

A CONTINUATION...

RADICAL PRAXIS – 4TH EXPRESSION

...there is not and there will never be a pure observer (he is always tied to a transforming praxis); no absolute knowledge... But, with the loss of the absolute, we gain in communication and in complexity... What we already perceive... through this translating, transducing, transforming, relativizing relation between the psychic and the physical, between the observer and the observation, is a first emergence of the relation between subject and object, because all knowledge, in an observer, is both subjective (self-referent), returning to its own interior organization (cerebral, intellectual, cultural) and objective (hetero-referent), returning to the exterior world. We can, therefore, perceive that *it is never by excluding the subject that we must look for the object, that is it not outside of praxis, but in a meta-praxis which is a new praxis, that we must look for knowledge* (Morin 1992: 365).

It is an intriguing twist to learn that the root word *poiesis* came to the attention of Maturana because of a friend who was reading Don Quixote and who noted Don Quixote's choice between praxis (action), the path of arms, or *poiesis*, (creation, production) the path of letters (Hawes 2000). At this point, the extent of Maturana's notion of autopoiesis is expressed as "embodied action" – which could also be a suitable definition for praxis...

But what about a more 'robust' understanding of praxis [and its distinction from *poiesis*]...

PRAXIS

To consider the notion of praxis, I begin with Aristotle – who distinguishes praxis from *poiesis* on a few occasions, including the following statement, which summarizes the distinction:

Poiesis (production) has an end other than itself: *praxis* (action) cannot have; for good action is itself its own end (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* in Barker 1958: 10)

As Barker (1958, see also Arendt 1958, Bottomore 1983) emphasizes:

The distinction between production (or *poiesis*) and action (or *praxis*) is based on the idea that 'production' aims at a result beyond the immediate doing, which remains when the doing is over, but 'action', such as the rendering of a service, is complete in itself, and aims at no result beyond the immediate doing... (Barker 1958: 10)

Arendt (1958) also draws attention to this distinction, suggesting that Aristotle separates *poiesis* from praxis, but also links them – to the extent of conflating them – when he relates them to political activity.

[Aristotle suggests that] legislating and the execution of decisions by vote are the most legitimate political activities because in them men 'act like craftsmen' the result of their action is a tangible product, and its process has a clearly recognizable end. This is no longer or, rather, not yet action (*praxis*), properly speaking, but making (*poiesis*), which they prefer because of its greater reliability. It is as though they had said that if men only renounce their capacity for action, with its futility, boundlessness, and uncertainty of outcome, there could be a remedy for the frailty of human affairs (Arendt 1958: 195).

Although speaking of the Greeks 3000 years ago, Arendt could be speaking of her contemporaries – or ours – since this preference for greater reliability is still observable today in continued faith on prediction and, subsequently, production. Yet Arendt continues:

...this remedy can destroy the very substance of human relationships
...an interpretation of action in terms of making, actually spoils the action itself and its true result, the relationship it should have established... Work, such as the activity of the legislator in Greek understanding, can become the content of action only on condition that further action is not desirable or possible; and action can result in an end product only on condition that its own authentic, non-tangible, and always utterly fragile meaning is destroyed (Arendt 1958: 195, 196).

The implications here are more fully understandable, in light of Arendt's distinction among three facets of the human condition: labour, work and action. Labour is that activity necessary as biophysical beings with particular requirements. Work – or poiesis – involves technologies in the production of something other than oneself. Action – or praxis – is momentary, spontaneous, non-producing behaviour. Arendt is not supportive of the Greek preference for production over action despite its potential for greater reliability. Rather, she points to action and its unknown consequences as the source of new beginnings; as offering opportunities for starting off new trains of events (1958, also Canovan 1998: xvi). This makes action critical for politics. Descriptions of uncertainty and complexity and the subsequent need for adaptive responses that were discussed previously support her suggestions. For example, an expert driven rational-comprehensive planning processes seems more readily interpreted as work (poiesis) rather than action (praxis) – a fuller understanding of this might contribute to development of adaptive participatory planning. This discussion brings to mind Franklin's (1990) distinction, in relation to technologies, between a growth model and a production model. Conceiving a third model, to parallel Arendt's labour, work and action might also be fruitful.

Arendt's reading of Marx and her three-fold distinction – labour, work, action – leads her to criticize Marx, suggesting that his conflation of labour and work means that “we are left with the rather distressing alternative between productive slavery and unproductive freedom” (Arendt 1958: 105). In addition, the conceptualization of action as a spontaneous activity that can lead to transformation contrasts with his deterministic/evolutionary slant. However, she does not necessarily attribute action with the reflective quality that praxis often carries, although she does emphasize the need for ‘thinking our doing’ (Canovan 1998). To further the consideration of praxis, then, I turn to a brief discussion of Marx.

MARX(ISM)

Marx and his work (e.g. 1976, 1974), including that written with Engels (e.g. 1968) spawned an ideological legacy that has influenced – politically and economically – much of the (developed) world (e.g. Johnson 1996, Held 1996, Stokes 1995). Although typically associated with communist states, his influence is notable elsewhere in that:

Many features of our own society such as a general public education, the absence of child labour, a minimum wage, and formal equality between the sexes, were radical ideas that one hundred fifty years ago, *only* socialists espoused (Johnson 1996: 74).

