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Planning as Persuasive Storytelling in the Context of “the Network Society”¹

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In my 1996 book, *Planning as Persuasive Storytelling*, I argued that planning can usefully be construed as persuasive and constitutive storytelling about the future. Three broad lines of critique have been directed against that claim. One argues that to think of planning as storytelling is to open the floodgates to fabrications; truth, not stories, is what matters. The second essentially argues that power has a rationality that rationality does not know; power, not stories, is what matters (Flyvbjerg, 1998). And the third suggests that there is more to storytelling than first meets the eye. Furthermore, my claim was not well connected to contemporary scholarship about economic restructuring and the emergence of a globalized “network society” and the postmodern, global, or transnational city.

This paper revises my earlier argument in light of these three broad lines of critique and the work of these urban theorists. It argues that planners’ stories about the future will necessarily have to begin from a normative position, but, to be persuasive to a wide range of readers, they will also have to make narrative and physical space for diverse locally-grounded common urban narratives (Finnegan, 1998), juxtapose those narratives against

¹ Presented at the ACSP-AESOP Third Joint Congress, Leuven, Belgium (July 8-12,

one another, and enable the actual geohistorical readers of transnational places to engage in fruitful dialogue with their fellow strangers (Eckstein, 2003). Powerful actors will strive to eliminate or marginalize competing stories, and hence will induce some planners to devise plans (stories about the future) that are designed to persuade only the audiences that most matter to them.

The Claim Restated

Let me briefly restate my original claim. If we understand planning to be an exercise in persuasive storytelling, or at least to incorporate and be influenced by stories and storytelling, then it might be helpful to begin by thinking of planners (and others involved in planning) as *authors* who write *texts* (plans, analyses, articles) that can be read (constructed and interpreted) in diverse and often conflicting ways.² Such planner-authors have to write texts that *emplot* (or arrange and shape, or at a minimum seek to turn) the flow of future action. To do it well, these planner-authors have to fill that flow of action with interesting and believable *characters* (e.g., planners, developers, neighbors, elected officials) who act in *settings* (e.g., in older inner-city neighborhoods, in suburbanizing landscapes, in public hearings). These planner-authors have to build conflict, crisis, and resolution into their narratives, such that key antagonists are somehow changed or moved significantly. They have to adopt distinct *points of view* and draw upon the *imagery and rhythm of language* (including statistical models, forecasts, GIS-based maps, three-

2003).

² For other good recent treatments of storytelling in planning, see Croucher (1997), Forsyth (1999) and Hamlin (forthcoming). For additional insight into the role of narrative in the social sciences, especially with regard to how narratives construct memory,

dimensional architectural renderings and virtual reality models, surveys, advisory committees, and other persuasive figures of speech and argument, or *tropes*) to express a preferred attitude toward the situation and its characters. Through emplotment, characterizations, descriptions of settings, and rhythm and imagery of language, such "planning stories" unavoidably shape the readers' attention, turning it *this* way instead of *that*.

The raw material of planning stories emerges from the practical world of day-to-day life, but stories cannot tell themselves. Rather, they must be transformed into narratives and then be told.³ That act of construction is necessarily selective and purposeful. One chooses to include *this* but exclude *that*, to start (and end) a story *this* way rather than *that*, to use *these* words rather than *those*, to configure the events of the story *this* way rather than *that*. These purposes in turn are tightly connected to emotion. We choose to tell certain stories because they matter to us, and we tell them in certain ways because those ways of telling feel right (often for reasons we are not fully conscious of). Thus planning stories are often about (or are inspired by) powerful memories, deep fears, passionate hopes, intense angers, and visionary dreams, and it is these emotions that give good stories their power. In the end, such stories shape *meaning* and tell readers (and listeners) what is important and what is not, what counts and what does not, what matters and what does not. Such future-oriented stories guide readers' sense of what is possible and desirable. If told well, they enable readers to envision desirable transformations in

identity, and community, see Hinchman and Hinchman (1997). For the role of narrative in social movements, see Davis (2002).

³ Finnegan (1998) consider a story to be "essentially a presentation of events or experiences which is told, typically through written or spoken words" (p. 9).

their cities, long for the transformations, feel inspired to act, and believe that their actions will actually have an effect.

To suggest that planning can be thought of as a form of storytelling runs against the grain of conventional planning practice, which is deeply imbued with the ethics, ambitions, and sometimes the obfuscations of science. Still focused on trying to control the future of territorially-bounded representative democracies through the application of technical expertise, most practicing planners want to believe that they can be neutral, objective, rational adjudicators of the public interest, and that their texts have a single literal meaning (the one planners intend) which any intelligent person can grasp.⁴ For example, planning scholars E. J. Kaiser and D. R. Godschalk (2000) say, “Development planning can be thought of as a serious community game in which the values and interests of many players are at stake. All players seek to achieve the future land use pattern that best suits their needs. Government planners work to facilitate an efficient and equitable development process that balances stakeholder interests and results in a desirable land use pattern” (p. 152). Recognizing that all players, including planners, are interdependent, these planners “facilitate cooperation to achieve win-win outcomes” (p. 153). Kaiser and Godschalk’s formulation notwithstanding, all planners also know that context (political pressures, funding constraints, and the like) shapes their work and that other people often respond to the planners’ texts in antagonistic ways. So planners are caught in a bind between what they want to believe and what they know is true, between espoused theory and actual practice. This often leads to much confusion, most

