A Portrait of Postmodern Planning:

**Anti-Hero and/or Passionate Pilgrim?**

Dr. Leonie Sandercock

A FEW YEARS AGO I FLEW OVER THE CITY in a helicopter with fellow city planners. Why couldn’t all this be different, we asked: why should this house, this street, stay where it is? An unjustifiable, irrational city – untidy, crowded, anarchic. Let’s put air ducts into its gasping lungs; let’s relieve its clogged arteries and cut through its concentric circles. Traffic is choking its inner core: it is cowardly and sentimental to want to spare its undulating and redundant mysteries. This is the eleventh hour, time for major surgery. We managed to rearrange the city down to the last grain of sand. Upheavals of imagination erupted under our fingers. Then we came...
In the old model, planning was a project of state-directed futures, part of a two-hundred-year modernization project that began with the industrial revolution. There is now a thriving, community-based planning practice in which planners link their skills to the campaigns of mobilized communities, working as enablers and facilitators. Rather than speaking for communities, as in the older advocacy model, this new style of planning is geared to community empowerment. Planners bring to the table skills in research and critical thinking, knowledge of legislation and the workings of state agencies, specific skills in fields like housing and local economic development, organizing and financial skills, and a commitment to social and environmental justice. This is not, however, meant to be an argument for the rejection of state-directed planning. There are transformative and oppressive possibilities in state planning, just as there are in community-based planning. And victories at the community level almost always need to be consolidated in some way through the state, through legislation and/or through the allocation of resources.

In the old model, as it existed until at least the late 1960's, planning was held to operate in "the public interest", and it was assumed that planners' education enabled them to identify that public interest. In the wake of Marxist, feminist, and poststructuralist dismantlings of this concept, it seems more useful to talk about planning for multiple publics, or for a heterogeneous public. Planning has never been value-neutral. It ought now to be explicitly value-sensitive, acknowledging that the dominant notion has typically been an ideal of homogeneous and exclusionary groups, and replacing this notion with a concept that is more inclusory and democratic. In this new arena of planning for multiple publics in multicultural societies, new kinds of multi- or cross-cultural literacies are essential.

These are the bare bones of a shifting paradigm. The old planning served modernist cities in a project that was, in part, dedicated to the eradication of difference: to the erasure of history, context, culture. Its dominant images are of identical Levittowns sprawling across the landscape, and of identical (colour-coded) high-rise towers planted in windswept wastelands, each of them "machines for living" in the modern age. The new planning, defined schematically above, emphasizes communicative rather than instrument rationality; is less document-oriented and more people-centred; practices many ways of knowing rather than relying exclusively on technical knowledge; works through community-based organizations as well as through state agencies; questions the notion of "the public interest" and affirms the existence of multiple publics. A "politics of cultural recognition" (Fuliy 1995) is fundamental to the new planning. But what are its embodied inspirations?

**Inspirations for twenty-first century planning**

The inspiration for and legitimation of this postmodern planning project comes from the wide variety of social movements that have emerged across the planet in recent decades, each demanding that its voice be heard in decisions affecting neighborhoods, cities and regions. I am thinking of three broad socio-cultural forces which have been and will continue to reshape our cities: migration and an accompanying new politics of multicultural citizenship; postcolonialism and a corresponding politics of reclaiming urban and regional space by indigenous and formerly colonized peoples; and the rise of civil society in the form of multiple urban and environmental movements, all seeking to expand our vocabulary of justice (from economic to social, cultural and environmental) and to expand our democratic space. These struggles, in their failures as well as their successes, are managing to transform values and institutions, and the stories of these struggles constitute an emerging planning paradigm which requires a very different style of planning, a familiarity with the lifeways of different communities, and new kinds of cultural, political, economic and environmental literacies.

