Planning Just Futures

Edited by Marisa A. Zapata and Lisa K. Bates

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INTERFACE

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Planning Just Futures: An Introduction

Marisa A. Zapata [iD]

Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, USA

In 2020, without much thinking I said 'yes' to working on an *Interface* about planning just futures. Futures planning is at least, to some degree, a hopeful activity, and I had agreed, implicitly, to find other people who think a lot about futures and planning during a less than inspirational time. An enduring pandemic had swept across the world, most acutely affecting poor people and people of color. At the same time, in the United States, some of the largest civil uprisings in recent history, protesting police violence against Black people, were taking place

Writing about futures and optimism for change has felt absurd at times in the malaise of COVID-19, protest, and politics. I found myself talking with contributors about what it means to talk about hope in the face of such sadness and loss, to still know that we must push towards the just future. I encouraged authors, and myself, to reject the idea of producing falsely optimistic pieces, but to share visions of hope, ideas for paths forward, and reflections on now. As a less optimistic person, I appreciated what other contributors shared, and how our different ways of thinking might assemble some type of guide for those planning scholars and practitioners looking for the – what happens now?

In the writings, you will not find rose-colored glasses. You will also not find recommendations to stop doing the work of reaching just futures. Instead we make suggestions, offer insights, and ask questions about what it means to engage in our futures at this moment in time. Each essay offers its unique contribution, with several themes emerging across them. I want to highlight the ones that have kept me thinking, and hoping for planning scholarship and practice.

When we make plans, we choose whose futures matter. Historically that choice has been people in power. To plan for justice, we must consciously make a decision to plan *with* people who have not been in power. This means showing up for people and asking what they imagine for their futures. We have to reconsider our assumptions, and the data, tools, and techniques we utilize. They were developed and built to serve an elite that had envisioned a future that depended on the exploitation of others. People are not disconnected for other living beings. When we choose marginalized people to support, we must also consider their natural and built environment. We must reconnect our present lives with nature – justice can only happen if the natural environment is with us in the future.

Early professional planning practice, and even much of it today, has considered time to move in a linear fashion where each plan builds on the progress of the previous one. What do we miss, and more importantly who do we fail to consider when past leads to present leads to future in an easy hand-off from one to another? How can we consider both shorter and longer and even longer time frames when making plans, and put them into motion together in a way that privileges the knowledge and experiences of people of color?

Much of planning practice today pushes back against utopia and dystopia in planning. But the act of imagining, of dreaming, opens up our minds to previously unconsidered ideas. Utopia and dystopia create spaces for emotion – for hopes to be created and fears to be shared. Emotion should

be at the heart of planning for justice. Rage, frustration, and anger might come to mind first. But planning for just futures also means loving your community, caring for others who may not be like you, and helping people in need. When we focus on the utopian and dystopian imaginings from people living with injustice, a focus on the plausible plans and calls for radical actions from marginalized people, planners can become part of the fight for just futures.

Notes on Contributor

Marisa A. Zapata is an associate professor and director of the Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative at Portland State University. She is committed to achieving spatially – based racial justice by supporting communities to act for equitable futures. Dr Zapata believes land-use planning expresses our societal values.

ORCID

Marisa A. Zapata http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7135-7459

Indigenous Planning: Constellating with Kin and Urban Futurity

Laura Harjo

University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma, USA

Indigenous people make up 370–500 million of the world's population, yet still do not have the platform to articulate their formidable knowledge in shaping the future of the city (United Nations, 2021). The prevailing literature is the so-called expert outsider looking in at what is best for Indigenous peoples and is not sufficient for including Indigenous peoples in shaping Urban Futures. However, Indigenous planning scholars have grappled with community and temporality, for example, seven generation planning, walking backwards into the future, speculating futures, viscerality, and foreclosed futures of Native erasure (Dorries, 2017; Harjo, 2012; Jojola, 2013; Matunga, 2013; Sweet, 2021). We need approaches theorized from Indigenous peoples' lived experiences by Indigenous peoples, but, even before taking that step, we need to ask the right questions about futures, time, and the gaps that planners can detail and solve.

