶ as in formalized knowledge, is brought into collective deciding and acting through intersubjective communication rather than through the self-reflective consciousness of autonomous individuals. The effort of constructing mutual understanding as the locus of reasoning activity replaces the subject-centered "philosophy of consciousness," which, Habermas argues, has dominated Western conceptions of reason since the Enlightenment.²⁷ Through it, the specificities of time and place, of culture, society, and personality, and of "habitus," as Pierre Bourdieu puts it,²⁸ are expressed and constituted. For Habermas, a conscious in-

tersubjective understanding of collective communicative work is a force to sustain an internally critical democratic effort, resisting the potential domination of one-dimensional principles, be they scientific, moral, or aesthetic.

What can planning mean in this context of post-rationalist, inter-communicative, reasoned, many-dimensional "thinking about and acting" in the world? What purposes and practices should it have?

A communicative approach to knowledge production—knowledge of conditions, cause and effect, moral values, and aesthetic worlds—maintains that knowledge is not merely a preformulated store of systematized understandings but is specifically created anew in our communications through exchanging perceptions and understandings and through drawing on the stock of life experience and previously consolidated cultural and moral knowledge available to participants. We cannot therefore predefine a set of tasks which planning must address, since these must be specifically discovered, learned about, and understood through intercommunicative processes.

Nevertheless, ongoing processes of debate about environmental matters have created a thought world, a contemporary "common sense," within which the elements of a substantive agenda are evident. The contemporary rediscovery of environmental planning is fueled by a widespread and interdiscursive concern with managing economic development, enriching cultural life, avoiding polarizing and segregating tendencies in life-styles and life opportunities, and undertaking all these within an attitude to the natural environment which is both respectful and sustaining of long-term ecological balances. The general purposes of environmental planning situated in this context are to balance these connecting but often contradictory aims. But what constitutes the "balance" in particular times and places cannot be known in advance.

If this is so, then attention to the substantive purposes of environmental planning needs to be complemented by consideration of the practices through which purposes are established and actions are identified and followed through. What does a communicative rationality suggest as appropriate when addressing environmental management issues in contemporary Western democracies? How can the recognition of appropriate practices avoid the trap of formulation as a "process" blueprint?

The outlines of appropriate practices for an intercommunicative planning began to emerge through the work of planning theorists during the 1980s. This work has been influenced not only by Habermas but by other, often conflicting, contributors to the postmodern and antirationalist debate, notably Foucault and Bourdieu, and by an increasing number

of “ethnographic” studies of planning practice.²⁹ The following ten propositions summarize this “new” planning direction.

1. Planning is an interactive and interpretive process; it focuses on deciding and acting within a range of specialized allocative and authoritative systems but draws on the multidimensionality of “lifeworlds” or practical sense rather than a single formalized dimension (for example, urban morphology or scientific rationalism).³⁰ Formal techniques of analysis and design in planning processes are but one form of discourse. Planning processes should be enriched by discussion of moral dilemmas and aesthetic experience using a range of presentational forms, from telling stories to aesthetic illustrations of experiences. Statistical analysis coexists in such processes with poems and moral fables.³¹ A prototype example here might be some of the new initiatives in Britain to help tenants and residents improve the quality of their living environments.

2. Such interaction assumes the preexistence of individuals engaged with others in diverse, fluid, and overlapping “discourse communities,” each with its own meaning systems and hence knowledge forms and ways of reasoning and valuing. Such communities may be nearer or farther from each other in relation to access to each other’s languages, but no common language or fully common understanding can be attained. Communicative action thus focuses on searching for achievable levels of mutual understanding for the purposes in hand while retaining awareness of that which is not understood (i.e., we may not understand why someone says no, but we should recognize the negation as valid; we know there is a reason but we cannot (yet) understand it).³²

3. Intercommunicative planning involves respectful discussion within and between discursive communities, “respect” implying recognizing, valuing, listening to, and searching for translative possibilities between different discourse communities.³³ A prototype example here might be the public participation exercises undertaken by a few progressive local authorities in Britain when producing their development plans.³⁴

4. Planning involves invention not only through programs of action but in the construction of the arenas within which these programs are formulated and conflicts are identified and mediated. Such a planning needs to be reflective about its own processes.³⁵ For example, organizing development plan preparation involves planners in considering not only whom to consult about what, but also the areas within which issues are identified, debated, and decided upon.