In some ways, then, the capitalism that Marx critiqued has become more socialist (Stokes 1995). This does not, however, mean that Marx and his critique are irrelevant today. As Derrida notes “There will be no future... without Marx, without the memory and the inheritance of Marx” (Derrida 1994: 13 in Munck 2000: 1). Of course, this ‘inheritance’ will be viewed quite differently by a fugitive of the totalitarian Stalinist regime, than a well-paid Canadian unionist.

As could be expected with such broad ranging work, several streams of Marxism, including libertarian, pluralist and orthodox have emerged (e.g. Wallace and Wolf 1998, Johnson 1996, Held 1996). His work has had an influence in many areas outside of politics, most notable sociology, economics and

philosophy, but also areas as disparate as education, feminism, anthropology, social ecology, environmentalism, and more recently ecology and postmodernism.

This breadth indicates one of the challenges of cross-disciplinary research: gaining a broad understanding of the subtle connections and interconnections amongst various theories and theorists as well as the embedded themes and concepts. As an example of such subtlety, I have written on distinctions among various expressions of “the ecosystem approach” that reflect epistemological and political differences likely to be unnoticeable without some understanding of the terms and concepts used (Dempster 2001). While I expect similar subtleties within Marxism, without the same level of familiarity they remain undetectable to me. In this case, especially given potentially negative political associations, a lack of direct attribution to Marx is also likely to have occurred in many cases. Such potentially high levels of tacit or implicit understanding – available from within a discipline, but hard to detect from without – is important to acknowledge and address as much as possible. For this discussion, I have relied on text-book type literature (Wallace and Wolf 1998, Johnson 1996, Held 1996) as well as others (Munck 2000, Mayo 1999, Carver 1998, Sixel 1995, Stokes 1995, Lukács 1991, Smart 1983, Arendt 1958).

To focus the brief exploration of Marx and his influence, I elaborate on two notions articulated previously: attention to the concrete/material and the subsequent conceptualization of *praxis*.

Fundamental to Marx and Marxist tradition is attention to the materiality of existence, which Marx presented as a contrast to the idealism of Hegel and to the utopian socialists who looked to a *moral* revolution. Marx took a ‘scientific’ approach – although not necessarily a positivistic one – viewing society as an outcome of material factors including the social nature of being human and the economic factors of production.

The socialist might agree with the liberal that in *abstract models*, the market is impartial and rewards individuals, but in practice, the socialist argues, the market is partial to those with resources and rewards classes of individuals privileged in terms of assets like capital, or information, or education. The error of the liberal is precisely that she *abstracts* from social reality (Johnston 1996: 65).

For Marx, the material fact of existence required a different response – one focused on modes of production and class distinctions and the need for change with respect to the relations among these. This grounding in the material world contributes to the description of Marx’s work as a “philosophy of praxis” (Labriola and Gramsci in Bottomore 1983). Bottomore (1983) attributes Lukács with revival of the broader Marxist notion of praxis – critiquing Engels’ reduction of praxis to industry and scientific experiment. The latter neglected the more rounded and comprehensive understanding of praxis as a mode of being linking theory and action toward a revolutionary transformation. As Marx states:

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary praxis (Marx, from the *Theses on Feuerbach* in Lebowitz 1992: 141).

The resolution of *theoretical* contradictions is possible *only* in a *practical* way, only through the practical energy of man (Marx, from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in Bottomore 1983: 386).

In a sense, praxis is *the* defining characteristic of being human. Marx distinguishes humans from other animal species. The latter can only do the most basic activities instinctively to meet their needs, whereas humans *think* about their action, producing other outcomes. This distinction contributes to the notion of

praxis as reflective action; as a merging of theory and practice, which had been advanced by others, including Bacon (Bottomore 1983) and which emerges again in the work of Gramsci and Friere:

Men's activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis, it is transformation of the world (Friere 1972: 119).

This quote points to a third aspect of praxis that emerges from the Marxists heritage – the notion of transformation or change. As Mayo notes:

In Friere's view, any separation of the two key elements in the process of praxis (i.e. action and reflection) is either mindless activism or empty theorising, the latter being ... 'armchair reflectivity.'
The two elements ought, in Friere's view, to be inextricably intertwined (Mayo 1999: 63).

It is perhaps this third aspect that has led to the adoption of praxis in other schools of thought such as feminism.