While there is research on Indigenous planning and futurity, there is even less written by Indigenous researchers in the planning field; this is imperative, because only an Indigenous researcher can know and feel felt knowledge. It remains an outsider-looking-in point of view, narrating Indigenous existence to Indigenous communities. For example, in 2020, Barry and Agyeman provided a review of studies that intersected with Indigenous communities, however, many of the authors were not Indigenous researchers. While there is a dearth of research on Indigenous futurity in the planning field by Indigenous researchers, Critical Indigenous Studies is rife with futurist inquiry by Indigenous scholars, such as Grace Dillon, Elizabeth LaPensée, Eve Tuck, and Noelani Goodyear- Ka'ōpua, who are addressing futurity in literature, technology, and community engagement. By expanding on these initial inquiries, I discuss the role of futurist thinking but

consider it within the context of kin-space-time (Harjo, 2019a). I move away from a linear order of past/present/future and train my focus on Indigenous kinship relationships. In this way, I move toward a framework for understanding how community operates socially, spatially, temporally, and cast this as kin-space-time. We are always in a present temporality, held in the interstice between past and future; however, we are guided by ethical, and cultural responsibilities to kin who inhabit many temporalities. Inch argues that communities lament that they sit and plan and are told "not yet", and the contribution of my work is to show how communities are living out the unactivated possibilities of their ancestors right now – they are living out old futures – which is a form of futurity (Harjo, 2019; Inch & Crookes, 2016; Lothian, 2018).

First, I wish to begin with my professional and personal responsibilities in which to situate my work. My primary draw to the scholarly inquiry and practice of futurity is my responsibility to my community, Muscogee (Creek) Nation. I grew up in Oklahoma within Indigenous spaces, specifically – Mvskoke (Creek) and Cherokee reservations, then ventured off to various states for college, work, Indigenous events, and visiting my kinship network. Growing up, these contexts placed in sharp relief the political and economic ways in which my community and my extended family were subjected to discrete and structural racism. Sometimes, the discrete racism involved overt actions, physical and verbal attacks against Indigenous people – punches, kicks, and harsh names. Other times the structural racism was a low idling subjugation. For example, in the Tulsa Oklahoma area, Indigenous people were and are still underemployed; they are overeducated for a low skilled job. I saw this happening to my college educated relatives, and I saw it happening to myself, even though I was actively pursuing higher education.

Despite this situation, it also placed in sharp relief the ways in which Indigenous communities across Creek Nation, urban and rural, have continued to thrive, through their relationships with one another, as performed through social relations and ways of coming together. Kinship is the crux to taking care of community and the larger community. There are many concepts that support this practice of kinship and community caretaking; Andrew Jolivétte (2015) calls this radical love, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, Leanne Betasomasake Simpson (2013), calls this decolonial love and living a life that is full, and Cherokee and Mvskoke scholars, Jenell Navarro & Kimberly Robertson (2020), call this radical kinship (Harjo, 2019). Radical kinship making is a practice in which nonblood kin are relied upon for support, love, and relationality, especially within the diaspora.

Mvskoke people (Mvskokvlke) call this vnokeckv (a-no-getch-ka), which is love and compassion. I build upon Simpson's work of 'constellating' and conceive of this as the ways in which a community stays in movement and stays in conversation with relatives that have lived in material form before them and relatives that will manifest in the future. Stating my responsibility to my kinship network or stating a land acknowledgement are both concrete examples of constellating with kin (Simpson, 2017). Kinship and compassion are governing values in many Indigenous communities. However, when non-natives offer a land acknowledgement, is this a simple statement or is it operating to begin and maintain a relationship with Indigenous communities?

What does it look like to ask the right Indigenous planning questions? It begins with examining Mvskoke community through a futurity lens, which allows the community to focus on speculating on a future that their ancestors desired, that they desire in a current temporality, and build something that caretakes our community for future relatives. Ancestors and future relatives are part of the community – not in a conventional linear way – sort of the trope of "honoring the past while looking towards the future", however, for my own community it is the

idea that our people have lived and continue to live through the wreck of genocidal policies and that our ancestors wishes were cut short. The notion of futurity challenges a conventional reckoning of time and the future, and pushes us to create right now – in the present moment – that which our ancestors, we, and future relatives desire. As community builders, we often ask tactical sets of questions to develop a concrete plan, and then tell people that they are going to have to sit and wait, knowing that conditions will not improve in their time: their dreams will be for someone else. In other words, we tell them "not yet". We cannot say "not yet" (Inch & Crookes, 2016). I am not eschewing a long view of community; I am merely saying that futurity does not have to be limited to a future temporality, in which we must wait to create and get to the place where we want to be. Indeed, there are a range of ways in which we are already enacting Mvskoke futurity to shift community conditions.