⁴ As Denis Wood (1992) shows, even the most “objective” maps are constructed with purposes in mind. And as James C. Scott (1998) argues so persuasively, many “facts” are

importantly to the idea that planning is purely a technical activity and politics is something that takes place downstream from the technical work and can only muck it up.⁵ Contrary to this literal view, a persuasive storytelling perspective implies that the meaning(s) of the planners' texts depends on their *contexts*; that is, their meaning(s) depend(s) on the story or stories of which they are a part.⁶

Not all planners' texts explicitly or intentionally engage in persuasive storytelling. In many cases, their texts act as part of some larger story. Often this larger story is presented only in cursory fashion; readers have to infer it or unearth it from other sources. In this context, the planners' texts act as *tropes* that seek to turn the larger implicit story in a preferred direction. DeLeon (1992) offers a good example in his analysis of how professional planners advanced the "progrowth regime's" story in San Francisco from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s. He claims that the regime "brought order out of hyperpluralistic chaos" and that the progrowth regime "became the author of the city's vision, architect of its plans, and source of its power to get things done" (p. 40). Those who conceptualized the progrowth regime envisaged downtown San Francisco as a commercial, financial, and administrative headquarters that would link the United States to an emerging transpacific urban community. To achieve that vision, blighted areas near the downtown would have to be cleared, undesirable populations would have to be removed, the regional transportation system would have to be improved, and high-rise office buildings would have to be put in place. Moreover, achieving that vision required

socially-constructed, primarily through the creation of categories that are subsequently used to guide the collection of facts.

⁵ For a good contemporary example, see Hopkins (2001).

⁶ Surely we could all agree that July is a hot month. Well, not if you live in Melbourne, Australia. Context matters.

construction of a political coalition that would supply the strategic leadership, mobilize the resources, and coordinate actors in such a way as to guide and empower the city's transformation. So the progrowth coalition created a series of organizations designed to articulate strategic visions, offer detailed plans and proposals, and carry out specific projects. According to DeLeon, this progrowth regime "paved a smooth road that led to a new San Francisco...a West Coast Manhattan, a gleaming global gateway to the Pacific Rim" (p. 43).

If we treat planning as a process of constructing persuasive stories about the future of cities, where meaning depends on context, then much can be learned from the practice of literary criticism. Reader-response theory tells us that the meaning of the planners' texts lies not just in the authors' intent or the written documents themselves but, as suggested above, also in what the various readers bring to the texts. This notion has important implications for planning: planners cannot assume that any audience will receive the same message that elected officials or planners intend to convey. Nor can planners assume that their texts will evoke a single desired response if "read correctly." The meaning of the text is contestable and negotiated between the author and its many readers.

As if reader-response theory did not complicate matters enough, there is another complication to consider: in our contemporary world, multiple stories are being told simultaneously. Said differently, readers of one story frequently are also the authors of their own stories, and their stories often differ from the planners'. These diverse stories generate differing sets of argumentative claims and evaluative criteria, with judgements of quality (Is this a good plan?) being dependent on who makes the judgements.

Moreover, both planners and readers are characters in each other's stories, often in ways that they can scarcely recognize. Lastly, since the meaning of a statement, trend or action depends on its context, the simultaneous existence of multiple stories means that any one trend, action, or place—even specific words, concepts, and statues—can have multiple and contestable meanings. (What *did* the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center mean?) This means that planners act in a contextual web of relationships and partial, contestable truths.

Furthermore, future-oriented storytelling is not simply persuasive. It is also constitutive. The way in which planners—and others involved in the process of planning—write and talk shapes community, character, and culture. How planners (as authors) choose to characterize (name and describe) the people who inhabit and activate their stories shapes how those characters are expected to act and relate to one another. And how planners write and talk shapes who “we” (as a temporary community of authors and readers) are and can become.

Lastly, cities and their planning-related organizations can be thought of as *nodes in a global-scale web*, a web that consists of a highly fluid and constantly (albeit subtly) changing set of relationships. These relationships can in turn be defined as links between nodes, as paths through which goods, services, energy, capital, information, and other social exchanges flow. This global-scale web can be likened to a text that can be constructed and read in multiple ways. Plans, in turn, can be understood as persuasive stories about how particular nodes or links in the web should or will change in the future. When one plans, one plans as part of a web of relationships. However, the point of view from which one plans varies with one's location in the web. To plan effectively, planners

(and others) have to recognize that they are embedded in an intricate web of relationships, that they have to construct understandings of that web, and that they then have to persuade others to accept their constructions. But they also have to accept the fact that people tell diverse and often conflicting stories. That means planners must also find ways to set these alternate stories side by side, let them interact with one another, and thereby let them influence judgements about how particular nodes and links in the web should change, are likely to change, and why. In the end, the challenge for planners is “to begin planning based on the imagery of webs, nodes, and links; to find ways to construct stories that reconfigure the web in persuasive and compelling ways; and to construct new forums which enable public and democratic argumentation” (Throgmorton, 1996, p. 257).