5. Within the argumentation of these communicative processes, all dimensions of knowing, understanding, appreciating, experiencing, and

judging may be brought into play. The struggle of engaging in interdiscursive communicative action is to grasp these diverse viewpoints and find ways of reasoning among the competing claims for action they generate, without dismissing or devaluing any one until it has been explored. Nothing is inadmissible except the claim that some things are off the agenda and cannot be discussed. All claims merit the reply: "We acknowledge you feel this is of value. Can you help us understand why? Can we work out how it affects what we thought we were trying to do? Are there any reasons why the claim cannot receive collective support?"³⁶

6. A reflexive and critical capacity should be kept alive in the processes of argumentation, using the Habermasian criteria of comprehensibility, integrity, legitimacy, and truth. But the critical intent should be directed not at the discourses of the different participative communities (e.g., "We are right and you are wrong"; "We are good and you are bad") but at the discourse that surrounds specific actions being invented through the communicative process (e.g., "Watch out: this metaphor we are using blocks out the ideas our other colleagues are proposing"; or "This line of thinking will be dismissed as illegitimate by central government. Do we really think it is illegitimate? Are we really going to challenge their power? OK, so how?").³⁷ A sensitive illustration of this and the previous practice that was used in developing the women's agenda for the Greater London Development Plan is described by Judith Allen.³⁸

7. This inbuilt critique, a morality for interaction, serves the project of democratic pluralism by according "voice," "ear," and "respect" to all those with an interest in the issues at stake. This is no easy matter; interests overlap and conflict, and the conflicts experienced within each one of us are magnified in the interdiscursive arena. The important point is that the morality and the dilemmas are addressed interdiscursively, forming thereby both the processes and the arenas of debate.

8. The literature on negotiation counsels us that apparently fixed preferences may be altered when individuals and groups are encouraged to articulate their interests together. Interaction is thus not simply a form of exchange or bargaining around predefined interests. It involves mutually reconstructing what constitutes the interests of the various participants—a process of mutual learning through mutually trying to understand.³⁹

9. Communicative planning is not only innovative, it has the potential to change, to transform material conditions and established power relations through the continuous effort to "critique" and "demythify"; through increasing understanding among participants and

hence highlighting oppressions and “dominatory” forces; and through creating well-grounded arguments for alternative analyses and perceptions—through actively constructing new understandings. Ultimately, the transformative potential of communicative action lies in the power embodied in the “better argument,”⁴⁰ in the power of ideas, metaphors, images, and stories. This echoes Bourdieu’s point that how we talk about things helps to bring them about.⁴¹

In this way, diverse people from different societal conditions and cultural communities are encouraged to recognize one another’s presence and negotiate their shared concerns. Through such processes of argumentation we may come to agree, or accept a process of agreeing, on what should be done, without necessarily arriving at a unified view of our respective lifeworlds. The critical criteria built into such a process of argument encourages openness and transparency, but without simplification. If collective concerns are ambivalent or ambiguous, such a communicative process should allow acknowledgment that this is so, perhaps unavoidably so. So the dilemmas and creative potentials of ambiguity enrich the interdiscursive effort rather than being washed out in the attempt to construct a one-dimensional language.⁴²

10. The purpose of intercommunicative planning is to help planners begin and proceed in mutually agreeable ways based on an effort at interdiscursive understanding, drawing on, critiquing, and reconstructing the understandings everyone brings to the discussion. The inbuilt criterion of critique, if kept alive, should prevent such starting agreements and “traveling pacts” from consolidating into a unified code and language which could then limit further invention. We may be able to agree on what to do next, on how to start out, and then travel along for a while. We cannot know where this will take us. But we can act with hope and ambition to achieve future possibilities. Neither the comprehensive plan nor goal-directed programs have more than a temporary existence in such a conception of communicative and potentially transformative environmental planning.⁴³

Systems and Practices for Environmental Planning

How can this conception of communicative practices for constructing and critiquing understanding among diverse discursive communities assist in the development of systems for environmental planning, local realizations of these, and the specific contents of local planning systems? The very concept of a system immediately conjures up notions of domi-

natory practices which impose themselves on our actions. Yet, with respect to our mutual environmental concerns, a key purpose of communicative action is to work out what rules or codes of conduct we can agree we need, to allow us to live together but differently in shared environments.