My operating definition of futurity is the enactment of theories and practices that activate our ancestors' unrealized possibilities, the act of living out the futures we wish for in a contemporary moment, and the creation of the conditions for these futures. Theories and practices of kinship are one way of activating our ancestors' unrealized possibilities and holding spaces for future relatives. For example, the ways that community convenes in urban areas might include "inter-tribal" conventions. In Tulsa that might be hand games – sports tournaments like softball or basketball, and pow-wows. This yields ephemeral geographies of Indigenous community. Remembrance convenings for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls also operate as another type of geography – an ephemeral and meta-physical spatiality in which a community maintains dialogue and a responsibility to their kin that have transitioned to the spiritual realm. In many ways conventional planning is not prepared to have a respectful planning process when grappling the constituent elements of Indigenous futurity. An Indigenous futurity that invokes kinship, meta-physical realms, responsibility to kin, while reckoning with time that is not linear, and communities that are spatially fixed. Kinship disrupts linear structuring of time in community – kinship is given primacy over the necro-chronologies of history that mark time through loss and tragedy.

Western spatial imaginaries are not complex enough to imagine and carry out Indigenous futurities, and therefore Indigenous communities conceiving of Indigenous geographies is critical. Thus, spatial grammars enter the Indigenous planning discourse, such as geographies, space, place, kin-space-time envelopes, and scale. Mvskoke spaces are not limited to the federally assigned reservation area and cannot be made fully legible within the measurement geographies of Cartesian mapping. Understanding Mvskoke spaces and Indigenous spaces involves understanding that they are also social spaces that might not ever be fully legible to outsiders. Mvskoke geographies are instantiated through multiple dimensions that include, but are not limited to, terrestrial, virtual, spiritual, metaphysical, and celestial realms. The ways in which we relate to our kin is our connection to the realms that constitute the geographies of our kin across many space-time configurations.

Kin-space-time is one way of understanding a dimension of Mvskoke geographies that is predicated on how we relate to our kin. A kin-space-time envelope is a spatial object that is a singular event, while a constellation of kin-space-time envelopes, connect and triangulate across many relationships, geographies, and moments to constitute spatialized Indigenous futurities. The spaces are relational; they are open to change predicated on the positionality of the individual or community. An envelope is a spatial object that is relative and changes. Kin-space-time envelopes unblock bounded spatial interactions. How we think about where Mvskoke space exists is not relegated to the Mvskoke reservation in Oklahoma. We can imagine

Figure 1. "Mississippian Black Metal Girl on a Friday Night", Artist Hotvlkuce Harjo.

a way to plan and enact community, right now, that honors ancestors, and considers our future relatives – and it does not have to be bounded by the inside/outside state demarcated reservations and reserves meant to contain Indigenous people. A kin-space-time constellation is a cluster of kin-space-time envelopes that render new spatial configurations that validate our knowledges and experiences. A constellation of kin-space-time envelopes might involve a Mvskoke funeral where practices such as young children to elders singing soul sustaining

songs that our relatives sang during their forced removal from Alabama to Oklahoma, or sitting up all night visiting, remembering, and grieving as a family, these are past/present/future triangulations of relationality across many spaces and moments.

What does it mean to plan for spaces where a palimpsest of deep relations to the land exist, and where Indigenous place names have been exchanged for European ones? How would a planner begin to have a conversation with an Indigenous community about contested urban space? Mvskoke places are locations that are imbued with meaning to a community; however, Mvskoke places often exist as a palimpsest, a layer of Mvskoke geographies and spatial meaning hidden by several layers of settler geographies. A land acknowledgement can never assuage the deep Mvskoke loss and might do more to insult than to honor the original people if it is simply a statement without further relationships or actions.

In the Mvskoke homelands of Alabama and Georgia, several layers of settler places obscure Mvskoke tribal towns, and the memory and cartographic representation of Mvskoke tribal towns have been covered with counties and municipalities named after white men, such as Lee, Russell, Bullock Chambers, where Mvskoke towns, Koweta, Cusseta once existed in full autonomy. Mvskoke places are situated within measured geographies and imbued with particularity, time, and location, such as a tribal town location or ceremonial grounds. This is where it is so critical to allow Indigenous communities to carry out a knowledge production process on their own, through collaging, or creating a map or a zine to surface their community knowledge.