FEMINIST THEORY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Feminist theory and epistemology covers a broad range of perspectives emerging from what Humm (1992) has noted as *feminisms* (see also May 1996), including liberal, socialist, radical, Marxist, psychoanalytic, postmodern and poststructural feminisms (e.g. May 1996, Tong 1989, Weedon 1987). Intersecting or cross-cutting these essentially political-epistemological perspectives are what might be termed disciplinary feminisms – or disciplinary *feminists* – people who interpret, and consequently contribute to, bodies of knowledge and theory by applying a feminist perspective to more or less specific degrees. By this I mean that the distinction between a critical and critical-feminist or postmodern and postmodern-feminist critique is often rather indistinct. Of particular interest here are feminist critiques of science and epistemology (e.g. Haraway 1991, Harding 1991, 1987, Keller 1983, Merchant 1981), ecofeminism (e.g. Warren 2000, 1996, Sandilands 1999, Plumwood 1993, Diamond and Orenstein 1990, Shiva 1988), and feminist methodologies (e.g. Harstock 1998, Ristock and Penell 1996, Lather 1994, Acker *et al.* 1991, Fonow and Cook 1991). In addition, as noted previously, I have relied on feminist critiques of planning (e.g. Friedmann 1996, Sandercock and Forsyth 1992, Moore-Milroy 1991) and political critiques that carry a feminist angle (e.g. Young 1997, 1990, Mansbridge 1996, Dean 1996, Benhabib 1992, Gilligan 1982). With respect to systems theory, specific feminist critiques appear to be limited, the work of Hayles (2000, 1999) and Cornell (2000, 1996), notwithstanding.

These feminisms have made significant contributions politically and socially, with respect to the role and status of women and have also – feminist epistemology in particular – identified, highlighted and criticized the dominance of the male, patriarchal perspective with respect to knowledge, understanding and power. The latter has consequently contributed to greater awareness of the social constructedness of reality and the epistemological underpinnings of action. While the feminist perspective is by no means mainstream, and much work at change is yet to be done, essential features have become more common and widespread in many bodies of literature. In addition, the contribution of feminist theory towards ever increasing attention to of the multiplicity of differences, cannot be underestimated as indicated by feminist contributions to and evolution into the broader notions of gender research, theory and praxis (e.g. Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000).

FOUCAULT

What false idea has knowledge gotten of itself and what excessive use has it exposed itself to, to what domination is it therefore linked? (Foucault 1997: 49)

Previously, I noted the foregoing quote as ‘succinctly expressing’ the ‘primary theme’ distinguishing Foucault’s work – a comment open to considerable and justifiable criticism. Foucault’s work can be divided into three interconnected and overlapping periods – archaeological, genealogical and ethical – coinciding with different periods of his writing (e.g. Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000, Darier 1999, Smart 1983). The archaeological period – considered to be somewhat structuralist in nature – is exemplified by Foucault’s description of the medical profession and its characterization or constitution of “madness” (e.g. 1973, 1971). The associated approach was an attempt to unearth or reveal the underlying historical structures that constitute knowledge and create the subject/subjectivity.

The genealogical period, (e.g. 1978, 1977) attempts to reveal the origins or the “conditions of emergence” (Darier 1999: 15) of discourse, by describing the broader influences and interactions including power, randomness and discontinuities. As such it was more poststructuralist in nature. This period and approach were particularly significant regarding the conceptualization of power/knowledge. Rather than two distinct approaches, however, “archaeology and genealogy complement each other in that archaeology studies the forms of the discourses and genealogy their (power-related) origins. Archaeology provides the distance, the detached description of the discursive formation, and genealogy the engagement, the critically committed probing of the roots of societal practices” (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000: 224).

As will be noted below, the ethical period (e.g. 1988, 1986) has been suggested as a turn, away from the distributedness of poststructuralism toward a more fixed notion of subject/subjectivity, although others argue differently.

To focus the broad range of implications and influences from Foucault work, I discuss two themes that seem especially relevant: subjectification, power/knowledge.

Subjectification is one of three modes of objectification of the subject that Foucault describes – along with dividing practices and scientific classification (Rabinow 1984: 7-12, also May 1996: 186). The latter mode objectifies the subject through his/her categorization according to particular characteristics determined by (presumed) objective science/expertise (e.g. madness). Dividing practices involve techniques of domination in which particular individuals or groups are objectified through isolation – physically (e.g. lepers, prisoners) or normatively (e.g. race, class, sexuality). Subjectification – “his most original contribution” (Rabinow 1984: 11) – involves the “way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject” (Foucault 1984: 11) and involves technologies of the self. Subjectification carries similarities to Althusser’s notion of the interpellated subject, which is described by Mansfield:

Ideology... constitutes us as subjects by ‘interpellating’ us, according to Althusser – calling out to us in the way a policeman calls out to someone in the street, to use his most famous example. He writes: “the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*” [Althusser 1971 *Lenin and Philosophy*: 163]. By calling out to him, the policeman creates from the solitary walker in the street a certain type of subject – one answerable to the law and to the state and system behind it. This subject does not develop according to its own

wants, talents and desires, but exists for the system that needs it. [...] Subjectivity [...] requires us not only to behave in certain ways, but to *be* certain types of people (Mansfield 1999: 53).

In order to grasp the interconnections among power, knowledge and subjectivity, Foucault points to the importance of recognizing techniques of domination and techniques of the self. The latter include habits, rituals, and ways of thinking that people apply to themselves to modify and control their own being in order to achieve desired states such as happiness. Foucault emphasizes that it is important to:

take into account the interaction between those two types of techniques – techniques of domination and techniques of the self... to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another overlap processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely... to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion or domination. The contact point, where the individuals are driven (and known) by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves (and know themselves). It is what we can call, I think, government (Foucault 1997: 181).