Planning systems consist of formal rules to guide the conduct, resource allocation, and management activities of individuals and businesses. But they are more than a set of rules. The rules derive from conceptions of situations (contexts), problems experienced in these situations, and ways of addressing these problems and changing situations. It is where planning effort is deliberately focused on *changing* situations that we can speak of a planning with transformative intent.⁴⁴

Urban design or physical blueprint approaches to environmental planning focused on transforming towns. Ideas of urban existence were consolidated into principles of urban structure and form, and from these into rules to govern proposals for development projects. Debates were confined to principles of urban form and conducted primarily within a narrow expert group (architects and engineers) legitimized by paternalist notions of "planning for people." The old approach was supported by a narrow architectural engineering discourse about the relative merits of different urban forms, drawing on aesthetic and moral principles. The dominatory consequences of this for our towns and cities are notorious. The urban design approach was essentially a continuation of a pre-Enlightenment tradition of city planning carried forward into the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century industrialization and urbanization.

The Mannheimian conception of planning as the "rational mastery of the irrational"⁴⁵ provided a more appropriate realization of a modern conception of planning. Translated through the Chicago school, this became the rational-comprehensive process model of planning which has been so influential in planning practice. This model focused on the processes through which goals were formulated and strategies for achieving them were devised. Rule generation operated on two levels: the methodological rules for arriving at a plan or program and the criteria necessary for realizing that program. Both were designed to be recursive, with feedback loops via monitoring procedures intended to sustain an internal critique of planning principles. Planning effort was focused on comprehensive understanding of urban and environmental systems and the invention of sets of objectives and guidance principles for the comprehensive management of these systems. Rules to govern change in systems were expressed as performance criteria and linked back to objectives. In this rationalist conception, citizens contributed to the process,

but only by “feeding in” their rationalized goals rather than by debating the understandings through which they had come to have their goals. The concerns of politicians and citizens were, in effect, “translated,” converted into the technical scientific language of policy analysts and urban and regional science. The metaphors of this language focused on images of process forms, of strategy and programmatic action. The dominatory potential of the rational procedural model lies in the claims to comprehensiveness of what was primarily a narrow, economic, and functionalist conception of the dimensions of lifeworlds. The critical capacity of the monitoring feedback loops merely shifted priorities within the discourse; it did not provide a mechanism for critiquing the discourse itself.

Pluralist conceptions of interest mediation, of the kind first proposed by Paul Davidoff⁴⁶ but later widely developed, seem to reflect more clearly the reality of environmental planning politics. The practice of environmental planning is now commonly described as one within which environmental perceptions and interests are asserted and mediated.⁴⁷ The strategies, rules, and the way rules are used are interpreted in this conception as the product of bargaining processes among conflicting interests. But, as Forester argues, this treats each interest as a source of power, bargaining with others to create a calculus which expresses the power relations among the participants. The language of environmental planning is that of the prevalent political power games. It is not underpinned by any effort at learning about the interests and perceptions of the participants, and with that knowledge revising what each participant thinks about the others’ and his or her own interests. Only if this happened could a creative, inventive form of environmental planning develop to replace a merely power-brokering planning.⁴⁸

The focus of an intersubjective communicative argumentation is exactly at this point. It starts by recognizing the potential diversity of ways in which concerned citizens (citizens with an interest in issues) come to be concerned. Citizens may share a concern but arrive at it through different cultural, societal, and personal experiences. Understanding each other must therefore be accepted as a challenging task which is unlikely to be more than partially achieved. The language of interdiscursive communication uses multiple modes, moving between analysis, moral fables, and poems.

The struggle within such interdiscursive communication is to maintain a capacity for critique. This requires the development of a critical, interactively reflexive habit. Of course, the dynamics of the ongoing flow of relations means that people cannot pause to reflect collec-

tively at every instant, but taking a breath and sorting things out should become a normal part of the practical endeavor of planning work. The Habermasian criteria help here, but reflection is also required with regard to the arenas of the communicative effort itself. Are there other concerned people who should be involved? Are there other ways of understanding these issues or discursive practices which we should include? How should the position we have reached be expressed to maximize its relevance to all of us, allowing us to move on but still minimize the potential that what we have agreed will live on beyond our need for it and come to dominate us? Through these processes of active discursive critique, ideas for action may be invented, and necessary codes of conduct for the collective management of shared concerns may be identified and agreed upon.