Mvskoke places are not only based on the land but are also embodied by the land. Indigenous futurity involves processes that are relational, and reading Mvskoke art as a text can assist in demonstrating connections to a spatial imaginary. Reading Indigenous-produced art as a text also points to representations of many locations, relatives – and the value of kinship and relationality.

Hotvlkuce Harjo's work illustrates an embodied Mississippian-era kin-space-time envelope. Hotvlkuce is a queer, non-binary interdisciplinary artist who applies ancestral knowledge and practices in their artwork and in doing so produces a space of futurity by depicting ancestral tattooing in their illustrations, we see contemporary urban Mvskoke people with Mvskoke tattoos. Hotvlkuce states "Traditional tattooing with Mvskoke (Creek), Southeastern, and Mississippian cultures was an integral part of identity formation" (Harjo, 2020, p. 291). Further, Hotvlkuce is guided by community knowledge in urban diasporic spaces, invoking their grandfather's teachings and memories of Mvskoke values and of tattoos. Drawing on a deep study of Mississippian art, they stylize facial and finger markings in a contemporary context, living the futurity of their Mississippian ancestors as (see Figure 1, "Mississippian Black Metal Girl on a Friday Night"). Here, embodied Mvskoke space, is spatialized futurity and is a nod to ancestral roots, and Black metal which operates as a "place of refuge for many Native generations due to its existence going against nonnormative systems" (Harjo, 2020, p. 291).

The cost of not understanding how Indigenous communities manifest – right now, means that we plan communities based on theories and practices that do not align with who they are or who they want to be. Communities manifest in ways that are not bound up in constitutional governments in fixed geographies. There is more than one way of knowing community. Therefore, within planning we must focus on the ways the communities and their concomitant geographies manifest. This requires understanding values that guide communities, understanding how communities convene in diasporic settings, understanding and surfacing Indigenous legacies and relations to land especially in contested urban areas, and recognizing the concept of kin-space-space and how it surfaces in places, convenings, and artwork. It is from these spatial

imaginaries and kinship networks across time and space, that Indigenous communities tend to and enact their futurity.

Notes on Contributor

Laura Harjo is a Mvskoke scholar and associate professor in Native American Studies and affiliated faculty in the Regional and City Planning program at the University of Oklahoma. She is the author of the award-winning book, *Spiral to the Stars: Mvskoke Tools of Futurity* (University of Arizona Press, 2019).

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Planning: Reclaiming the Dream of Better Futures

Lucie Laurian

The University of Iowa, Iowa City, USA

Planning as Intentionality Toward Better Futures v. Planning as Habitus

There are moments in the history of planning when grand visions of better futures emerge, and planning paradigms shift. Examples of major pivots include: ideas that cities need public parks and that streets need trees, the sanitation-social-tenement-housing reforms movements, the baroque-beaux-arts city beautiful/city efficient movements, the garden cities and new satellite towns (British or French, townhouses or towers in the park), the modernist/socialist ideal of affordable quality housing for all, the participatory/communicative turn demanding direct democracy and inclusion into decision-making, the transition toward living sustainably within our ecological means. Whether they emerge from social movements or from the ruling elites of their time, those shifts are grounded in dreams of better long-term futures, pushing against the seemingly intractable forces of their times. They diffused through major efforts at persuasive storytelling about the future (Throgmorton, 1992, 1996) through speeches, manifestos, World Fairs, Expos and Exhibitions (Patrick Geddes' 'Cities Exhibition', Bel Geddes' Futurama), Charters (Athens, New Urbanist), documentaries, Ted Talks, and social media.

However, there are *many more* moments when planning decisions appear disconnected from those dreams of better futures. Everyday incremental decisions are not without direction (there is always an underlying vision, implicit or explicit), but rather grounded in the immediate need to act *now*: people must –and have the right to– live, produce, consume, trade, build, and move about safely. Everyday decisions can be blind to distant pasts and futures. For instance: the defining gridiron plan of all American cities and most cities in colonized nations is a byproduct of efficient land distribution to (usually white) settlers and investors, itself modelled after colonial forts and towns, themselves modelled after Roman, and earlier Greek, colonial cities. European settlers in 17th century Miami or 19th century Los Angeles likely didn't ask whether the grid was the best way to lay out a city. The grid had already become the urban habitus: ingrained, unquestioned, obviously best and most efficient. They perhaps saw the possibility of infinite development as a positive feature. They probably didn't question the wisdom of creating center-less and edge-less cities.[1] Similarly, everyday planning decisions tend to follow habitual, unquestioned practices, relatively stable ideas of what is "good", what the market "wants", what is efficient, and what existing laws and codes allow, i.e. a collective city-making habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), more responsive to path dependencies than thoughtful intentions to bring about better futures.

