

Symposium

New Paradigm or Old Myopia?

Unsettling the Communicative Turn in Planning Theory

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The field of planning theory has gone through periodical changes, with previous dominant theories drawing on, and in turn reacting to, urban-form concepts; comprehensive, rational decision-making, advocacy, and equity planning; Marxist and Weberian critiques; economic, public choice, and public goods theories; and environmental and sustainability approaches. During the last decade, a growing number of scholars have taken what is described by Healey (1996) as a “communicative turn,”¹ in describing and theorizing urban and regional planning or located policy-making. A rapidly growing body of work drawing on Habermasian, pragmatist, ethnographic, ethnomethodological, and related frameworks has prompted some to declare the emergence of a “new paradigm” (Innes 1995) or a dominant consensus among planning theorists (Mandelbaum 1996).

In what follows, we wish to raise a number of broad questions about the communicative paradigm and claims for its theoretical dominance. We thus extend an ongoing debate that began earlier, in sites such as the issue of *Planning Theory* edited by Mickey Lauria (1995) and elsewhere in the literature (e.g., Allmendinger 1996; Fainstein 1999; Flyvbjerg 1998; Lauria 1997; Richardson 1996; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 1998; Yiftachel 1998, 1999).

In continuing this debate, we concentrate on a number of commonalities in what is admittedly a large and diverse literature taking the “communicative turn.”² Those commonalities cluster around the idea of the planner, and the practice of planning, as facilitating communicative interchanges between interested parties, whether stakeholders or the community at large, over matters of common concern, and are not necessarily confined to issues of the development and land use. In some versions, such communicative action is seen as fostering community empowerment and recognition of difference, diversity, and disadvantage that has implications for the development of discursive local democracy beyond the confines of specific issues.

The importance of communicative or collaborative planning, then, is seen to rest in its ability to contribute to better debate, discussion, and deliberation about shared futures. It follows from this premise that planners should analyze and understand how communication takes place and what they themselves are doing when they engage in negotiations in their offices or in public mediations. The common thread in the communicative field is the interest in, and primacy given to, understanding the communicative actions of planners, and of individual, group, and community interactions.

However, while acknowledging the importance of communication and of community action in shaping the built environment and creating places, we feel that there is a tendency in some of the communicative literature to privilege communication at the expense of its wider social and economic contexts. The powers—posi-

ABSTRACT

During the last decade or so, many planning theorists have taken a so-called communicative turn, to the point where some have declared the emergence of a dominant new paradigm supported by increasing consensus among theorists. We wish to raise a number of broad questions about the communicative paradigm and claims for its theoretical dominance. We point to alternative analytical positions that focus on issues of power, of the state, and of political economy, in ways that are often underplayed in the communicative literature and that demonstrate a healthy diversity in the field. We offer six critical propositions about communicative planning theory as a contribution to the ongoing debates, in theory and practice, about the contested nature of planning, its practices and effects.

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tive as well as negative—of private developers and/or the state are intertwined in the communicative encounters involving planners. But at the same time, we see community action, the actions of state-related institutions, and the activities of private developers as analytically distinct from each other. We therefore identify planning with the state's attempts to influence and regulate spatial processes. It is not that community groups do not engage in shaping their environments, or that private companies do not plan; rather, even in times of neoliberal reorienting of the role of government, most planning practice in the West, as well as other parts of the world, ultimately draws on regulations and resources of the state. Thus, in the discussion of planning theory that follows, we use *planning* in the sense of spatial public policies and practices. In other words, planning practice includes all public policies, as well as specific zoning and development controls, that shape urban and regional land use under the auspices of the modern state.

The central subject of this essay—theory—can be defined in many ways. We lean toward the meaning identified by Raymond Williams (1983, 316-318) of theory as “an explanatory scheme” (316), or in the words of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “suppositions explaining a phenomenon; a sphere of speculations and concepts as distinguished from that of practice.” Our emphasis on theory is thus explanatory, analytical, and conceptual. This is not to negate the importance of other types of theory, especially descriptive and normative (see Yiftachel 1989), and we also accept that explanation or analysis cannot be neatly separated from normative and ethical assumptions. But we stress the explanatory, conceptual, analytical, deconstructive, and critical aspects as the main pillars of the theorizing endeavor, without which the descriptive and normative aspects of theory often appear inadequate to the demands of practice.