This insight has significant implications for the discussion, here and previously. For example, when coupled with the discussion of self-referentiality and the recognition of blind-spots, it questions the possibility of our ever entertaining how/how much we dominate others – especially by encouraging them to dominate themselves. Conversely, it questions how/how much we ourselves are dominated, including how much we contribute to our own domination. As Mansfield describes, the subtlety and pervasiveness of these influences are rather insidious:

For Foucault, Rousseau's free and autonomous individual is not merely an alternative, outmoded theory of subjectivity, a quaint forerunner to contemporary discussions. This very model is the one that allows power to conceal itself, and to operate so effectively... Foucault's ideas encourage a rigorously sceptical attitude towards subjectivity, one that I have called 'anti-subjective' because it will always see any statement that claims to speak the truth about our subjectivity as an imposition, a technique of power and social administration. In sum, the intensity of this scepticism is designed to match what is seen as the almost immeasurable cynicism of a power that controls us most effectively by making us believe in a uniquely contemporary and absolutely desperate way in our own freedom (Mansfield 1999: 55, 64).

The implications of these notions can be explored further through Foucault's understanding of power which "breaks radically with more traditional approaches" (Alvesson and Sköldböck 2000: 225). Rather than conceiving power as an exchangeable commodity, Foucault views it as a field of interactions or a "productive network which runs through the whole social body" (Foucault 1984: 61). As Alvesson and Sköldböck describe:

For Foucault, power does not constitute some kind of abstract property that can be isolated and studied in itself. It lacks an essence and is not measurable; it exists only in relationships and when it is expressed in action (Alvesson and Sköldböck 2000: 225).

The use and application of this notion of power/knowledge is wide-ranging, and has even been incorporated into the work of systems methodologists. For example, Flood (1999) in *Rethinking the Fifth Discipline*, criticizes Senge (1990) for not including what Flood (1999: 72) refers to as a "central concern in the social sciences – knowledge-power and social transformation." Flood links both notions (without naming Foucault) to the work of Marx:

Knowledge-power recognises that what is considered to be valid knowledge may be determined by powerful people. Remember, "The ruling ideas are forever the ideas of the ruling class," is the way Marx and Engels expressed this point some time ago in *The Communist Manifesto* in their search for transformation to a classless society (Flood 1999: 95).

In developing a heuristic for identifying and locating different types of issues and concerns Flood relies on a 'window' metaphor in which situations are assessed by 'looking through' different 'windows' – of process, structure and meaning. Flood also includes a 'window of knowledge-power,' which he emphasizes as influencing and problematizing what is seen through the other windows. This interpretation – which indicates implications for the description and treatment of 'real-world' issues – is supported by others (e.g. May 1996).

Flood's link between Marx and Foucault is also echoed – although in a more poststructural fashion – in the work of Wolfe (1998). Wolfe focuses on what seems to be one of the critical aspects of both authors work that is relevant to my studies: the strength, perversity, pervasiveness and productive nature of the underlying processes of power/knowledge and the subsequent normalizations and subjectification that emerge. To remain beyond structuralist mode, the dynamic, historical, variable nature of these underlying process must be recognized. As noted, some see in Foucault's late work a rejection of the seemingly nihilistic direction implied by a subject that is continually at the whim of systems of power. Foucault's (1988) emphasis on the care of the self is interpreted as recapitulation: accepting the notion of an essential and autonomous individual. However, other interpretations are available when the notion of a more dynamic self/subject (e.g. Kristeva 1986, 1982) is considered.

Even in the final phase of Foucault's thinking, the subject produced in the way indicated is coloured by forms of knowledge and power; yet the important thing is that it is *irreducible* to these. Thus the subject actually functions as a pocket of resistance to established forms of power/knowledge, in the present age. But this subject is not the old, immutable individual; it is an ongoing process, a new, dynamic creation, waging a sort of (micro) guerrilla war in favour of 'difference, variation, and metamorphosis' (Deleuze 1988) as against the powers that be. It is especially worth observing that in this late Foucauldian version of subjectivation, the subject is *not* primarily a 'social construction,' but a construction of the self reflecting on the self, albeit a construction that established forms of power/knowledge continually *try* to imprint with their crystallized patterns. The outcome of this struggle between subject and power/knowledge is always uncertain, never decided in advance, and never final (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 224).

The ideas offered by Marx, feminists and Foucault, as well as other authors building on their work, deepen consideration of praxis by establishing the linkage between theory and action, but also by critiquing the very nature of both.

RADICAL PRAXIS – 5TH EXPRESSION

At the beginning, dictionary definitions laid down a basic outline for understanding radical praxis. Through discussion, various activities of people on the ground – in radical *practice* – provided further insight. Third, the admonition to remain concrete, combined with the reflexive, recursive poietic systems understanding suggested the need to link theoretical musings to action-on-the-ground – without letting either theory or action become dominant. Incorporating poietic systems considerations and the subsequent assessment of both autopoiesis/sympoiesis *and* praxis as embodied action raised further questions about understanding of praxis. Further discussion, led through notions that emerge from Marx, with additional insight from Arendt, Foucault and Friere, regarding the meaning and manifestation of praxis.

Yet there is still the question of its radical nature...