Between Colonization, Habitus and Failures of the Imagination: Where Did the Good Future Go?

In addition to the disproportionate weight of immediate needs and path dependencies in everyday planning decisions, decisions' time horizons are often disjointed from their impacts. Short to mid-range plans (3 to 5, 10 to 20 years) create structures that last centuries and millennia: the life expectancy of most buildings and trees is 80–100 years, and road layouts are quasi-permanent (Laurian, 2019).[2] Short to mid-range planning time frames makes sense from pragmatic and mixed-

scanning perspectives as they reduce uncertainty, but they also artificially reduce the range of possible futures we may imagine.

More importantly, the distant future is systematically devalued by tragedies of the commons, externalities passed onto future generations, and by the economic norms of devaluating the future when calculating Return-on-Investments and the time value of money. The future is colonized, "prospected, produced and polluted" (Adam, 2006, p. 125; Laurian & Inch, 2019). Ideas of *better* futures, perhaps because they are intrinsically radical, are particularly subject to colonization. In the context of Afrofuturism, Dery (1993) asks:

> Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures? Furthermore, isn't the unreal estate of the future already owned by the technocrats, futurologists, streamliners, and set designers – white to a man – who have engineered our collective fantasies?

Similarly, in the context of India's colonization, Arundhati Roy (1997) writes:

> Our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of wars. A war that captures dreams and re-dream them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves. (p. 53)

This colonization of the future, Anna Livia Brand (2018) asks us to "Say its Name – Planning is the White Spatial Imaginary" and calls on the liberating power of imagination "in order to plan free spaces, envision new radical possibilities and have freedom dreams" (Kelley, 2002, as cited in Brand, 2018).

The goal is not visioning a walkable city or equal access to housing, health and education opportunities in a 2-hour or 2-day charette. It is to about freeing dreams and opening futures. Yet, for reasons of habitus, expediency, and colonial strategies, planning may have lost its good distant futures. When looking elsewhere for inspiration, we find popular culture, science fiction, and literary works replete with near-future dystopias, from Blade Runner to Black Mirror, and even to the (progressively titled) *A People's Future of the United States* (LaValle & Adams, 2019). Even if sci-fi dystopias are mere platforms for critiques of the present, the absence of great and plural futures in our collective psyche remains a gaping wound. Wakanda, of course, is the salient exception. Corbin's (2018) enthusiastic "Wakanda! Take the Wheel! Visions of a Black Green City" taps into Wakanda's Green/Black society and aesthetics – somehow bracketing the seemingly medieval practice of dispute resolution via hand-to-hand yield-or-die combat between male chiefs.

In response to the challenge of imagining good distant futures, my colleagues Scott Spak, Steve Spears and I developed and taught a course titled *Eight Generational Planning: Envisioning Cities for Year 2228*.[3] We asked students to imagine Iowa City in 2228 – the year Captain Kirk will be born in Iowa. We lifted one constraint and imposed another. In this future, clean, illimited energy is a problem solved (e.g. with Wakanda's vibranium), so wind turbines or solar panels are moot. This future city must be resilient, regenerative, inclusive and just. Students set to imagine the city of 200 years into the future, not unlike the participants of Alex McDowell's World Building Institute workshops (Miller, 2018).

Our students (undergraduate, white, mainly from Iowa working and middle-class backgrounds, some first generations in college, some non-binary-gender-conforming), imagined: rooftop gardens and vertical farms; elevated commuter trains (a blend of Wuppertal's 1901 Suspension Railway and 1950s Japanese bullet trains); clean and fast long distance travel modes for tourism; green and efficient buildings connected by a smart grid managed by a very smart AI; and a good amount of downtown land returned to wilderness. They largely drew from history, current tropes, and improved marginally on existing systems.

When asked to describe a day in the life of 2228 residents, most woke up to some Siri-Alexa who told them the time and weather outside, commuted to work by rail, and had meetings all day. For me, that was a moment of reckoning. The colonization of dreams is not an act of colonization of "others", Black, Indians, by Whites, but a colonization of all minds, Whites included, by bigger forces (capitalism? pop culture?). When we challenged their need to work 9-5, students struggled to imagine the meaning of life without work. They settled for a new version of 'Angie's list' for bartering and volunteer jobs.