In what follows, we first flesh out in more detail the main arguments presented by the proponents of communicative planning theories, and proceed to offer several propositions that we hope will contribute to debates about the possibilities of planning theory, theoretical pluralism in general, and the relation between theory and practice.

■ COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND THE DEATH OF THEORY

Since the early 1990s, some writers have suggested that an approach—often termed *communicative planning*—began to constitute a central theoretical position, to the point of becoming a “dominant paradigm” (Healey 1997; Innes 1995; Mandelbaum 1996). Such claims echo those of Andreas Faludi and like-minded rational comprehensive/incrementalist theorists nearly three decades ago, who argued that rational decision-making enveloped all other theories of/in planning (see Faludi 1973, 8; Alexander 1984). But such claims ignored the growing debates in the social sciences in

general, and in planning in particular, about the nature of rationality itself, about the nature of capitalist society, and the purpose and function of planning. As we argue below, contemporary debates in social science, the philosophy of science, cultural studies, and in planning itself similarly dilute claims to the theoretical dominance of any particular perspective.

In this sense, the communicative planning field as we see it also shares with the rationality-in-planning school a tendency to see planning as a mainly procedural field of activity, one degree away from the political and economic realities of power and inequality in urban and regional development (see Taylor 1998). There is the same sense of searching for the right decision-rules—be they rational-comprehensive or rational-communicative, universal or local. The assumption is that using the right decision-making process will enable planning (however defined) to further its progressive, even emancipatory, potential.

The roots of this latest turn of events seem to lie in the brief period when political economists influenced planning debates, mainly during the late 1970s and early 1980s. While they genuinely stirred up the field and seriously questioned the dominance of the rationalists, political-economic theories were quickly branded as Marxist by many rational-comprehensive theorists, who were keen to defend the core of their professional canon against the Marxist critique. Many planning scholars labeled such Marxist theories as “hopelessly unrealistic,” and divorced from everyday practice (see, e.g., Innes 1995). But such responses ignore both the many forms of praxis informed by Marxist and related analyses, as well as the rich variety of non-Marxist political-economic approaches, such as the influential left-Weberian strands of the debate (for overviews, see Hall 1988; and Taylor 1998).

Perhaps because of this unease with critical approaches to understanding cities and urbanization, the spatial dimensions of difference and disadvantage, as well as power and regulation, much work relevant to planning has developed in the field of human geography (see Smith 1994). But these theories are separate from the mainstream of planning, and they have much more immediate appeal to the vocational concerns of the field than attempts to understand planning as a social/economic phenomenon inextricably enmeshed in nets of material/discursive power (see, e.g., McLoughlin 1994). These theories are also removed from planning theorists, of whatever school, who pose relevance, applicability, and the inductive derivation of theory from practice as key theoretical problems.

John Forester's (1989) *Planning in the Face of Power* was an early and significant marker of the “communicative turn,” applying Habermasian and ethnographic frameworks to the study of practice in a planning agency. Forester's (1993) subsequent volume, *Critical Theory, Public Policy and Planning Practice: Toward a Critical Pragmatism*, further developed and conceptualized this approach. While privi-

leging the communicative realm, these studies acknowledge the constraints of social structures and the power of interest groupings in shaping the information infrastructure within which planning outcomes are often determined.

Much of the subsequent work drawing on Habermasian and pragmatist perspectives, however, including Forester's (1999) recent book, *The Deliberative Practitioner*, has concentrated on communicative action theory, with its vision of discursive communities shaping their futures through democratic communicative practice (e.g., Healey 1997). This vision has spurred the imagination of planning theorists who hope that by focusing on the daily experiences of planning practitioners and their deployment of useful knowledge, it will be possible to construct applicable and normative theoretical frameworks.