Critical Responses to the Claim

Four broad lines of critique have been directed against this basic claim. One argues that to think of planning as storytelling is to open the floodgates to fabrications; truth, not stories, is what matters. The second essentially argues that power has a rationality that rationality does not know; power, not stories, is what matters. The third is implicit. By not directly engaging the work of urban theorists such as Manuel Castells, David Harvey, Saskia Sassen, Michael Dear, John Friedmann, Edward Soja, and others, my claim appears irrelevant to major contemporary arguments about the importance and power of economic globalization. And the fourth critically analyzes the concepts of author, story, and audience in relationship to the idea of planning as persuasive storytelling.

To Tell a Story Is To Lie. Perhaps the most fundamental objection claims that telling a story means making something up, writing fiction, telling lies. Why would planners want

to associate themselves with such fabrications? The most direct response is to repeat that we (planners and others) tell stories all the time. It is unavoidable, for events cannot tell themselves. Events have to be configured in relationship to one another and then narrated in order to be told. But questioning the possible falsehood of stories raises a more important question: How can one tell whether one story is truer than another? And what should one do in the face of lies or errors of fact? I think the questions miss the point. It is completely appropriate to insist that planners and others tell the truth about the facts of a matter, while simultaneously being aware that they don't always do so. But I would suggest that, in most planning-related cases, the facts matter far less than their interpretation. It is how facts are configured relative to one another, how they are interpreted, or, in a word, what they *mean* that matters. (Did President Clinton have a particular sexual encounter with a young woman staff member? Evidently he did. The more important question is, what did that encounter mean?) So more fruitful questions would be: How can one determine which story is *more persuasive*? More persuasive to whom? And why? To ask about *meaning* and *persuasiveness* rather than *truth* is to shift attention from technical accuracy to a combination of accuracy and normative evaluation. It is not to deny the persuasive power of Web-based technologies and 3-D simulations that Brail and Klosterman (2001) describe so well, but it is to place planning in a technical-political realm rather than an idealized world of pure technique. So let me now turn to the political critique.

It Is Power, Not Storytelling, That Matters. A related objection has been that, like other “communicative theories” of planning, persuasive storytelling privileges process over substantive issues that are grounded in actual contexts (Lauria and Whelan, 1995;

Yiftachel, 1999), and gives too much attention to action by planners and too little to structural features that shape and limit those actions (Campbell and Fainstein, 1996). And in his recent case study of planning in Aalborg, Denmark, Bent Flyvbjerg (1998) has argued that power is always present and cannot be done away with by a communicatively rational process. Power creates the knowledge that is then used to determine reality; or, as he puts it in a felicitous turn of phrase, “power has a rationality that rationality does not know” (p. 234).

Although some of the “communicative” literature does indeed pay too little attention to political context, this criticism misses the mark for my book. As Patsy Healey (1997) and Vanessa Watson (2002) both note, I clearly presented a nested set of stories about electric power planning in the Chicago area, with each story being placed in a progressively larger context. Moreover, stories cannot tell themselves; they must be transformed into narratives and then be told. That act of construction is necessarily selective and purposeful; that is, necessarily political. As Michael P. Smith (2001, p. 43) argues, this means it is important to focus attention on “representational power” and to ask, “Who has the power to give meaning to things, to name others, to construct the character of collective identities, to shape the discussion of urban politics [and to ask]... what are the appropriate boundaries of urban politics?” In this context, I see more similarity than difference between my work and Flyvbjerg’s. He narrates a fascinating story about planning and development, he immerses readers in the flow of action by writing in the present tense, he fills the story with interesting and believable characters, he places the action in the real-life settings of Aalborg, he persuades his readers by relying heavily on the trope of irony, and he draws on interviews and his own

observations to characterize the key actors. Flyvbjerg has told a persuasive story that (necessarily) has a political purpose: to convince its readers that planning is political and that planners must learn to be more effective in the political arena.

What Counts Is Good Theorizing about the Network Society or the Global City, Not (Mere) Storytelling. These comments about context point to a third line of critique. In a 1997 review of my book, planning scholar Jeanne Wolfe suggested that the Chicago electric power case could have been more fruitfully analyzed from a neomarxist, post-Fordist, or postmodernist perspective. In effect, she was saying that I could have interpreted the Chicago case in the context of a better, more fruitful, theoretical perspective. Her criticism can be restated: Why would a scholar want to focus on (mere) storytelling? Do not real scholars develop and test *theories*, especially ones that are deeply rooted in the neomarxian critique of capitalist-led globalization and urbanization?

In general, Wolfe's comments reflect the perspective of the urban theorists mentioned previously. While these theorists differ from one another in many important ways, they collectively argue that several important trends or processes (e.g., economic globalization, global communication systems, transnational migrations, complex environmental flows and cycles, and exurbanization of development in the regions of "the North") have been producing the "global," "postmodern," or "transnational" city, and that these trends/processes have been transgressing, undermining, and reshaping the conventional technical, political, and epistemological boundaries that have shaped planners' work.