This confirmed the saying, by Jameson and/or Žižek, that "it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism" (Fisher, 2009). Our students found the end or dramatic reduction of work extraordinarily radical. It is not a new idea: Smicek and Williams (2015), and 130 years before, Larfargue (1883), imagined a post-capitalist world not driven by work, where technology replaces significant labor burdens. In the US, where identities, survival, comfort, and social standing are grounded in production and consumption activities, the end of work is so radical that it had no place in our students' dreams.

A Proposal: Forecasting from a Distant-Past Aleph to Free the Imagination, Backcasting From a Good Distant-Future to the Now

To free the imagination and enable freedom dreams (Brand, 2018), I propose a new Mixed Time Scanning *a la* Etzioni (1967), building on the added (but often unrealized) value of backcasting, on the value of finding a strong Aleph[4] (Yftachel, 2016), and on the importance of thinking *from* time rather than *about* time (Bhan's approach to pluriversal times, Bhan, 2019).

While forecasting limits the range of options considered by continuing present trends into the future, backcasting starts with an entirely open desired future, and retraces steps from that future back to the present. Backcasting has more freedom potential. Yet, since it proves so difficult to imagine good futures, the value of backcasting seems limited in practice where good futures are the goal.

I propose opening more possibilities by thinking *from* a distant-past Aleph. Alephs are "place of all places" embodying all relevant forces: colonialism, political, cultural, economic and gender dynamics. In the U.S., we could place ourselves 200 or 250 years (7 or 8 generations) in the past, say, in the 1770s at the very beginning of the US white colonial settlement, in the 1800s before the Industrial Revolution, 600 years ago before Europeans set foot in the Americas. Those would be strong Alephs: significant referentials, times of beginnings, before the current era, times dramatically different from our own, yet well documented and understood so that we can imagine them, from historical fiction, paintings, dioramas, or period-piece movies. I do not propose that we gaze *at* the past from the present (that is what historians do). Rather, I propose that we set ourselves, our imaginations, and our empathies, firmly *into* this past. We don't need much knowledge of our imaginary ancestors' language, beliefs, or personal histories. Let's just imagine the materiality of their daily lives as best we can. Dirt roads (or no roads), following river courses in canoes, nomadic settlements or log cabins, wool or deerskin clothing, hunting-gathering, the hardship of winter. The goal is not accuracy, nor a social critique of the present as Voltaire's hypothetical Huron provides. The goal is to ground ourselves far enough back in time so that the present reduces to one option among an infinity of possibilities (perhaps a strange, magical, or dramatic option) rather than an unquestioned necessity.

Now, from this perspective, let's look at the present as we know it. What do we see? Roads are paved with slick black material; buildings are very tall, hard and shiny; there is some grey stone that doesn't seem like it was cut from any quarry; vehicles are mysterious, fast and quiet, drinking some liquid from a pump but not pulled by any recognizable animal; homes are warm but we can't tell where the heat is coming from, have running water from unknown but seemingly unlimited springs; there are many

sources of illimited light everywhere; some flat images move and talk; people communicate in disem-bodied voices across walls and long distances; little objects give access to more information than any book could hold; clothing and hair come in thousands of colors; the supermarket's cereal aisle is probably indescribable. Some people seem to sit around doing things unconnected to the work of basic survival. Others work three shifts; cutting, packaging, moving stuff in fast-paced cavernous ware-houses, their children hungry despite unlimited foodstuff piled ceiling-high in mega-markets. All things unimaginable 200 years ago. How incredibly mysterious, magical and disturbing.

Let's take in the awe we experienced looking at 2021 from 1770. Let's sit in the mystery of that vision, the technological prowess that seems magical, how easy life seems, yet how painful for some. And now let's go to year 2228. What do we see? Vibranium glows blue in every home? No-one ever hungry or lacking? Streams run clear? Everybody breathes clean air, drinks clean water, eats organic food – which is now just called "food"? Milan's Bosque Verticale, also seen in Wakanda, has become the architectural norm? Skyscrapers are made of pine or bamboo? People are playing in lush flowerful parks (no mowed turf), throwing bizarre-looking frisbees around? They have strange-looking bio-engineered designer pets? Are private property and single-family homes still around, or do we enjoy living as nomads from time-shares to AirBnBs? Do human babies have puppy eyes, cat ears or furry tails? What does racial justice look like? Do people with different skin colors work together, like on 'the Enterprise', or does everyone have beige-brown skin after centuries of intermarriage? Is it hard to tell who are the males and females of the human species, or would the question of male/female not even come up, and no one seems to care about body colors, shapes, or where people come from because those categories are irrelevant?