The advent of interest in pragmatist philosophy, in the works of Habermas, and in communicative rationality and discursive democracy comes at a time when the modernist project and its leading epistemologies are being seriously challenged, particularly by feminist and postmodernist scholars. Here, Iris Marion Young's (1990) *Justice and the Politics of Difference* has quickly become immensely influential. Indeed, she has contributed a flatteringly optimistic view of the potential of progressive planning practice to the issue of *Planning Theory* devoted to feminist planning theory (Young 1992).³

Nevertheless, the growth of academic studies drawing on Habermasian and institutional-ethnographic concepts and pragmatic philosophy have prompted Judith Innes's (1995) description of the emergence of a "new paradigm," whose scholars:

... differ from their predecessors, who did primarily armchair theorizing The new theorists pursue the questions and puzzles that arise from practice ... and do grounded theorizing based on richly interpretive study of practice ... they apply intellectual lenses new to planning Their work gained the attention of both academics and practicing planners because it is accessible and interesting (183).

This description is echoed in other overviews and recent histories of planning ideas, most notably by Hoch (1997) and Healey (1996, 1997). Mandelbaum (1996) claims that a moment of broad agreement can be discerned among planning theoreticians "who are remarkably consensual" (xiv) on most issues concerning the construction of new knowledge. This consensus consists, *inter alia*, of a disillusion with grand theories—or in his (Mandelbaum 1996) own words:

The severe forms of both positivist and normative theory that used to command the intellectual heights and draw us to them now appear as a

mirage that retreats or disappears as we approach it Our rhetorical variety is appropriate to *praxis* and to *techne*—the only forms of knowledge within our grasp. Aristotle's *theoria* is an empty category (xiv).

This assertion needs further examination (see Proposition 3 below). Suffice it to say here that we feel that such claims to a dominant paradigm in planning theory are problematic, and that appeals to a mix of practice, pragmatism, and communicative theory are, on their own, inadequate as frameworks for explaining or contributing to improving planning practice. The problems relate to issues that might at first seem definitional (what is meant by planning? what meaning of theory is being employed?), but that are fundamental to our understanding of society, space, and the role of the state. In the next section we explore several propositions relating to the communicative turn in planning theory.

■ UNSTAKING THE CLAIMS

In common with other writers (e.g., Allmendinger 1996; Beauregard 1995; Fainstein 1999; Lauria 1995; Richardson 1996; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 1998; and the contributors to this issue), we wish to question the claims to paradigmatic status of the "communicative turn." In this endeavor we need first to revisit the meaning of a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense (Kuhn 1970): that is, a set of assumptions that frame what sort of questions can be asked and therefore determine what methods can be used to answer them, up to the point where new questions cannot be answered by the existing frameworks.

Our starting position is that if a planning paradigm does exist, it is probably in the taken-for-granted status of various kinds of technical rationality that still inform most daily practice—be they knowledge of modeling systems, economic theories, design procedures, decision-making processes, organization of consultation, or the politics of stakeholders. We would argue that communicative planning theory influences these practices along with a myriad of other sources of institutional behaviors, but cannot be seen to have attained the status of a paradigm in either academia nor the planning office.

In the interest of engaging in this debate, we have identified a number of propositions that we feel contest some of the claims made by various proponents of communicative and pragmatic planning theory. The propositions below are necessarily generalized, and we realize that any given writer will not exactly match all of them. But we hope we have captured some of the common features of the current debate by formulating these propositions as open-ended statements that can be problematized, investigated, and debated, and by briefly noting some of the ways in which this might be done.

- **Proposition 1:** Claims to dominance and/or consensus among planning theorists appear to be overstated.

A brief look at planning, urban, and geographic journals over the last decade reveal a multitude of theoretical approaches. In fact, the field seems to display a remarkably healthy state of (postmodern?) heterogeneity. Nevertheless, there is evidence of some coalescence of theoretical directions (in addition to communicative, collaborative, or multicultural planning) inspired by regulation theory (mainly in the U.K. and Europe, e.g., Painter and Goodwin 1995; and examples in Judge, Stoker, and Wolman 1995) and regime theory (mainly in the U.S. and Canada, e.g., Lauria and Whelan 1995; Lauria 1997; Leo 1997; but see also Newman and Thornley 1996), public choice theory and libertarian approaches (Pennington 2000; Poulton 1991a, 1991b; Sorensen and Day 1981), as well as economic rationalist thinking on matters like the management of environmental externalities. Not all of these theoretical sources are found in the pages of narrowly defined planning theory journals since, as often as not, knowledge for the practices of spatial planning come from outside planning.