I think these urban theorists are right in drawing attention to these factors; they create the context which shapes local stories. But why should one embrace a neomarxian

construction/interpretation of this context rather than, say, one that celebrates a right-wing populist nationalism or the now-dominant free market neoliberalism? The answer cannot be derived solely by comparing the theories' explanatory or predictive power, or by testing the accuracy of their factual claims. The global-scale web is awash with theories, each of which purposefully constructs understandings of the web, restricts attention to a few phenomena, and typically ignores other theories.⁷ Given that, I would, like Ruth Finnegan (1998, pp. 14-23), argue that urban theories can usefully be characterized as stories: they postulate some temporal ordering of events and emplot those events as historical change, they typically use basic narrative plots to provide coherent explanation, they position scholars as the tellers of abstract and generalizable tales, and they draw upon expected patterns of form, context, and delivery. Michael P. Smith (2001) likewise argues, quite persuasively in my view, that “contemporary theories of political economy and globalization are themselves situated systems of representation, contested readings that give alternative meaning to the ‘out there’ of political economy and global restructuring” (p. 31). To interpret these theoretical constructs as persuasive stories is not to deride their value. Nor is it to suggest that one should not pay attention to them. It is merely to suggest that they can be made more or less persuasive to pertinent audiences by attending to the basic principles of good storytelling.

Jeanne Wolfe also said that the case I chose to analyze was not an appropriate one for “city and regional planning as *we* understand it” (Wolfe, 1997, p. 527, emphasis added). Perhaps. But note that she constructs the community of planners in a particular way. Others might—in fact do—construct it differently. So I would reply that *electric power*

⁷ Dear (2000) characterizes it as “a pluralistic pastiche of plausible alternative theoretical

planning is still *planning*, and that to find such a scientific and technical form of planning being practiced as a form of persuasive storytelling is not trivial. More important, I would argue that the case I studied took place in one of the nodes (Chicago) and pertained to one of the links (electric power) of a global-scale web of relationships.

Geography-planning scholar Edward Soja (2003) has recently offered a critique of the storytelling claim which I find to be quite constructive. In his view, the narrative mode typically ignores space. Accordingly he warns, “the practice of persuasive storytelling must be approached with caution, not because storytelling and the narrative form more generally are not attractive and powerful ways of understanding the world, but because they may be too powerful and compelling, silencing alternative modes of critical thinking and interpretation, especially with regard to the spatiality of time” (p. 207). Quoting art theorist John Berger, he emphasizes, “It is scarcely any longer possible to tell a straight story sequentially unfolding in time. And this is because we are too aware of what is continually traversing the story line laterally” (p. 208). On this point, I would agree with Soja. Economic globalization, transnational migrations, and global environmental systems have radically transformed the context of local action. Local planning takes place in the context of a global-scale web of relationships. To be viable and legitimate in present circumstances, persuasive storytelling must take into account the diverse ways in which stories spatialize that web. We must spatialize the storytelling imagination.

There Is More To Storytelling Than First Meets the Eye. The last critique I would like to address comes from a scholar of English and American Studies, Barbara Eckstein (2003). Focusing her attention on authors, stories, and audiences, she basically makes

visions” (p. 32) and “a Babel of incommensurable narratives” (p. 53).

three claims: first, it is not clear why readers should trust any planner's claim to have converted "community stories" into a single persuasive story; second, the best stories—ones that produce a will to change—are ones that disrupt habits of thought and "defamiliarize" the familiar; and third, the best stories "conscript" readers who are willing to engage strangers ("geohistorical readers") in dialogue. She substantiates these claims by focusing on three important concepts: authors, stories, and audience.

With regard to authorship, Eckstein rightly observes that it is usually quite difficult to determine who the authors of plans really are. "Community storytellers" construct and tell contending community stories, but these people typically disappear in plans and in planning theories about storytelling; the planner supplants them as the storyteller, usually in ways that cannot be discerned. As a reader, she wants to know what authorizes the way planners transform those community stories into authoritative plans. In order for readers to assess and trust the planners' claims to authority, she advises planners to think of themselves as ones who "make space" for stories to be heard. As she puts it, "It is their knowledge of traditional stories and local conventions; it is their skill as narrators, as 'hosts,' for stories they hear and retell; it is their demeanor, their voice, their ordering, their shaping, their ability—literally—to create an amiable narrative and physical space, that allow their telling, retelling, and thus transformation of the community's stories to be heard" (2003, p. 21).

With regard to stories, Eckstein observes that most people think of stories as a means of bringing order to the chaos of events. Reversing that expectation, she suggests that stories can "quite usefully disrupt the habits of thought and action that control everyday life" (p. 25). "The will to change," she claims, "has to come from an ability—a planner's

ability, an urban users' ability—to imagine one's self in a different skin, a different story, and a different place and then desire this new self and place that one sees. It has to come from a storyteller's ability to make a narrative and physical space in which to juxtapose multiple, traditional stories so that they enrich, renarrate, and transform that space rather than compete for ultimate control of a single, linear, temporal history of a impermeably bounded geopolitical place" (p. 24). In this context, she draws attention to the use and importance of *duration* (the amount of story time) and *frequency* (the number of times a theme is advanced) in storytelling. Skill with duration provides the storyteller an opportunity to rivet the readers' attention on events and occasions that best serve the storyteller's intentions, whereas skill with frequency focuses readers' attention on patterns of significance. And drawing upon Soja's work, Eckstein observes that both the spaces made for storytelling and the spaces stories make figure in the production and apprehension of meaning. Since stories deploy different geographic scales and since their interpretation depends upon careful reading of those scales, stories that "defamiliarize" can compel audiences to shift their usual interpretive scale or spatial perspective.