In other words, we are now ready to envision Escobar's (2018) pluriverse:

> The collective determination toward transitions, broadly understood, may be seen as a response to the urge for innovation and the creation of new, nonexploitative forms of life, out of the dreams, desires, and struggles of so many groups and peoples worldwide … If this were to be the case, they would have to walk hand in hand with those who are protecting and redefining well-being, life projects, territories, local economies, and communities worldwide. These are the harbingers of the transition toward plural ways of making the world. (p. 7)

From this good, sustainable and just distant future we dreamed and now perhaps we can start backcasting to the present. We may be ready to begin "living out the futures we wish for in a present moment", what Harjo calls "futurity" (Harjo, 2019, 2020, p. 26).

Notes

1. In contrast, Doxiadis was thoughtful in his use of grids for Isamlabad, Riyad, and Sadr City, just as Olmsted was intentional in his use of curvilinear suburban streets.
2. 2000 year-old Roman roads are still embedded in the urban structures of many European cities, and most streets in center London, Paris or Rome already existed in some form 500 years ago. The main arteries of Boston, Atlanta, Chicago or Los Angeles will most likely remain in 500–1000 years as well.
3. The course received the 2020 ACSP/Lincoln Institute of Land Policy Curriculum Innovation Award.
4. Yftachel's (2016) Aleph epistemology is grounded in "dynamic structuralism", 'in which several central forces are identified as most powerful for a particular place and time, although these are neither stable nor perpetual" (p. 485).

Notes on Contributor

Lucie Laurian is Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, and Director of the University of Iowa School of Planning and Public Affairs. She is interested in urban natural environments, in the implementation of sustainability practices, in environmental justice, and in questions of trust and time.

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Possible Beyond Plausible: Reimagining Ourselves and Our Cities

Olivia Bina and Lavinia Pereira

Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal

Premises of Transformative Futures

We are said to be living in a time of multiple failures and crises (climate, biodiversity, health, inequality – to name a few now in the headlines) all playing out within a fast changing world. Behind the grand narratives of planetary boundaries and Anthropocene, is a world of increasing injustice and

inequitable relationships – between humans and between humans and more-than human life. If our dominant systems fail to change, the unravelling of an existential crisis seems increasingly certain. Taking this, and much else, into account, a series of global policy agendas are combining to make a strong case for transformative change, through the rethinking of the so-called 'human-nature relationship'.[5] Indeed, we might say that the 'Covid crisis' has made the case for this irresistible, as well as opening up hitherto sealed doors of possibility to alternative pasts, presents and futures.

The starting point for our reflection builds on three interconnected premises rooted in a diverse set of literature and traditions, including ecological economics and systems theory, sustainability and critical futures studies, philosophy, feminist critique, wisdom and indigenous traditions.[6] First, we understand today's challenges to be complex, but acknowledge the dominant economic system, and its frankly outlandish assumptions, as the primary cause of our 'trouble', in Donna Haraway's terminology (Haraway, 2016). Second, we view broken relationships between humans and between humans and nature, endlessly repurposed in dominant economic worldviews and theories, as the ultimate driver of the synchronous failures and multiple crises (Homer-Dixon et al., 2015). Third, we understand urban planning as a colonised expression of the same economic worldview (see Weber in this issue). We therefore see un-sustainable and un-just futures as the inexorable outcome of any anticipatory and planning effort, even when co-imagined with all the enthusiasm and hope of the ecomodernist movement, the circular economy renaissance, green/eco visions, or any number of other current policy agendas - none of which can break open those doors of possibility enough to offer the prospect of an alternative to capitalist extraction and despoilation. Nor can they therefore make 'right' what continues unwitnessed: the roots of a bitter legacy of abusive relationships between humans, and between 'us' and other critters, plant life and Earth's abiotic elements.