In addition, it can be noted that far from rejecting positivist and normative theories “which now appear as mirages,” as suggested by Mandelbaum (1996, xiv), communicative theory and ethnographic methodology are inevitably tied to Enlightenment origins, especially those versions that reflect positivist and normative aspects of Habermas’s thought, in their emphasis on the speaking subject, intentionality, rationality, and belief in progress. Like Marxism, the shift to ideas of communicative rationality takes place *within* modernist and/or humanist modes of thought and does not (cannot?) transcend them.

At the same time, as noted previously, planning practice in its various Anglo-American derivatives in various places can hardly be said to be emancipated from the bounds of technical expertise, demands for economic efficiency, or privileging of the interests of the powerful. Individual planners may indeed struggle to institute communicative dialogue and discursive democracy in their patch, but these approaches do not (yet?) characterize the mainstream of planning practice.

- **Proposition 2:** Communicative planning theory does not dislodge planning’s claims to universal legitimacy.

Planning theory has nearly always been written as universal—that is, elevated to a status of universal truth, putatively able to predict the behavior of all rational human actors. Planning fits well within a universalist world view, from which are derived theories of urbanization, urban ecology, Garden Cities, Green Belts, location theory, bid-rent curves, trip-generation models, megalopolises, capitalist cities, rationality, sustainability, spatial justice, and even multicultural spaces, all generalizing a Western context and tradition, to

create universal laws and prescriptions and abstracted planning procedures.

The communicative turn appears to come from a different direction and has much in common with the postmodern language of difference, identity, particularity, and locale (Healey 1996, 1997; Hillier 1999). However, planning is still portrayed as an unproblematic global activity, adhering to similar logic of communicative rationality wherever it is found.

A glance at the reference lists of most leading planning theory texts would reveal an enormous U.S./American bias and a near-total hegemony of Anglo-American scholarship. For example, in Campbell and Fainstein’s (1996) recent collection *Readings in Planning Theory*, all 31 authors write from an Anglo-American context, while in the Mandelbaum, Mazza, and Burchell (1996) collection, which was based on a conference with an explicit European participation, 24 of the 27 authors work in Anglo-American universities.

By way of another illustration of this general tendency, descriptions of “a new type of planning theorist ... beginning to dominate the field” or statements that “there are probably 1,500 people today who hold a planning Ph.D.” (Innes 1995, 183), without further specification, in a journal with a broad international circulation, have the effect (albeit unintentional) of marginalizing readers and planners from outside the U.S. But to outsiders, it appears that a specifically *American* planning theorist is emerging (and one from the United States of America, as distinct from South America or Canada).

So, despite genuine attempts to foster cultural sensitivity, openness, and awareness, the new planning and planners seem to share culturally, historically, and geographically grounded sets of assumptions and perspectives with those of the old rationalist approaches.

Part of this problem derives from the original Habermasian project, and Habermas has been taken to task by feminists and writers on difference, for the genderless and colorblind notion of “the public” and the abstraction of the processes he propounds (e.g., Fraser 1989, 1990). In addition, as David Harvey (1996) points out: “Habermas has, in short, no conception of how spatio-temporalities and ‘places’ are produced and how that process is integral to the process of communicative action and of valuation” (354). So it is ironic that his work has been taken up in the field of planning, a set of practices that above all else should be concerned with the production of space and place.

However, we claim that the continuing use of universal language is not only a matter of benign neglect. The importation of putatively universalized Western or Anglo-American planning theories and practices, including processes of participation and community empowerment, into other cultures and regions of the world continues a pattern of academic and professional dominance that perpetuates the unequal power relations (Escobar 1992).⁴ The importation of Western, mainly Anglo-American, theories and practices has had major adverse consequences in other settings. Planning has been widely used

to enhance the position of national and ethnic elites, using the convincing high status of theory, often at the expense of peripheral minorities (Yiftachel 1995, 1998).

In the name of cultural sensitivity, communicative planning needs to stress that the potential relevance, applicability, and communicative possibilities of collaborative approaches may only pertain to specific parts of the world where particular academic, professional and urban, institutional and local circumstances prevail.

- **Proposition 3:** Leading communicative planning scholars conflate theorization with normative prescription.