With regard to audience, Eckstein considers the importance of thinking about the "conscripted reader." This notion refers to the way in which a text drafts readers, however voluntarily, to play particular roles and to embrace particular beliefs and values. But actual readers, she calls them "geohistorical readers," negotiate with the conscription in accordance with their interpretive communities (groups determined by cultural/professional training or practice); the formative experiences of their geohistorically situated, individual lives; and their dispositions. Sometimes geohistorical

readers blatantly resist being conscripted the way planner-authors desire. In the end, Eckstein concludes:

The storyteller is the one who actively makes space for the story(s) to be heard. An effective story is that narrative which stands the habits of everyday life on their heads so that blood fills those brainy cavities with light. Such a story fully exploits the materials of time (duration, frequency of repetition), time-space (chronotope), and space (scale, perspective, remoteness) deliberately arranging them in unfamiliar ways so that they conscript readers who are willing to suspend their habits of being and come out in the open to engage in dialogue with strangers (pp. 35-36).

The Claim Revised

These four broad lines of critique provide fruitful material upon which to revise my initial claim. Knowing that the content of a story depends on its purpose, I would begin by claiming that planners must be clear about their purpose. I believe that contemporary planning stories must be inspired by a normative vision. (As David Harvey [2000, p. 189] puts it, “without a vision of Utopia, there is no way to define that port to which we might want to sail.”) But which purpose, which vision? The answer is, of course, contestable and therefore political. In the remainder of this paper I want to suggest how planners could help imagine and create sustainable places by making space for diverse locally-grounded common urban narratives (or community stories).

Planning Stories Should Be Inspired by the Vision of Sustainable Places. In the view of many people around the world, planning stories should be inspired by the normative

vision of the sustainable place; that is, by the vision of creating city-regions that are ecologically healthy, economically vital, socially just, and guided by richly democratic practices (see Throgmorton, 2003, and Beauregard, 2003a). According to this vision, planners should be advocates for the sustainable city; they have to tell persuasive stories about how sustainable places can and should be created.⁸ But it is also important to recognize that, in the words of planning scholar Scott Campbell, "our sustainable future does not yet exist, either in reality or even in strategy. We do not yet know what it will look like; it is being socially constructed through a sustained period of conflict negotiation and resolution. This is a process of innovation, not of discovery and converting the nonbelievers" (1996, p. 302).

Places Should Be Understood as Multidimensional. One cannot make a "place" more sustainable without having some sense of what "place" means, and it turns out that, as literary critic Lawrence Buell (2001, p. 62) puts it, "[a] place may seem quite simple until you start noticing things." Consider Louisville (Kentucky), Berlin (Germany), or any urban place you know well. What does it mean to be connected to that place? Surely it means, in part, thinking of it as home. It means feeling an emotional attachment to the house in which you live, to the familiar surroundings of your neighborhood, and—with decreasing intimacy—to your city, your region, and perhaps even larger areas. But as Buell observes, there are at least four other ways of being connected to a place (see

⁸ Gare (1995) argues it is necessary to create an image of the future that enables individuals to "relate their own lives to a new grand narrative, the global struggle for an environmentally sustainable civilization" (p. 160). Following Mikhail Bakhtin, he suggests that the new narrative should be a "polyphonic, dialogical narrative in which a multiplicity of perspectives are represented, where through dialogue the narrative reflects on its own development" (p. 140). While there are similarities between Gare's argument

Figure 1). Each of them provides, along with the first, “subject positions” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) from which stories about a place can be authored and narrated.

One type of connection might be thought of as a scattergram or archipelago of locales, some quite remote from one another. “Tenticular radiations” connect your home to those other locales. Think, for example, of the electric power transmission lines that lead away from your home, of the carbon dioxide that billows from your car’s tail pipe, of products you use that are fabricated in distant places, or of goods produced in your area and transported to other parts of the world.

Places also have histories and are constantly changing. These changes superimpose upon the visible surface an unseen layer of usage, memory, and significance. As historian Brian Ladd (1997, p. 1) writes about Berlin, “Memories often cleave to the physical settings of events. That is why buildings and places have so many stories to tell. They give form to a city’s history and identity.” In almost every place, some people display an acute awareness of this invisible layer. But whose unseen layer should be remembered, and how should that memory be embodied in the built environment?

A fourth type of connection derives from the fact that people are constantly moving into or departing from places. Thus any one place contains its residents’ accumulated or composite memories of all places that have been significant to them over time. When Muslim Turks move to Kreuzberg or Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin, or when migrants from Central America move to Louisville, they bring with them memories of those other places and the pathways leading away from them.

and mine, I want to distance myself from the claim that we should impose a new “grand narrative” on others.

Lastly, fictive or virtual places can also matter. Past imagined places such as Ludwig Hilberseimer's 1924 *Hochhausstadt* (skyscraper city), Albert Speer's *Germania*, Harland Bartholomew's 1929 plan for Louisville, the cacatopian cityscape of the film *Bladerunner*, Kim Stanley Robinson's trilogy about the colonization of Mars, and many others have influenced thought and action, for good and for bad. Advocates of contemporary free market neoliberalism have been arguing that we have come to "the end of history," that there is no alternative to their vision of capitalist democracy, and that there is no need to imagine better places. Both Buell and David Harvey (2000) observe, however, that the contemporary scholarly and literary worlds are full of explorations of "the imaginary" and of utopian possibilities. We need alternative visions now, Harvey says, and those visions should emerge out of "critical and practical engagement with the institutions, personal behaviors, and practices that now exist" (p. 186).