RADICAL? PRAXIS

The term radical has had a rather dynamic and – especially within the political arena – dichotomous history. According to Williams (1985), for example, it has been applied both positively and pejoratively to both ends of the left/socialist–right/conservative spectrum. Consistency emerges from the general implications of extremity and of change. Linked to these is the origin of the term – root – which leads to another meaning: expressing something inherent and fundamental (Williams 1985). The latter definition leads to the question: what is the radical, inherent nature of praxis when it is interpreted as reflective action manifesting transformation in the world? Given the preceding discussion, I suggest that the radical nature of conjoined thought/action is its embodiment in individuals influenced by their context.

To some degree, individuals are continually in praxis – we are continually linking theory and action as we make judgements and decisions based on our ontological, epistemological, axiological, ethical positions in the world. However, we may seldom do so in a reflexive manner, typically neglecting to consider the potential for change and transformation. Conceiving of praxis as individual *only* would, I believe, be mistaken. Individuals are not separate and autonomous – even if credited with free will and agency – since they are embedded in systems of power/knowledge. Even in practising technologies of the self, individuals are not necessarily free from external influence. Yet, as noted above, this does not have to mean that individuals operate only at the whim of circumstance and system. Newer conceptions of the self as a subject-in-process (Kristeva 1986, 1982); or as a relational subjectivity always under construction (McAfee 2000) point to a different kind of understanding. The self is distinct but dynamic, emerging from interconnections among a diversity of constituents – a rather sympoietic conceptualizations of the self/subject. Radical praxis, then – the root of reflective action – is *rhizomatic*, to use Deleuze and Guattari's terminology:

In contrast to centred (even polycentric) systems with hierarchic modes of communication and pre-established paths, the RHIZOME is an acentred, non-hierarchical, non-signifying system without a general and without an organizing memory or central autonomon, defined solely by a circulation of states (Deleuze and Guattari 1983).

The dynamic interconnection of influences that make up an individual necessarily include both theorizing and its material manifestation in action, yet the locus of change is neither one nor the other, but in their 'coincidence of being.' This may also, then, point to the radical/different quality of praxis:

It is as if, finally, something new were emerging in the wake of Marx. It is as if a complicity about the State were finally broken. Foucault is not content to say that we must rethink certain notions; he does not even say it; he just does it, and in this way proposes new co-ordinates for praxis. In the background a battle begins to brew, with its local tactics and overall strategies which advance not by totalizing but by relaying, connecting, converging and prolonging... (Deleuze 1988: 30)

LINKING TO THE 'REAL-WORLD'

In considering the implications of the whole discussion for 'real-world' planning issues there are multiple points of entry. From these, multiple directions emerge. I take the two most basic aspects arising from the discussion to be the systems heuristics and the philosophical perspectives, including epistemological and ethical perspectives. Intersecting these are the three categories of planning theory, subject-oriented, procedural and definitional; the question of agency; and the arena of application. Regarding the latter, I believe the ideas discussed have implications and applications relevant to research and education that are *also subsequently relevant to* 'real-world' planning issues. However, I will consider implications and applications for planning more directly. By referring to the implications as emerging from intersections among these various aspects, I mean to imply, for example, that the system-heuristics are relevant to considering the three categories of planning theory and that the question of agency could then be considered within each of these. Alternatively, I could focus on individual agency – of planners and/or non-planners – discussing its implications for planning theory and relevance of/to the system-heuristics, epistemology and ethical behaviour. Given these interconnections, discussion will touch on all of these aspects, although the focus is primarily on the system-heuristics as well as the philosophical implications. While some may consider the latter as abstractions, rather than concrete concerns, I argue otherwise and begin with these considerations.

PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS AND PLANNING

The epistemological and ethical considerations described here and previously have significant implications for 'real-world' planning issues. Although seemingly removed from the 'practical' considerations most planners deal with on a daily basis, the arguments of Foucault, reinforced by recognition that we all operate with blind-spots, suggests such an assessment to be naïve and potentially harmful. Rather than abstractions, epistemological and ethical positions become manifest as the lived experience of those influenced by planning decisions, whether reflected upon, accounted for, or not.

Instructive here, is Kupperman's (1999) discussion of differences between western and eastern philosophies. He draws attention to the eastern tendency to view philosophical decisions and considerations as integral to lived experience rather than the western tendency to highlight such considerations as removed and separate. While western ethical text-books turn to issues such as capital punishment, abortion or other 'big' decisions to teach the challenges of ethical decision-making, eastern teaching tends to focus on ethical living: mindful consideration of small actions and their consequences. From the discussion above, regarding Foucault's notion of power/knowledge and the idea of radical praxis, it would seem that we could learn from such eastern teachings.