**Some necessary qualities of a twenty-first century planner: technical and other literacies**

When students sign up for a planning course they usually assume that they are going to be acquiring "the skills of the profession". And indeed we teach them many skills that could be described as technical, among them basic statistics and computing, economic and demographic data-collection and analysis, the use of GIS and other computer packages, report-writing and basic graphics, and of course the ability to read plans and a sound knowledge of planning legislation. Not all planners need all of these skills. Some of them can be picked up or refined in the workplace. Some technical skills become quickly outdated as technologies advance. It is important to be cautious in how we teach these techniques. Technical skills come with embedded assumptions, are used in highly ideological ways, and always depend on certain values that inform their use. How does a transportation planner decide what data to feed into her model? Why is the model privileged over other forms of analysis? The politics of statistics - beautifully articulated in Alonso and Starr's The Politics of Numbers (1987) - needs to be taught within a statistics course. Being technically literate, then, ought to imply a whole lot more than familiarity with a range of technical skills and subjects.

It goes without saying that the kinds of technical skill listed above are an essential part of any planner's basic tool-kit, and need continual refreshing and upgrading. What is problematic is an educational and political climate in which both practicing and trainee planners/students think that this is all there is to planning. What further qualities are required of a planning profession that is committed to a larger project of positive social change? For that we need a whole other set of knowledges, or literacies, about context, about history and culture, about human and organizational behaviour, about politics and power. We need not only analytical and critical thinking, but substantial process-oriented knowledge concerning such challenging issues as local economic development, cultural diversity, environmental degradation, and the relationship between design and behaviour. Let me expand on this, then, by talking about the multicultural, ecological, and design literacies that ought to be part of planning curricula as well as subjects for a continuing professional education program.

**Multicultural Literacy**

When people with different histories and cultures arrive in other cities, their presence inevitably disrupts the normative categories of social life and urban space. The same is true when existing residents, hitherto invisible, begin to assert their difference. The politics of belonging to society, are not only reshaping cities today, but are of necessity reshaping the way we think about planning.

As new and more complex kinds of ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity come to dominate the city, these multiple experiences increasingly demand a new basis for understanding and defining planning. There is a new cultural politics of difference in the air, and planning needs to come to terms with it. Historically, universalist ideals of community and citizenship have operated to construct a homogeneous society. Planners have encouraged the ideal of towns and neighborhoods in which people all know one another and have the same values and life-styles. The current popularity of both the "new urbanism" and of gated communities is the latest manifestation of this denial of diversity and fear of difference.
Given that we are living in what Canadian philosopher James Tully has described as "an age of diversity" in which the desire for cultural recognition, for voice and space, has forcibly emerged (Tully 1999), it seems essential that planners find ways to respond. One way is to think about how the built environment affects, and is affected by, cultural diversity. Another is to think about whose culture is endorsed in planning legislation, and whether it is appropriate, in multicultural societies, that the norms of one particular culture should be dominant. Yet another response is to learn new languages, both literally and metaphorically: new ways of knowing, being and acting, ways that are more humble, more collaborative, more respectful of difference and cultural diversity.

Planning's core concepts of rationality, comprehensiveness, and the public interest need rethinking in the light of new concepts of participation and empowerment, alternative ways of knowing, and multiple publics.

This is what I mean by multicultural, or inter-cultural, literacy. It involves valuing alternative forms of knowledge and methods of knowing, including traditional ethnic or culturally specific modes: from talk to storytelling, as well as a wide range of non-verbal forms of expression, such as music and painting. It involves listening and interpreting, developing skills that are sensitive to everyday ways of knowing. It suggests a different practice in which communication skills, including openness, empathy, and skillful and attentive listening, are crucial; in which we are alert to and respect gender, and ethnic differences.

The retreat from wanted (Davis 1992). I offer insights and a fresh proposal. This has been the case in planning in Australia since the 1950's Discrimination by Design (1984), and The Young Australian of the Year in 1998. Most have been made that urban planning is on the powers of design to addressing and redressing the past) as it jostles with the city of memory (the city of 70's), and Gendered explicit assertion of planning's must listen to the educated to take their place in society, or in which they are excluded.

We must return to those age-old questions of values, of meaning, of the good city: but in order to attempt to answer those questions we must look for guidance from those hitherto excluded or marginalized: we must listen to all voices. We must respect the city of nature (the past) as it jostles with the city of desire (the present and future). We must rediscover the city of spirit, and invent new forms of enrichment of the built environment. The goal of planning education is not how to stuff the most facts, techniques and methods into students' minds, but how to raise these most basic questions of values:

How might we manage our co-existence in shared space? How might we live with each other, in active acceptance of all of our differences, in the multicultural cities and regions of the next century? And how might we live lightly and sustainably on the earth?