These five dimensions combine to form complex places. To a point, their complexity can be can be witnessed by observing "everyday life" from Michel de Certeau's (1984) street level perspective.⁹ Consider Berlin, Germany. The capital of a reunited Germany, the center of an increasingly integrated Europe, and a major site of global capital investment, this city of 4.2 million people has been described as "a palimpsest of past desires" (Balfour 1989, p. 249) and a city of "unintended ugly beauty" (Richie 1998, p. xvi). Walking amid the ghosts in *Hackesche Markt*, in the *Tiergarten*, along *Oranienburger Strasse*, in *Potsdamer Platz*, and along *Karl-Marx-Allee* one continually encounters juxtapositions of the old and the new, the renovating and the deteriorating, the ugly and the beautiful, the joyous and the horrific. One can see *Ossis* and *Wessis* (former

east and west Berliners), Muslim Turks, foreign tourists, migrants from the former Soviet Union, global investors, and a range of familiar and unfamiliar strangers mixing with one another, with varying degrees of comfort and security.

Places Should Also Be Understood as Nodes in a Global-Scale Web of Relationships.

If we think of each place as being a node in the global-scale web, with each place being linked to all other places through a highly-fluid and continually-changing set of relationships, then we can connect Buell's conception of place to the urban theorists' research concerning the space of flows, the global city, the postmodern city, and the transnational city (see Figure 2). As Michael P. Smith argues (2001, p. 49), "there is no solid object known as the 'global city' appropriate for grounding urban research, only an endless interplay of differently articulated networks, practices, and power relations best deciphered by studying the agency of local, regional, national, and transnational actors that discursively and historically construct understandings of 'locality,' 'transnationality,' and 'globalization' in different urban settings." This means that multiple and contestable stories can be told from the subject positions provided by these nodes and links.¹⁰ These

⁹ According to de Certeau, urban users tell stories that "carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places" (1984, p. 116).

¹⁰ According to Bruno Latour, these subject positions provide "oligopticons" that enable people gaze in some directions but not in others, to experience localized totalities and partial orders (see Amin and Thrift, 2002, p. 92). There are also distinct similarities between this and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*: "Each field," he says, "...involves its own agents in its own stakes, which, from another point of view, the point of view of another game, become invisible or at least insignificant or even illusory" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 97). "The agent engaged in practice knows the world," he claims, "but...[h]e knows it, in a sense, too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment [*un habit*] or a familiar habitat. He feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of a habitus" (pp. 142-143).

stories often follow the general contours of what Ruth Finnegan (1998) calls “common urban narratives.”

Common Urban Narratives Emerge from Subject Positions Provided by the Web's Nodes and Links. Finnegan claims that *common urban narratives* (often expressed abstractly as urban theories) are told about cities in general, but that such narratives become *locally anchored* in specific urban places. Exemplifying these common urban narratives would be the oft-told story about how industrialization, urbanization, and the artificial culture of the city destroy rural and communal nature. In one variant, this story emphasizes the movement from misery to happiness, while acknowledging that losses occur along the way. In another, it focuses on the losses. In still another, it focuses on locally-based social movements' heroic efforts to resist destruction. When told by urban theorists and other scholars, these common urban narratives often seem to express a point of view (or subject position) that stands outside or above the web, construct understandings of the web that privilege class over all other relationships and identities, and tend to treat “the global” as the site of history's dynamic flows and driving forces and “the local” as the site at which cultural meanings are produced and social movements of reaction or resistance are formed (Smith, 2001). They are, of course, irretrievably immersed in the web.

Once locally grounded in specific places, these common urban narratives contain their own unique details and community stories. Focusing on the new town of Milton Keynes in England, Finnegan finds four locally-anchored stories. According to one of them—the planners' tale—planners develop and successfully carry out their “master plan.” Although not without its twists and turns, the planners' story has a clear beginning

and end, a clear plot (destiny fulfilled), and an evident hero (the Development Corporation), and it is disseminated through many media.

This tale is consistent with planning scholar Leonie Sandercock's (1998) claim that modernist planning historians tell a heroic, progressive narrative, an "official story," in which planning is the hero, "slaying the dragons of greed and irrationality and, if not always triumphing, at least always noble, on the side of angels" (p. 35). In her view, this "official story" is deeply flawed. As she puts it, "The boundaries of planning history are not a given. These boundaries shift in relation to the definition of planning...and in relation to the historian's purpose.... The writing of histories is not simply a matter of holding a mirror up to the past and reporting on what is reflected back. It is always a representation, a textual reconstruction of the past rather than a direct reflection of it" (pp. 36-37). In her view, this has produced an absence of diversity and of any critical/theoretical perspective in planning history. She argues that planning historians need to begin telling a more inclusive history of cities, ones that include what she calls "insurgent planning histories." To do that, planners will have to develop a new kind of "multicultural literacy," which will require familiarity with the multiple histories of urban communities. To use Eckstein's (2003) language, the challenge is to make space for these diverse community stories and to juxtapose them in a way that transforms understandings and transforms relationships among diverse geohistorical readers.