This is not to suggest that epistemological and ethical issues have been neglected within planning. Rather they have been discussed many times over and include questions about the role of planner as 'expert' and as political agent (e.g. Mandelbaum 2000, Forester 1999, Hendler 1995, Krumholtz and Forester 1990, Davidoff 1965). These considerations, may more reasonably apply to *planners* rather than *planning*,

although codes of ethics (e.g. CIP 1994) indicate such a division to be less than straightforward – the two are, of course, inextricably intertwined. In particular, some of the Foucauldian critique applied to planning, which was discussed previously and was embellished here by further exploration of Foucault's work, is relevant. In the 'real-world' planners are continually faced with a multiplicity of decisions of multiple types. While they may claim a lack of political input – that is, to be only technocrats or implementers rather than decision-makers – the discussion suggests such a position represents abdication of responsibility or an inappropriate lack of awareness regarding power/knowledge and the implications of (even seemingly innocent) actions and behaviours. Such consideration is observable within planning practice. The shift from 'advocacy planning' (e.g. Davidoff 1965) to 'equity planning' (e.g. Krumholtz and Forester 1990), for example, indicates a recognition of the potentially *disempowering* effect of planners-as-advocates and an attempt to generate more equitable processes through more distributed involvement in decision-making. In such situations, the political implications of practical decisions must also be considered. As I have noted elsewhere, there are multiple decisions regarding who and how and why various people should be included when planning participatory processes.

Such basic issues as location and timing, for example, will influence who attends and will consequently influence the outcomes. The point is that such 'practical' factors must be recognized as ethical-political arrangements, not merely as matters of convenience and expense (Dempster 2001b: 128).

These intricate interconnections between the philosophical and practical aspects of planning, echo the interconnections described as praxis: reflective action manifesting transformation in the world. Friedmann's (e.g. 1987) notion of planning as the link between theory and action reinforces the similarity. The need for appropriate tools to grapple with the complexity of 'real-world' issues involved in making this link is readily recognized. This is the other area in which I believe the ideas discussed in this paper are applicable.

SYSTEMS-HEURISTICS AND PLANNING THEORY

System-heuristics – as analytical tools for identifying, describing, understanding and/or assessing the subjects or situations of planning – have been applied in many circumstances, although with mixed reviews (Forrester 1975, 1969, Faludi 1972, Chadwick 1971, Catanese and Steiss 1970, McLoughlin 1970, Chapin 1968). Use of systems analysis was particularly popular in the command-and-control heyday, where the potential for predicting and controlling outcomes was considered possible. Both system-heuristics and their epistemological backing fit well with rational-comprehensive approaches to planning. More recently, in a less positivistic manner, soft-systems methodologies (Rosenhead 1989, Checkland 1986) have been used in multiple circumstances, including their originary 'discipline' of organizational management, but in other situations as well.

Although yet to be fully explored, I have briefly developed a methodology for identifying and describing systems according to the autopoietic-sympoietic systems perspective (Dempster 2000, forthcoming, also 1998a, 1998b). In these descriptions I point particularly to application of the heuristics in two different ways: to gain understanding (subject-oriented planning theory) and to aid in cultivation of appropriate planning and management systems (linked to procedural theory). Regarding the first, the heuristic can be

applied as a framework for identifying and describing the factors and influences involved by developing a description according to the poietic system attributes and characteristics (e.g. components, relations, interaction of global-local influences, feedbacks, etc.). Despite its inherent uncertainty and unknowability, such a (qualitative) description allows conceptualization of the diverse phenomena at play.

An example is the description in Dempster (1998b and 2000), of Point Pelee National Park according to the sympoietic heuristic. Application of the heuristic indicates that even description of a “natural” system must include human influences. In the case of Point Pelee, for example, social norms and expectations regarding private property rights of the land-owners east of the Park have an apparently negative impact on the ecological integrity of the park. The construction of barriers to prevent erosion of shoreline property affects the sand budget of the Park’s main feature – the sand-spit reaching out into Lake Erie. If the intent of park planning and management is the maintenance of ecological integrity – as is now dictated by National Park mandate – then park planning and management that is focused only on behaviours occurring within the Park, ignoring those beyond the boundaries, is inadequate. Park jurisdiction, however, is legitimized by current legalistic, property-oriented standards and ends at the park boundaries. While the new institutional mandate may have broadened the responsibilities, it has also made them more complicated. There are two significant challenges here. First, is to gain understanding of the broader influences at work. Second is to consider how to develop new, participatory approaches to deal with them, especially given the expertise, which is currently weighted toward ecology, engineering and facility/recreation management.

The foregoing comments illustrate an approach for addressing the first challenge. In addition, I have used the Point Pelee example, to argue and illustrate use of a systems typology – based on the complex systems ideas presented previously – to match planning approaches to planning situations (especially Dempster 1998a, 1998b). In essence the argument is that – in situations illustrating autopoietic characteristics, approaches with autopoietic characteristics are suitable, in situations illustrating sympoietic characteristics, sympoietic approaches are required. While the planning literature – especially that which calls for more participatory and collaborative approaches – indicates that many people already think this way, there are also many situations in which this is not the case. This is particularly so in protected area and natural resource management where ‘planners’ have typically received training in ecology or engineering, not communication and personal/public relations – the second challenge I noted above. In such cases, systemic explanations may more readily lead to understanding. This is exemplified by recent correspondence from a “non-philosopher” (self-titled) who appreciated the epistemological insights gained from my systems-based description of science and post-normal science (Dempster 1999) as he works at developing indicators for sustainable agriculture.

