HOW MUCH DO WE CARE ABOUT PROGRESSIVE AND RADICAL PRACTICE?*

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Many years ago, in the late 1970s or so, John Friedmann wrote a short note in the Planners Network newsletter to appeal for fresh work in planning theory that would address issues of progressive planning. Working on my dissertation in Berkeley at the time, I took a deep breath, wrote to him and got lucky: I found him to be a generous and encouraging critic who sent pages of comments on the thesis chapters I'd sent him-all of this even though we'd never met, and wouldn't meet, as it turned out, for another year or two. We then met a few months after a striking moment in the first course I taught at U.C. Santa Cruz, when I'd discovered that his daughter had been taking one of my classes. «Oh» she said to me one day after class, «You said you'd studied urban planning at Berkeley, isn't that right. Well, my dad teaches urban planning – maybe you've heard of him?».

«Friedmann?» I thought to myself, before I gasped, «Do you mean to say your father's John Friedmann?!».

«Yeah» she said, and as she asked: «Have you heard of him?». I burst out laughing, «Of course, and I've been lucky enough to have been writing back and forth to him a bit over the last year and more as I finished my dissertation».

But my other debts to the Planners Network – for solidarity, information, links to on-going work – go far beyond that correspondence, as I noted in *Planning in the Face of Power* long ago. At that time, radical planning theory pretty much referred to what we called "the theory of the state", and Althusserians fought with students of Ralph Miliband and both tried to refine and extend James O'Connor's analysis of state activities oriented to legitimation and accumulation.

What was missing, it seemed to me, was not any progressive sense that a quarter of the U.S. population lived in poverty, that racism and sexism were both vicious home-grown diseases, or that (are you ready for it?) "planning is political" or that equally obviously (brace yourself!) "power matters"! If anything, all *too many* progressive "analyses" of planning cases just *ended* forcefully, if increasingly unsurprisingly, with last paragraphs proclaiming earnestly that we progressive readers now had to deal with politics, now had to deal with power. What was much less obvious or clear in those earlier days of PN was just *how* we might think about, imagine, strategize, or develop a progressive planning practice that made some day to day, pragmatic and not only utopian sense. The perpetual rediscovery of politics and power was getting old even in PN's early days.

I don't know, actually, how much further along we are today, since we still have probably ten if not twenty rediscoveries of inequality, power, and politics for every one progressive analysis that explores or investigates, or practically and not just rhetorically "interrogates", how progressive planners, "in" the state or "outside" of it, might act or organize or resist or build coalitions in their everyday practices with others. We are still far better – if I can put this with an edge – at broad and

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descriptive *complaint* than we are at strategically sharp and institutionally focused *critique*.

Tempting as it might be, it's too easy, ethically and intellectually, for us to point out once again that "the powerful win", that the old boys manipulate "participation" as Sherry Arnstein showed so obviously, that planning involves irreconcilable "antagonisms". That's the easy part, an indulgence in truisms that are almost as boring as they are not yet helpful.

The hard part, and the job of progressives, is not just to keep pointing out the obvious but to *show how* any of us, with allies, in movements, in coalitions, in communities or regions or broader networks, might actually do the work *not just to talk* about rosy ideas of equity or justice – but *to achieve or at least move toward* those outcomes and to defend and protect and maintain those outcomes as well. It's a waste of our time to argue for "the idea of justice" if we can't say anything about how to achieve more just outcomes and how to defend them. Process without outcome is pointless; outcome without process is defenseless – if not a pious hope then gone tomorrow if no-one will organize to defend it.

As the "theory of the state" waned, the integration of process and outcome took a new form and was then translated into dozens of languages in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The chord that Freire sounded was one that recognized structural inequality and class power at the very same time that he taught so clearly that consciousness and action mattered. Dialogue for Freire had nothing to do with any search for perfect understanding: it was about the potentially transformative politics of language or organizing that

enabled one person's speech (not simply their "words") actually to change another person's sense of recognition or humiliation, sense of hope or resignation, sense of politics and questions ("who owns the land?"). Here in practice, dialogue, or critique, or progressive education was a realm of possibility, not one of fatalism. Freire was so widely translated not because he was a utopian, not because he wrote about "communication", which he did, but because he so simply and elegantly contrasted two very practical modes of action, two very practical modes of learning, two very practical processes that he dubbed, "the banking" model and the "problem-posing" model of critical education. His analysis was not one more complaint about the mind-numbing destructiveness of banking "education"; it was instead a critique that showed the real possibilities of a problem-posing pedagogy, real political opportunities within real structures of power, ideology, class and institutional settings.

Freire integrated a sense of action and interaction, a style of organizing, with a broader structural framework of political institutions and systematic bias. So he wrote, both movingly and critically, «Any situation in which some men prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence» (Freire, 1970, p. 73).