My hope is that upcoming generations will want to answer these questions, and to shine some light for them.
Summary
A Portrait of Postmodern Planning: Anti-Hero and/or Passionate Pilgrim?

Many commentators have argued that the modernist planning project has failed. This paper proposes a way forward for the profession, offering a portrait of the postmodern planner as a passionate pilgrim, a tireless seeker after social, environmental and cultural justice in the planning of human settlements. I outline five critical elements of the shift from a modernist to a postmodern paradigm: I ask what, or whom, might inspire our vision of planning for the twenty-first century; and I sketch some of the qualities, or literacies (technical, multicultural, ecological, and design-based), that the passionate pilgrim will need for the journey into the next century.

Résumé
Portrait d'un urbanisme postmoderne: Antihéros et/ou infatigable pèlerin?

De nombreux observateurs ont prétendu que la période moderne de l'urbanisme était un échec. Cet article propose une perspective d'avenir en traçant un portrait de l'urbanisme postmoderne. Il présente comme un pèlerin passionné poursuivant sa quête inlassable d'une justice sociale, environnementale et culturelle dans l'aménagement des milieux de vie. On y expose cinq éléments marquants du passage du modernisme au postmodernisme ; l'auteur cherche à savoir de quoi ou de qui devrait surgir notre vision de l'urbanisme du 21ème siècle et y ébauche quelques-unes des aptitudes ou des connaissances (technique, cultures, écologie et design) qui seront nécessaires à cet infatigable pilier pour poursuivre sa route dans le prochain siècle.

Leonie Sandercock writes, teaches, and occasionally consults in the field of urban studies, policy and planning, with a particular emphasis on socio-cultural issues. She graduated with a BA (Hons) from the University of Adelaide, a PhD in Urban Research from the Australian National University, and an MFA in Screenwriting from the University of California in Los Angeles. She was Foundation Professor of Urban Studies at Macquarie University from 1981 to 1986, before moving to the US for eleven years, where she divided her time between screenwriting in Hollywood and teaching urban planning at UCLA. In 1996 she returned to Australia, where she currently teaches in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne. She has written nine books (and ten screenplays). Including Cities for Sale (MUP, 1975), The Land Racket (Silverfish, 1979), Urban Political Economy: The Australian Case (Allen & Unwin, 1983, with Mike Bony), Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural History of Planning (University of California Press, 1998), and Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities (Wiley, 1998).

Rummaging in the Compost

Dr. Gary Davidson

An invitation to “philosophize” about the planning profession and its meanings is just too good to pass up, even when one is constrained to a thousand words. As the tooth grows longer, much of the writings on planning leave us, in Richard Sennett’s words, “to rest uneasily in that odyssey zone just left of centre, where high-flown words count for more than deeds.”

In my opinion, which is based on my reading of the appendix for planning educators in Towards Cosmopolis, Sandercock’s writing falls, plop, right in the centre. It’s of the “trash it, dump it, resurrect it” approach to planning. The inherent problem is that it is trapped in the paradigm it eschews. It is literally rummaging in the compost of planning at a considerable distance from current planning action. It is squarely “in the box”, and may even be a vague attempt at digging all the way down to an older notion of comprehensiveness, as it structures its own grand designs.

Let’s look deeper. The notion that “both practicing and trainee planners/students think that this [technical skill] is all there is to planning” is not dissimilar to the notions underlying earlier attacks on “comprehensive planning” by social activists, marginalized communities and environmentalists. It is not that the current analysis is not accurate. Earlier criticisms were equally valid, as the next ones will be. Sandercock’s notions about working with communities, dealing with change and deploying ethical values as critical elements in planning are, again, remarkably similar, as are the calls for integrating education and practice.

Nothing new here. Nor is there anything new in the solution. As with numerous past cries for change, the solution is always a new categorization, better education, or a “re-thinking in light of new concepts”. In short, we need a planning revolution, wholesale change or some other grand design that the author is promoting. Well, I’m on board. Who doesn’t need a wholesale shake-up? Besides, it diverts attention and can even be fun for planners, who then have no need to make real changes in communities.