Finnegan then collects and narrates "storied lives"; that is, personal stories that are pinned to Milton Keynes and which are narrated with the specificities of time, place, and person. These storied lives are similar to the "practice stories" that John Forester has been writing about professional planners. His stories help us understand how planners

construct their understandings of their subject positions within the global-scale web of relationships. In his 1999 book, *The Deliberative Practitioner*, Forester claims that the stories planners tell one another about their work (their “practice stories”) matter. From these stories, planners learn how to be planners and how to work with others in the messy world of planning practice. But he also describes a second type of practice story. These are “profiles” of practitioners’ work. After recounting “Kirstin’s” story, Forester concludes that planners are “reflective practitioners” who, pressed by the real-time demands of work, learn through stories about “the fluid and conflictual, deeply political and always surprising world they are in” (p. 26). From another story (the planners’ staff meeting), Forester concludes that planners are also “deliberative practitioners” who learn through engagement with others.

Forester further argues that these practice stories “do work by organizing attention, practically and politically, not only to the facts at hand but to why the facts at hand matter” (p. 29). Planners do not simply present facts and express opinions and emotions; they also “reconstruct selectively what the problems at hand really are” (p. 30). Such planners don’t have time to learn through sustained research, and they have to make value judgements and set priorities, so they must learn not just from scientific inquiry but also through a process that is akin to learning from friends. In Forester’s view, we learn from stories like we learn from friends; they speak in ways that are appropriate to the planner’s situation, they help the planner deliberate, and they help the planner see his (or her) own interests, cares and commitments in new ways. They help the planner understand not just how the world works, but how the planner works, who the planner is, and what sorts of things matter to him (or her). They typically try to do justice to the

complexities the planner faces rather than offering simplistic cure-alls or technical fixes. Lastly, practice stories help the planner learn by presenting him (or her) with a world of experience and passion, of affect and emotion. They allow the planner to talk about fear, courage, outrage, resolve, hope, cynicism, and all the other political passions of planning.

Persuasive Stories about Creating Sustainable Places Have To Make Space for Diverse Locally-Anchored Common Urban Narratives. There is much value in Finnegan's treatment of locally-anchored common urban narratives and of storied lives, especially when juxtaposed against Sandercock's and Forester's use of stories. But much more can be done with it, especially in terms of relating it to Buell's five dimensions of place-connectedness and my earlier arguments about planning as persuasive storytelling in a global-scale web of relationships. I would suggest that at least five broad narratives are commonly told about urban areas in America in addition to the urban theorists' abstract story about global capital and the planners' "official story" about fulfilling destiny. To imagine and create sustainable places, planners have to make space for these and other locally-grounded common urban narratives.

One constructs *the city as a site of opportunity and excitement*, a center for artists and other creative people. If you want to be somebody, you must—this story claims—go to the bright lights and big city. If you don't believe me, just watch the urban imaginary proffered by Home Box Office's wildly successful cable television show, *Sex and the City*.

Although this story has many tellers, members of locally-rooted "growth machines" (Logan and Molotch, 1996) tell it with the greatest enthusiasm. They assert that "growth strengthens the local tax base, creates jobs, provides resources to solve existing problems,

meets the housing needs caused by natural population growth, and allows the market to serve public tastes in housing, neighborhoods, and commercial development,” and that growth and its effects are aligned with “the collective good” (p. 318). In Logan and Molotch’s view, growth machine advocates want to ensure a good business climate; i.e., a place in which there is no violent class or ethnic conflict, the work force is sufficiently quiescent and healthy, and—most important—local publics favor growth and support the ideology of value-free development. According to Logan and Molotch, growth advocates use that presumed consensus and insistence on the need for a good business climate to eliminate any alternative vision for the purpose of local government or the meaning of community; that is, to eliminate or marginalize competing stories that might threaten growth.

A second common urban narrative constructs *the city as a nightmare*: cities losing population, seething with drug-related criminal activity, experiencing riots like that of Miami's Liberty City in 1980 and Los Angeles in 1992, suffering diminished employment, facing a shrinking tax base, losing the white middle class, and watching housing and infrastructure deteriorate and be abandoned. (Flee! Flee! Migrate out! Move to another place!) This story of the city as nightmare has become deeply rooted in American culture (see Beauregard, 2003b). Just think of the movies *Bladerunner* and *Escape from New York*. Better yet, walk through the heart of Detroit or St. Louis and experience the combined effects of slum clearance, urban renewal, high-rise public housing, interstate highway construction, immigration, segregation, abject poverty, business disinvestment, and the abandonment and torching of buildings.

A third common urban narrative—which often emerges from the black urban experience—constructs *the city as a site of injustice, oppression, and exclusion* (but also hope). Drawing heavily on her knowledge of Detroit, for example, June Manning Thomas (1994 and 1997) argues that one cannot comprehensively understand the history of American cities, and their planning, without understanding the African-Americans' experience. That experience began when hundreds of thousands of southern black workers migrated northwards between World Wars I and II, seeking opportunity and fleeing oppression, only to be met by racially-restrictive zoning ordinances and covenants and by white riots against blacks. The black urban experience then involved having public housing, urban renewal, and interstate highway projects confine blacks within existing ghettos or displace them from land that the local growth machine wanted for other uses. Confined to ghettos and alienated by decades of racially insensitive policies, black neighborhoods exploded in violence during the 1960s decade of “civil rebellion.” And now blacks find themselves in a racially divided metropolis, living in the heart of the city as nightmare, which for them often feels like a city of oppression. According to this story, when African-Americans try to escape the city of oppression by moving to the suburbs, they are greeted with exclusionary zoning policies. As Kirp, Dwyer, and Rosenthal (1995) put it, when the residents of middle-class suburban neighborhoods hear the phrase “affordable housing” they think: “*lots of very poor and black outsiders on welfare are coming to Mount Laurel from places like Camden, and they will bring violence and drugs, and they will wreck our schools. They will destroy our way of life*” (p. 47). Though awash in tide of urban decline, Thomas says, many black politicians and

communities strive heroically to preserve and improve their neighborhoods. Thus the city of despair and oppression can also become a city of empowerment and action.