Much theorization in the planning literature is normative and prescriptive and seeks to provide various pathways to better planning, be they rational comprehensive, systems, advocacy and participation, or collaborative approaches. While there is a place for such a normative enterprise, it covers only one part of the theorization endeavor—"the largely programmatic idea of how things should be" (Williams 1983, 317)—and leaves to one side explanations of why things are as they are. While some theorists invoke notions of praxis drawn from critical theory, praxis involves critical explanation that informs theory and action—a critical stance that is difficult to maintain in a frame of reference that takes planning as its starting point (see McLoughlin 1994).

The reason why many planning practitioners have traditionally seemed indifferent or even hostile to theory (and especially Marxist theory), however, may stem from another meaning noted by Williams (1983): "theory [in this sense] is used derogatorily just because it explains and (implicitly or explicitly) challenges some customary action" (317).

But the critical theory that underlies Habermas's work emphasizes three interrelated aspects of critical, analytic, and normative theorizing, which make up the notion of praxis—the inseparability of practice and theory (see Kemp 1982). Without the necessary work of critique (identifying problems and the implications of prevailing norms and conditions) and analysis (explaining how the problems were created), the normative dimensions of theory on which prescriptions might be based (indicating what to do to bring about change) are in danger of becoming ineffective responses to immediate crises. This is highlighted by the following illustration (Sandercock 1998b, quoting black activist Michael Zinzun):

Theory is necessary to figure out what's *really* going on. People always want to be saviors for their community. It's like they see a baby coming down the river and want to jump in and save it. We need to stop being so reactive to the situation that confronts us. Saving babies is *fine* for them, but *we* want to know who's throwing the goddamn babies in the water in the first place (85).⁵

- **Proposition 4:** Studies of planning procedures and microprocesses confuse theory with method and means with ends.

Communicative theory as translated by planning theorists drawing on ethnographic and interpretive methods tends to engage in microstudies of practice (see Forester 1999; Healey 1992, 1997; Innes 1998), which often—though not necessarily—gloss over contextual understandings of power and material interests, of discourse and the constraints of the taken-for-grantedness of the world. Just as it is not possible to arrive at theories of social justice and how to create it in practice simply by studying lawyers' everyday interactions with their clients, nor theories of public health and how to improve it only by observing doctors in their surgeries, it is not possible to arrive at theories of spatial processes and how to change the spatial or social effects of those processes by concentrating exclusively on the study of a planner's day (Huxley 1997, 746).

This is not to say that stressing different styles of practice and enabling diverse groups to act on their own initiatives is not an important aspect of any public or semipublic employee's work. It is just to note that without a thorough knowledge of the context of that work—the constraints and opportunities that derive from wider structuring and discourses of power and the specific and local conditions and effects—thick description and attention to everyday details can become ends in themselves, reflecting back to practitioners unchallenged, even enhanced, images of their own understandings. What is missing is analysis directed at understanding opportunities for change that link specific sites and practices to wider relations of power. And, we argue, to be effective, these analyses need to be linked to the objects of planning—that is, spatial processes, land development, the built environment.

Research needs to demonstrate the specific effects of planning practices rather than starting from theoretical normative assumptions about the ends of those practices. Thinking differently about strategies for resistance and change may not involve knowledge of what planners do at all. The theoretical and practical possibility has to be entertained that planners may be irrelevant to social or urban change, or that their practices may be part of a nexus of power that produces effects quite other than those commonly supposed for the purpose of planning (Yiftachel 1998; see also Cohen 1985 on criminology).

- **Proposition 5:** The theorization of planning requires stepping outside the planning discourse.

The tendency has always been strong to believe that whatever received a name must be an entity or being having an independent existence of its own. And if no real entity answering to the name

could be found, men [sic] did not for that reason suppose that none existed, but imagined that it was something peculiarly abstruse and mysterious (John Stuart Mill).

Is it possible to have something called “planning theory” at all? In empiricist terms, like J.S. Mill we might ask, What are the empirical events, measurable outcomes, or observable actions that need to be understood? Do they constitute a coherent real entity that can be named *planning*? In realist terms, we could use the same questions to suggest that planning is a chaotic concept. Either way, the notion of planning theory is problematic.