The potential value of system-based descriptions may be most especially useful when considering the system characteristics as design criteria for the development of appropriate planning and management systems. The conventional bureaucratic park management systems are insufficient for considering the broader influences on parks given the mandate for maintaining ecological integrity. The response of park management agencies has been the to develop ecosystem conservation plans (e.g. Skibicki and Nelson

1996), which require different institutional arrangements for their implementation. In particular, these need to include cooperative, collaborative interactions and behaviours among people living and working adjacent to parks as well as among others more widely spread. The latter range from institutional arrangements involving government bureaucracies at various levels, resource-based corporations, and – as in the analysis in Dempster (1998a) – educational institutions and cultural norms. Implementation of such ideas through the development of cooperative networks and other arrangements present significant challenge.

With regards to Point Pelee National Park for example, establishing open communication among the various people involved including land-owners – let alone manifesting behaviours that are not detrimental to the Park (if this is what *should* happen) – will require some effort on the part of Park managers. Even such practical decisions as content, format, timing and distribution of communications, must be considered with respect to the messages to be communicated and the recipients they need to be communicated to. While the systems notions do not answer these questions, I believe they provide a framework for considering the issues at stake and, again, are likely to be especially valuable for circumstances where key decision-makers are more familiar with ecology or engineering, than people. For example, understanding the notion of structural coupling and its relation to information transfer in ecosystems might facilitate understanding – on the part of park managers – regarding the need for use of appropriate communication content/format in order to transfer information to park neighbours. Ideally, such notions would also be turned around, in a self-reflexive process, for park managers to consider their ability to *receive* information from others when presented in unfamiliar structure/format. For example, narrative descriptions and qualitative accounts will not ‘structurally couple’ with a management system used to dealing with ‘facts’ and technical quantitative information any more readily than a cactus can structurally couple with a swamp.

So far, the discussion has focused on subject-oriented and procedural planning theory. With respect to definitional planning theory, application of the system-heuristics raises more questions than resolutions. While the following discussion may seem to move away from ‘real-world’ applications, I think these considerations are as ‘real’ as any. To some degree, I believe they are more important, because they often seem to be taken for granted and are seldom fully investigated or explored.

If society – say Canadian society, or western-industrial-scientific society – is conceptualized as a complex, self-organizing or sympoietic system with distributed control, evolutionary trajectory etc., then the very notion of ‘planning’ becomes suspect. This is especially the case if planning is taken to hold any suggestion of controlling present circumstances to manifest desirable conditions in the future. The most immediate corollary would seem to be that we should just give up on planning. However, I do not think it is nearly so simple and have argued both for planning-that-is-non-planning and serendipitous planning as possibilities to *complement* but not *replace* planning. Given the conceptualization of sympoietic systems these notions make intuitive sense to me, although I find them a challenge to articulate. A story from Bateson (1972) comes to mind. He describes a conference of conference organizers. As is typical for conferences, the participants spent the first part of the conference socializing rather than attending to the

focus of the conference. As people well accustomed to the typical course of conferences they had no concern over this lack of focus, knowing that – as always happens at conferences – people would eventually ‘get down to business.’ So they kept socializing, comfortable in the recognition that soon enough the ‘business’ would start. Until the end of the conference arrived – and it was too late. Doing nothing is also doing something. Holding a particular knowledge in mind does not mean it will be manifest. While planning may not always lead to desirable future conditions, *not* planning also has implications and *also* may not lead to desirable future conditions. As Ellul (1990) argues with respect to technology, planning is – at least to some degree – ambivalent. It is not a matter of being applied to ‘good’ ends or ‘bad’ ends, but rather that there will be some of each regardless of the intentions.

The other notion relevant to planning that emerges from conceptualizing society/culture as sympoietic is that not only planners are planning and not only decision makers make decisions. As noted in the quotes from Hempel and Beck, ‘moralizing groups,’ cultural norms and institutions – and consequently a much broader constituency than ‘planners’ – are contributing to ‘planning,’ decision-making and the manifestation of particular futures. This means, then, that ‘planning’ involves multiple interactions among multiple people with multiple understandings. It is continually occurring through the minor decisions people make on a daily basis as well as through more formalized processes. This brings the discussion back to the notion of praxis and emphasizes the value in recognizing it as a fundamental and universal human reflexive activity rather than just the purview of those who define themselves as agents of change – be they planners or activists.

As another example for considering application of the theoretical discussion to the real lives of individuals and groups, it is worthwhile to turn to critiques of feminism that emerge from *within* feminism. Work of “sister outsiders” (Lorde 1985, 1984), “*mestizas*” (Anzaldúa 1987), or “US 3rd world feminists” (Sandoval 2000), (see also hooks 1992, 1981, Moraga 1981) add a critical voice that is important to listen to and learn from. While the ‘white women’s movement’ may be valorized for manifesting change it is also criticized for creating a hegemony that silenced voices of different race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability. This criticism can be conceptualized as pointing to the same problem/concern that was noted previously with respect to the role of the observer in delineating systems. Here, the fundamental, inescapable and unspoken power of the activist is that in identifying opposition as well as focus and direction for manifesting change, the activist decides who is silenced – even if unwittingly. Without caution “any ‘liberation’ or social movement eventually becomes destined to repeat the oppressive authoritarianism from which it is attempting to free itself, and become trapped inside a drive for truth that ends only in producing its own brand of dominations” (Sandoval 2000). Given the understandings highlighted by the work of Foucault and the ‘blind-spot’ of self-referential systems, this domination through imposed silence becomes readily apparent – and a significant challenge to resolve.