A fourth story offers the environmentalists' interpretation. According to it, the city is a site of activities that are rapidly eroding the ecological base upon which those activities are founded. Cities, human progress, and all they entail are rapidly destroying or taming wild nature. I think of it as *the city of boiling frogs*. In this tale, the people of a city are like the frog who has been tossed into a pot of temperate water. The frog never notices that the water is gradually heating up, eventually to the boiling point and to the frog's death. Like the boiling frog, the people of a city gradually over-consume resources and pollute their environment until the city (and the global-scale web of life, or "organic machine," in which it is embedded) becomes no longer livable.

And a fifth story might be called *the city of ghosts*. This offers a narrative of memory, of loss, of small towns drying up and blowing away, of farmland disappearing from the urban fringe, of neighborhoods being destroyed by urban renewal and interstate highway construction, of other neighborhoods being eviscerated by deindustrialization.¹¹ In these *cities of ghosts*, people recall how lively and hopeful their older towns and neighborhoods used to be, and they seek to preserve what remains from any further demographic, economic, and environmental change. But the preservationists' story is often complicated by the fact that their towns and neighborhoods have already changed. Howell Baum (1997) provides an example with his story about the effort of the people of Southeast Baltimore to develop a neighborhood plan. According to Baum, those neighbors believed

¹¹ See Rotella (2003) for an analysis of nostalgic stories about "the old neighborhood" of Chicago's South Side. These stories are closely connected to "the politics of return,"

quite strongly in one straight-forward ethical principle: that all community members should have an opportunity to help envision the neighborhood's future. But in practice they were not able to adhere to that principle. Renters, poor people, and blacks who had moved into the neighborhood over the previous twenty years either did not participate or else were not thought of as part of the community. Instead, white professional middle-class people who thought of themselves as being "goodhearted homeowners" dominated the process. The result was a conflict between the long-time residents' "community of memory" and the actual, diverse residents' potential "community of hope." Thusly conflicted, the neighbors were not able to think seriously about their present and anticipated problems.

Persuasive Stories about Creating Sustainable Places Have to Negotiate Emotional Conflicts. How can planners and others make space for these and other locally-grounded common urban narratives, and how can they do so in a way that enriches and transforms them without imposing uniformity upon them? This is a difficult question. Sociologist Joseph E. Davis (2002) points to the nub of the difficulty when he observes that stories call participants "not so much to reflect on the merits of coherent arguments or self-consciously adopt an interpretive scheme...but to identify with real protagonists, to be repelled by antagonists, to enter into and feel morally involved in configurations of events that specify injustice and prefigure change" (2002, p. 25). In other words, by dealing with emotion as well as intellect, stories question their senses of identity and community. This can frighten many people. But from a narrative point of view, it is precisely that conflict and emotional resonance that potentially gives storytelling such

wherein some people seek to recapture or reterritorialize a lost or threatened "homeland"

importance and power. As John Kotre (1984, 1996) observes in his study of narrative psychology, stories can be generative: “If a new culture is coming into existence, that story will emerge as a prototype that establishes a myth capable of energizing future adherents” (p. 224). We choose to tell certain stories because they matter to us, and we tell them in certain ways because those ways of telling *feel* right. Good planner-storytellers will tap those emotions (joy, sadness, hope, anger, fear), drawing upon the visual arts, music, poetry, and street theater to construct and tell stories that help the people of specific places imagine desirable transformations, long for the transformations, feel inspired to act, believe that their actions will prove effective, and create a “sustainable economy of spirit” (Throgmorton, 2000; LeBaron, 2002). Planners should tell these stories on their own authority, but the only way they can gain their diverse readers’ trust, the only way the planners’ stories can be considered legitimate, is by making space for their readers’ diverse understandings and contextualizations.

Conclusion

On the whole, the preceding critiques and perspectives reinforce the claim that planning can be construed as a form of persuasive and constitutive storytelling about the future. But they also suggest ways in which the initial claim should be revised. Let me conclude by summarizing those revisions.

Planners’ stories about the future will necessarily have to begin from a contestable normative position. To be persuasive to a wide range of readers, however, the planners’ stories will have to make narrative and physical space for diverse locally-grounded

(Smith, 2001, p. 152).

common urban narratives. They will have to recognize that planners and other geohistorical readers spatialize their stories in diverse ways. They will have to juxtapose those narratives against one another in a way that defamiliarizes the place. And they will have to enable the actual geohistorical readers of transnational places to engage in fruitful dialogue with their fellow strangers. This revised argument acknowledges, indeed presumes, that powerful actors will strive to eliminate or marginalize competing stories, and that those powerful actors will induce some planners to devise plans (stories about the future) that are designed to persuade only a very narrow range of potential audiences.

None of this will be simple. Moreover, it is not possible to know in advance where the interaction of these stories will lead. So we need the courage to act, and we need to be inspired by the hope that our actions will prove fruitful.¹²

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