Perhaps planning theory is better seen as the translation of general social, political, economic, and increasingly design and ecological theories into the planning office. General social theories of power, agency, structure, and their translation into organizational, decision-making, workplace prescriptions in planning are no different from those drawn on by, say, social work, criminology, community development, public policy, or management professions. Urban planning stands in the same relation to general theory in the social sciences as do other professions, and the same debates about praxis, ethics, and the relation of the profession to the state and society take place.

In other words, theorizing planning practice means applying meta-level theories from outside planning. There is nothing intrinsic to planning practice (however defined) that requires a separate set of theories or bodies of knowledge. Castells' (1998) paper on planning education illustrates this: he argues that planning is a *profession* that applies knowledge from a number of academic disciplines and therefore does not need, and cannot have, specific theoretical foundations of the kinds the planning theory literature has been attempting to construct for the last forty years.

Nevertheless, while Castells indicates a need for vocational education for planning professionals, it can be argued that there exists a need for knowledge that transcends professional training requirements. As noted above, theorists could provide knowledge to enlighten planners and policy makers about the *multiple effects* of planning practices on spaces, places and social relations. The critical theorization of planning—that is, the understanding of its contexts and consequences—cannot be achieved without stepping outside the internal worlds of the profession and accepted practice.

In this respect, the communicative school asks questions generally about *how* (is current practice conducted) and not about *what* (its effects are) or *why* (it is like it is). We claim that this approach is likely to isolate planners from knowledge bases from which they should draw inspiration, and to which they can contribute. If theoretical engagement with planning is limited to describing micro-interactions and posing ethnomethodological questions, whatever social potential planning practices may have is being neglected or even eroded.

Once again, it must be stressed that we are not saying that attempts to increase participation are doomed or counter-productive, but we do point to the need to be reflexively and critically aware of the power contexts and effects of discourses. Practice—and education for practice—should draw on cultural, social, and political theory and on philosophy and spatial political economy directly, without diversion into a cul-de-sac of planning theory.

- **Proposition 6:** The theorization of planning cannot ignore the state and the public production of space.

Here we come to the crucial problem of defining the meaning of planning and our understandings of what it might be as a practice. Much of the influential literature on planning, including Wildavsky (1973), Faludi (1973), Friedmann (1987), and, at times, Forester (1989; Fischer and Forester 1987), implicitly equates planning with public policy in general, and conducts the debate in terms of generalized notions of democracy, decision-making, citizen empowerment, and the limits to state intervention. Writers in the British tradition, such as Cooke (1983), McLoughlin (1992), Reade (1987), and Taylor (1998), have been much more concerned with confining the term to town-and-country or urban-and-regional planning, thereby emphasizing the spatial and explicit policy aims of this specific form of planning.

Much of the debate in the 1970s and 1980s around whether planning could be theorized as a generalized decision-making process separated from the activities, organizations, or substantive objects being planned only rarely made such differences in terminology explicit (see, e.g., Reade's 1983 reply to Wildavsky 1973). The more general debate about planning as policy gave rise to discussions about whether planning necessarily implied the achievement of stated aims, or whether drawing up the plans, writing the policies, and having good intentions were enough. The abstracted notion of planning as a generic activity with the purpose of enhancing human growth (Faludi 1973) still hovers over much of the writing of the communicative school.

We wish to draw on understandings of planning as a specifically spatial practice that is related to the state and the production of space, while at the same time we acknowledge that these relationships will be variable according to national and local histories and cultures (see McLoughlin 1992). Urban/regional/environmental planning are practices that are carried out by, or in relation to, the state and have as their ostensible object the spatiality of social processes. In this, they are different from practices directed at other objects (social work, economics, criminology, etc.)—although from a Foucauldian perspective, these are all related as practices of governmentality (Foucault 1991).

For the purposes of this paper, however, the connection of planning to spatial policies of the state is what gives the practice of planning its specificity, whether we talk about governance (Healey 1997), governmentality (Foucault

1991), or insurgent planning (Sandercock 1998a). The practices of urban/spatial/environmental/community planning are connected in diverse and changing ways to the state, its powers and resources deployed in projects of spatial management. Theories ignoring this context risk losing their explanatory potential for prescriptive relevance.