That insight expresses as powerfully as anyone has, I believe, not just the promise and the precarious vulnerability of democratic politics, but also the normative pragmatist agenda of John Dewey in *The Public and Its Problems*. To disrupt or prevent or systematically bias other people's abilities to inquire with others about who they can be, how they can live, how WE can remake our worlds – that strikes at the heart of political freedom, at the heart of the conditions of any actually achievable justice.

Now only because Martin Krieger at Berkeley had dared to violate planning as usual in its economism and fascination with rational choice and collective action did I find myself accepted, before writing my dissertation, into Hanna Pitkin's political theory seminar. She'd told all the social science students but for those in political theory that they wouldn't be able to enroll, but when I appealed after class that I was a planning student, she raised an eyebrow and said to me: «OK, *you* can stay. I've always wanted a student of Martin's».

I had little idea of what she meant, but I was willing to be a guinea pig in her class if it meant that I could study the politics of language with her – especially because she had promised to bring together broader, traditional political theory with the enacted pragmatism of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the performative analyses of John Austin. I couldn't explain those issues very well at that time to my friends studying the theory of the state, but I did soon find that it wasn't just Freire who was interested in linking speech, performance and question-posing to ideology, power and structure: so too was a German theorist named Jürgen Habermas.

My interest in Habermas depended substantially on his *integrating* Austin (doing things with words) with Steven Lukes and Murray Edelman (power as selective attention, agenda-setting and hegemonic talk and practices) into a critique of ideology and (as the title of Trent Schroyer's book put it) the critique of domination (Schroyer, 1973). That linkage of performance and practice to issues of power and structure had drawn me to Pitkin's class too. However counter to prevailing academic culture it was, my interest in Habermas had virtually nothing to do with the side room of his house that used so-called "counterfactual" (for the sake of argument not fact) suppositions or were framed by his debt to Kant. I wouldn't know an "ideal speech situation" if it bit me, and since it's a counterfactual idea, a deliberately imagined fantasy, not a desirable goal, that won't happen either. But I didn't realize, early on, how much my pragmatic reading of Habermas challenged (and continues to challenge) the popular and

often shallow misinterpretations of another part of this work.

What mattered here (for my purposes) was that Habermas provided the intellectual working out (to be further refined, critiqued, transformed, of course) of Freire's radical pedagogy, of Freire's critique of education that went so far beyond any complaint about contemporary education. The work of *critique* shows how a practical alternative to existing institutions can work; *complaint* tells us once again how deplorable actual institutions are, but it leaves us up the creek without a paddle to do anything to seek justice.

But if we put Freire and Dewey together, we could try to develop and explore both their emphases on action and speech, performance and performativity as well as the ways such action – which I referred to as the "organizing" or dis-organizing of attention – enacted power and resistance, contributed to social status and social reproduction, to movement building and mobilization or cooling-out and pacification. Freire and Dewey (as a critic of mere pluralist politics) showed how popular learning could challenge capitalist/neo-liberal institutional structures; Habermas and Austin and Lukes and Giddens and others provided even better analytic tools to examine potentially progressive (or alternatively critique regressive or repressive) practices in day-to-day work.

I've tried in a string of recent publications to draw some

strands of this work together under the banner of a "critical pragmatism" – a pragmatism not of expediency, not of disjointed incrementalism, not of serving the old boys, but one of thinking explicitly and practically – not just as a matter of good intentions – about inclusion and legitimation, about learning and not just presuming what's possible or impossible, about not quitting too early because of "politics" and inequalities of power. I use the term "critical pragmatism" as a challenge to progressive planning accounts and theories because we need more than ever good work that articulates a diverse array of progressive practices, *actual human practices* and not just egalitarian or respectful good intentions that might give "the idea of justice" a heartfelt, sincere aspirational content.

Only recently did I come to formulate this challenge to rhetorically radical or progressive planners and allied planning theorists and analysts in a way that many non-theorists will understand. We can think of the challenge this way. There's a dirty little secret of planning theory and of progressive planning theory in particular – and the secret is this: somebody's got to do the work. Somebody's got to do the work of radical planning, and if a so-called radical or progressive planning theory doesn't give us a clear sense of the practices it involves, then that "theory" will make the music of one hand clapping. No account of radical practice, no radical "theory" worth the name. Somebody's got to do the work: organizing, building relationships, questioning or articulating ideas of justice and injustice, and much, much more.

We can talk about our goals and our ideals of justice and beauty and community and recognition in more refined ways, it's true. But if all we can do is talk about how we *ought* to treat each other without paying real attention to how we might actually act today to achieve those noble ends, we should not be surprised when more and more people will ask «But what can we do to get there?», We should not be surprised if readers, or students, or colleagues object and come to distrust practice-free, so-called "progressive" or "radical" theorizing. If we don't address the diversity of real practices seeking pragmatically to achieve more justice, more beauty, more sustainability, more dignity, more kindness in our real lives, critical readers will rightly be tempted to think that we've traded in day-to-day politics for a facile rhetoric of outcomes, that we've traded in do-able practices and praxis for heart-warming pieties.