This concept of a planning "invented" through reflective processes of intersubjective communication within which are absorbed internal criteria of critique is suggestive of ways in which existing processes of plan making, conflict resolution, and implementation programs might be transformed. Specifically, the active presence of a planning in this form will be reflected in the language and metaphor used within the various arenas constituted for environmental planning work. It would reflect efforts at honesty and openness without losing a recognition of the layers and range of meanings present among those concerned with the issue at hand. It would acknowledge with respect the limited scope for mutual understanding between diverse discourse communities while struggling to enlarge that understanding. It would accept other limits—to power, to empirical knowledge, to the resolvability of moral dilemmas—but yet seek to enable the world of action to begin and proceed toward something better, without having to specify a goal. Rather than Lindblomian marginal adjustments to the present,⁴⁹ its language would be future seeking, but not, like its physical blueprint and goal-directed predecessors, future defining. Its images and metaphors would draw on both the experiential and the abstract knowledge and understanding of those involved, recognizing the interweaving of rational-technical, moral, and aesthetic dimensions in our lives. It would seek to reason between conflicting claims and conflicting ways of validating claims. It would not force one dimension of knowledge to dominate another. It would be courageous, challenging power relations through criticism and the presentation of alternative arguments. It would reflect the internal critical monitoring practices of participants. It is thus by the tone of its practices that intercommunicative planning would be identified.

The Dialectics of a New Planning

To those seeking specific substantive solutions to particular problems, the planning outlined here may seem too leisurely. With environmental disasters so near at hand, can we afford to take the time to invent answers? To those seeking knowledgeable actions, this planning may seem too unfocused and diffuse. What happens if mystical perceptions or aesthetic reification crowd out the useful empirical and theoretical knowledge we have about cause and effect? To those conscious of the scale of inequalities in power relations, this concept of planning may seem idealistic and innocent. Does it not merely cocoon us within a naive belief in the power of democratic discussions while the forces of global capitalism ever more cleverly conceal the ways they oppress us?

To these doubts there are two replies. First, to engage in any other strategy is to regenerate forms of planning which have inherent within them an antidemocratic "dominatory" potential. Second, the practices involved are not really so far removed from our experience. Prefigurative examples can be found in Britain in some of the work of the New Left, for example, in the Greater London Council, particularly in dealing with women's issues,⁵⁰ and recently in a few of the new efforts in plan making in Britain resulting from requirements to prepare Unitary Development Plans and District Development Plans.⁵¹ More generally, some branches of the environmental and feminist movements have been moving in this direction. Further prefigurative potentials can even be recognized in contemporary management theory's emphasis on group culture formation and empowerment rather than management through hierarchical authoritarian structures.⁵² At a broader level, the "struggle for democracy" in eastern Europe and China has generated questions in Western societies regarding the real meaning of democracy.

"Inventing democracy" is thus an issue that is moving increasingly sharply into focus. This is a time for the invention of democratic processes. The field of environmental concerns is one of the critical arenas within which such invention is being demanded and tested.

However, there are many possible democracies. Learning and listening and respectful argumentation are not enough. We need to develop skills in translation, in constructive critique, and in collective invention and respectful action to be able to realize the potential of a planning understood as collectively and intersubjectively addressing how to act in respect of common concerns about urban and regional environments. We need to rework the store of techniques and practices evolved within

the planning field to identify their potential within a new communicative, dialogue-based form of planning. This essay has drawn on the work of a number of planning academics who search within the lifeworld of planning practice for a better understanding of these skills. What is being invented, in planning practice and in planning theory, is a new form of planning, a respectful, argumentative form of *planning through debate* that is appropriate to our recognition of the failure of modernity's conception of "pure reason" yet is searching, as Habermas does, for a continuation of the Enlightenment project of democratic progress through reasoned intersubjective argument among free citizens.

As the planning community explores this hopeful new approach, it is important to remember the experience of past efforts at democracy making. Habermas offers the theory of communicative action as an intersubjective project of emancipation from fundamentalism, totalitarianism, and nihilism through deliberate efforts in mutual understanding through argument. But this can succeed for more than a historical moment only so long as the processes of internal critique are kept constantly alive, so long as what Habermas calls "the lifeworld" is constantly brought into the collective thinking about acting in the world in respect of common affairs, and so long as the communicative effort of mutual understanding is sustained as a critical as well as a creative process. Either we succeed in keeping a critical dialectics alive within communicative action or we remain caught within the dialectics of totalizing systems. As the opposition of capitalism versus communism collapses, perhaps there is a hope that, through dynamically critical communicative processes, the democratic project of "making sense together while living differently" can develop as a progressive force.

Notes

Debate is used in the title in preference to *argumentation*, as a more collaborative and positive word. Although others may see debate as involving opposition between two sides, it will become clear that this meaning is not what I associate with the word.

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