This line is supported by a recent substantive turn in the writings of two leading theorists who were previously among the main proponents of generic (as opposed to urban/spatial) planning: Andreas Faludi and John Friedmann. The first, in his suggestive theory of planning doctrines, portrays spatial organization as one of the key conceptual and material bases for planning (see Faludi 1996). Friedmann (1998) similarly acknowledges the lack of due consideration given to urban spatial processes in the field in general, and his own past work in particular. He further highlights the importance of firmly including “the production of the urban habitat” (249) within the framework of a rejuvenated planning theory.

■ THEORY IS DEAD: LONG LIVE THEORETICAL DEBATE

Were a theory open to no objection it would cease to be theory and would become a law (quoted in Williams 1983, 317).

In summary then, our propositions take issue with those writers who claim that there is an emerging dominant paradigm. Instead, we suggest that there is a multiplicity of ways of thinking about planning. We also question the assumption that current modes of planning theorizing are replacing previous forms of theory, particularly if by this is meant theories derived from historical materialist, political economy traditions; or that approaches derived from critical cultural studies or Foucauldian inspirations are not equally important in current debates.

Further, we suggest that rather than searching for *a* or *the* planning theory based in some notion of the primacy of practice, a more productive task for theoreticians and practitioners alike is to seek to critically examine planning itself. That is, on the one hand to ask questions about the histories of the practices and the power/knowledge discourses that are gathered under the heading of *planning*; and on the other hand, to understand the role of planning as a state-related strategy in the creation and regulation of space, populations, and development.

As noted, there are a number of emerging strands of work that are taking up these tasks. These theoretical developments are by no means confined to the conventionally defined field of planning theory but are vitally important for any meaningful debates about the links between spatial theory, and planning and policy practice.

Examples of such work include: the late Brian McLoughlin’s (1992) book on the political economic context and influence on the planning of Melbourne and his (1994) paper on the importance of spatial political

economy, the problem of professionalization, and the narrowness of much current planning education and research; and Howell Baum’s (1996) critical examination of theorists, politics, and institutions. One of the most widely published and respected critics of conventional planning theory over the last decade has been Robert Beauregard (1989, 1995), whose thought-provoking commentaries appear regularly in planning and geography journals.

Work in broad political-economy frameworks continues to provide fundamental insights into planning in capitalist societies (e.g., Marcuse 1995; Fainstein 1995, 1999). As noted earlier, regime and regulation theories (see Judge, Stoker, and Wolman 1995; Lauria 1995, 1997) are proving fertile ground for the further theorization of planning (see also e.g., Feldman 1995; Lauria and Whelan 1995; Leo 1995, 1997).

Postmodern or cultural-materialist approaches include Leonie Sandercock’s (1998a) critique of “time-warped planning historiographies” (12) and *Towards Cosmopolis* (1998b) on the possibility of communities planning multicultural futures beyond the state; and Sophie Watson and Kathie Gibson’s edited collections, *Metropolis Now* (Gibson and Watson 1994) and *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (Watson and Gibson 1995). Jane Jacob’s (1996) *Edge of Empire* provides a thought-provoking cultural analysis of the implications of postcolonial struggles over space and place. Ed Soja (1989) has touched on postmodern planning in his *Postmodern Geographies* and more recently has called for diversity and acknowledgment of difference in his chapter on “planning in/for postmodernity” (1997); while Michael Dear has been prominent in attempts to tease out the implications of postmodern thinking for planning theory and practice (e.g., see Dear 2000).

A provocative take on planning’s role in the gendered production and control of urban space comes from Wilson (1991) in her *The Sphinx in the City*. Sandercock has also been influential in bringing the growing field of feminist critique of planning theory and practice to the attention of mainstream planning debates (Sandercock and Forsyth 1992; see also, e.g., *Planning Theory* 7/8 (1992), edited by Beauregard; Little 1994; Hillier 1996; Huxley 1988).

Interest in feminist and postmodern analyses of planning and the city joins with studies of the relationships between identity, diversity, difference, and inequality in the city (e.g., Fincher and Jacobs 1998). In a related vein, Dear and Wolch’s (1987) *Landscapes of Despair* pioneered the spatial analysis of the results of policies toward the deinstitutionalization of groups of disabled populations (see also Gleeson 1999; Imrie 1995).