I find this to be another situation where application of the poietic systems-heuristic is valuable as a tool for conceptualizing the situation and subsequently for questioning how to address the concerns and inequities. The strength and purpose of an autopoietic system comes from its ability to self-produce boundaries and to structurally couple with a particular environment. As long as it can continue poiesis, it

can maintain its identity. The (white) women's movement, focused on maintaining a particular identity and holding it resolutely against the dominant patriarchy, required development of boundaries to restrict information input. While this kept traditional norms and stereotypes at bay, it also excluded the voices of many women of different race, ethnicity, sexuality and ability. As in the previous example, the relevance of structural coupling and communication with respect to inclusion/exclusion is important to recognize. Given the awareness that emerges from poietic systems understanding, I argue that manifesting change in such circumstance requires the development of movements carrying sympoietic qualities. Turning to responses described in the literature, it is possible to find responses coherent with such a suggestion, for example Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000). Drawing a contrast to the standard typology of feminisms, Sandoval (2000: 54) describes a five-fold topography of "consciousness in opposition" – a place "delineat[ing] a set of critical points within which individuals and groups seeking to transform dominant and oppressive powers can constitute themselves as resistant and oppositional citizen-subjects." The first four reflect the standard white hegemonic (autopoietic) versions of feminism, which she calls the equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist and separatist forms. As an alternative, she describes the 'differential form,' which enables movement between and among the other positions,

depend[ing] on a form of agency that is self-consciously mobilized in order to enlist and secure influence; the differential is thus performative... it functions as the medium through which the equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness become effectively converted, lifted out of their earlier, modernist, and hegemonic activity (Sandoval 2000: 58).

The differential form is a "guerrilla warfare" that is also a way of life (Moraga 1981), and that builds on difference, lived experience and dynamic change. Given similarities in the characteristics of sympoietic systems and the tactics and approaches described by Sandoval, their potential application in other situations is worthy of further exploration.

As a final example, I consider work that I have been involved in recently. The notion of praxis and planning as activities involving a broad constituency have lead me to view this work as an aspect of planning and decision making. Building on the notion of 'civics' (e.g. Dempster and Nelson 2001, Nelson 1993) as bringing people together to exchange ideas and learn from each other, we have been holding "civic dialogues" on topics of current interest. Each of us involved in planning these events has contributed a somewhat different understanding to their manifestation. For me, both the intention of the dialogues and the process of their planning and manifestation are based on the theoretical discussion presented here and previously. For example, the conceptualization of distributed information and control, the need for recognizing and learning from difference, and the concern that directed focus leads to development of barriers have all contributed to their design. Contrary to a typical planning process, the intent in the dialogues, as well as workshops I was involved in previously, is *not* to arrive at consensus or 'solve a problem' but rather to provide an opportunity for the expression of divergent views as a means of leaning and exploration about many issues. These issues may include those that are generally considered contentious and certainly those that seem intractable. Individuals are then left to apply what they learn in their own way in their own circumstances as agents of change in the most distributed sense. The planning of previous workshops was also based on the intermingling of systems and planning theory as well as my deepening understanding of epistemological and ethical considerations. While the 'success'

of events which are planned to have no specific outcome except for their manifestation is perhaps a little tricky to assess, the simplest evaluation may be whether people came, whether they learned something that might influence future decisions and whether they developed any new connections. Feedback from these events suggests that each of these have occurred. Another notion that emerges from this discussion is that multiple approaches to multiple challenges involving multiple people with multiple perspectives, may – in some circumstances – be the most promising direction to proceed.

RADICAL PRAXIS – FINAL(?) EXPRESSION

Life is praxis (action) and not poiesis (production).

(Aristotle, *Politics* in Barker 1958: 10)

These two papers have covered a wide range of ideas, insights and applications. For me, they represent a broadening of my understanding of my academic/planner/citizen self-in-the-world and of the range and variety of interpretations and explanations that exist. Planning is generally considered to be a professional discipline or field, oriented toward practice – and planning theorists are subsequently often criticized for being too abstract. While both sides of the theory-practice arguments typically acknowledge the need for both, they do not necessarily address the interconnection. My initial interest in the concept of *praxis* arose from its attention to this very point: the intermixing of theory and action. This subsequently leads to consideration of reflexivity as an essential aspect of any activity or practice. As illustrated by the initial quotes from Hempel and Beck another concern is the degree to which ‘planning,’ management and decision-making occur outside of the formally recognized processes. This was the other aspect that attracted me to the notion of praxis – and perhaps especially radical praxis – its description as the defining quality of being human. The complexity of interconnections and influences among individuals, groups and cultures as well as among humans, others and their environments defy detailed or accurate description. Yet in order to interact – myself with others, ourselves with our environments – we need some level of understanding; some means for conceptualizing the complexity in order to enable appropriate decisions as best we can. While this discussion has pointed out that such conceptualizations and decisions will be continually problematic, it has also provided some tools and cautions for coping with the complexity.

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