We have already mentioned recent critiques of the communicative turn (e.g., Allmendinger 1996). These are joined by work drawing on Foucauldian frames in understanding the history of planning as a discourse and as a strategy of government, work that seems to us to be worthy

of close attention for its understanding of the power/knowledge nexus of planning.

In addition to the writers already referred to, the proliferation of such work is barely indicated by the following more or less random examples:

- Mark Long's (1981, 1982) studies of the history of planning and urban reform as social regulation, and of the genealogy of planning history that applies Foucauldian analysis to the taken-for-granted stories of unproblematic progress;
- Lewi and Wickham (1996) similarly trace the histories of urban reforms as social control and management of urban populations;
- Christine Boyer's *Dreaming the Rational City* (1983), while largely materialist in approach, is an attempt to unpack "the myth of American city planning," using some Foucauldian insights;
- Paul Rabinow's (1989) study of French colonial planned cities demonstrates the moral and governmental programs embodied in built form;
- Judith Allen's (1996) work on public consultation procedures as forms of dominant agenda-shaping is a salutary lesson about the limits to participation;
- Bent Flyvbjerg's (1996, 1998) exposition of the *realrationalitat* by which real-world planning draws on Nietzschean critiques of Enlightenment rationality;
- Huxley's (1989, 1994, 1996) studies of the utilitarian genealogy of the discourse of planning uncover the social regulatory effects of zoning;
- Fischler's (1995) examination of the dominant discourses and representations contained in planning documents and maps shows how alternative discourses are suppressed;
- Similarly, Ola Sodaström (1996) shows how maps, bird's-eye-view projections, and social surveys are all technologies of power and regulation employed by planning;
- Richardson (1996) analyzes the nexus of power and knowledge present in regional policies;
- Yiftachel's (1992, 1998) work implicates planning in projects of ethnic territorial and cultural domination in multiethnic societies.

This brief list is, of course, inadequate, partial, and touches on only a few of the relevant fields and scholars: In particular, it leaves out the growing critiques and retheorizations of planning found in development and postcolonial studies. But it gives some indication of the rich and diverse theoretical work taking place. The flow of ideas and scope of research is vigorous and healthy. In this context, the strength of the "communicative turn" lies not so much in its interpretative or normative frameworks, but in its important contributions to ongoing debates, in theory and in practice, about the contested nature of planning, its practices, and its effects.

Authors' Note: Many thanks to the contributors to, and participants in, the session of the Third Planning Theory Conference at Oxford Brookes University in April, 1998, for stimulating debate and helpful comments, at the time and subsequently. Special thanks to Judith Allen for skillful chairing of the session and continuing discussions with Margo. The critical but pertinent comments of the anonymous reviewers have also been immensely useful in rewriting this paper. The persisting faults in final product are, of course, our own responsibility.

■ NOTES

1. Richard Rorty coined the term some two decades ago to describe changes in the field of philosophy.
2. The writers we identify with broadly defined communicative-collaborative or pragmatic approaches include, but are not confined to: Richard Bolan, John Bryson, Barbara Crosby, Frank Fischer, John Forester, Tom Harper, Patsy Healey, Jean Hillier, Charles Hoch, Judith Innes, Helen Liggett, Seymour Mandelbaum, Tore Sager, Stanley Stein, Jim Throgmorton.
3. Interestingly, Nancy Fraser's (e.g., 1990, 1995) equally relevant debates with Habermas around gender, the welfare state, the public sphere, and redistribution do not seem to have had as much impact on the planning literature—see Huxley in this issue of *JPER*.
4. But see Friedmann (1992) for a different view; Healey (1997) explicitly limits her prescriptions to the sociocultural and economic conditions of 1990s England.
5. Stanley Cohen (1985, 236-239) attributes a version of this parable to Saul Alinsky. In this version, a fisherman is rescuing drowning people from a river. Finally, he leaves the next body to float by while he sets off upstream "to find out who the hell is pushing these poor folks into the water." According to Cohen, Alinsky used this story to make a further ethical point: "While the fisherman was so busy running along the bank to find the ultimate source of the problem, who was going to help those poor wretches who continued to float down the river?" (237). This dilemma nicely illustrates the interconnections between proximate solutions and generalized explanations. Cohen suggests that the people saving those in danger of drowning should not be the same people who set off to find out the causes—but there does need to be some interchange of ideas somewhere along the way.

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