Yet, transform we must. And we concur with global agendas linking transformative futures to the questioning of human-nature relationships. But we want to argue for a stronger definition of transformative change, one that requires us to re-imagine, re-experience and understand ourselves as nature: as entangled in (a web of) more-than-human life. Taking courage, and a sense of purpose, from the rich intellectual and wisdom traditions mentioned above, we focus on the need to move beyond a narrow yet dominant expression of western thought: the mutilated worldview that holds humans apart from nature and that reproduces ideas of human and urban 'exceptionalism' (see Houston et al., 2018, p. 192).[7]

In the remainder of this essay we thus engage with the question of planning just and equitable futures from a perspective beyond the human-nature divide: the interconnected web of all life – plants and critters, homo sapiens included. While much ought to be said about the intrinsic merit of embracing the perspectives of all forms of life when thinking and shaping futures through planning, the aim here will be somewhat narrower and, almost, instrumental. It is intended as a shortcut, a way of breaking the multiple moulds of dominant onto-epistemologies, colonized imaginaries, and successful marginalisation of any real alternatives to linear ideas of progress and wellbeing. A thought-experiment if you wish, acknowledging the performative power of ideas and imaginaries. A sort of radical attempt at addressing two major obstacles to embracing the possible beyond the plausible: first, the decolonizing of our minds so that they can imagine futures beyond the tyranny of the plausible; second, the liberation of our desires, reduced by fears as much as mutilated worldviews, so that they might leap beyond the projection of the actual existing into the future.

'Sustainable and Just' Revisited

Thus, while we acknowledge that multiple crises require diverse responses, we take the view that re-imagining ourselves *as* nature is an onto-epistemological precondition to all other transformations,

helping us to question the range and scope of sustainable and just agency in planning. We draw in particular on two authors: First, Andreas Weber (2013) who emphasises "a singular deficiency in contemporary thought: a lack of understanding of what life is", and speaks of interconnectedness, as a web of life that is "deeply interwoven into the material, mental and emotional exchange processes that all of the more-than-human world participates in" (p. 16). Second, Rosi Braidotti's notion of 'zoe', "as the dynamic, self-organising structure of life itself [that] stands for generative vitality", a "transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains", relational assemblages beyond dualistic notions of the subject, encompassing us, all other critters and "earth as a whole" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 60).

We combine these scholars' insights under the expression of 'Zoe's Web' and propose taking such an encompassing perspective – one that celebrates the diversity of life in deep, interwoven, non-hierarchical exchanges - as a premise for redefining agency for just sustainabilities and just futures. This means moving beyond the propositions seeking to promote a better human quality of life and just futures within environmental sustainability, because they risk reproducing a version of the nature-human (ecological-cultural) divide found in the global agendas referred to above. We call instead for a space where Zoe's Web can imagine her future.

This perspective challenges most of the underlying assumptions of our dominant economic system, undermining its raison d'être. It is intrinsically diverse, relational and plural and it is precisely this radical (as in 'root', 'source')[8] shift of perspective that we feel is needed to honour the hopes and needs of transformative change, as it offers a shortcut through dominant onto-epistemologies, colonized imaginaries, and the hitherto successful marginalisation of any real alternative to a linear idea of progress and wellbeing.

Re-Imagine Ourselves to Re-Imagine Our Cities

A Zoe's Web perspective allows us to engage in a much needed thought experiment about possible futures beyond the plausible: that is, beyond the violence of there being no real alternatives to the dominant economic and socio-technical system. Can we perhaps extend the appeal by Barry and Agyeman (2020) to "try to imagine a different kind of relationship with Indigenous peoples … unlearning the epistemological and ontological foundation of planning that undermine and exclude Indigenous authorities and ways of knowing" and point to the need for a similar remaking of dominant relations between all life forms (p. 25)? There is no better place to explore such futures than in planning 'the urban', where so many of our prospects for sustainability are at stake. And yet, this perspective does not want to orient around mainstream conversations about agro-ecological urbanism, ecosystem services or nature-based solutions (Welden et al., 2021). Their merits are explored elsewhere, including in global agendas. Here we wish to take the longstanding debate between nature in the city (where nature-based solutions are currently dominating debates), and the nature of the city (Houston et al., 2018) from a Zoe's Web perspective as a means of bridging and transcending both perspectives.

Zoe's Web is alive, abundant, in constant adaptation, and intrinsically diverse. Each of these qualities opens up worlds of possibilities for 'nature' in and of cities. Our invitation to rediscover us *as* nature, as Zoe's Web, is an invitation to experience aliveness, abundance and constant adaptation in our interwoven selves and our cities. By extending co-creation processes to relate to the imaginaries and desires of all critters, plants and Earth's abiotic elements – or Zoe's Web – we point to the rapidly accumulating western science that is now discovering these qualities (aliveness, abundance, adaptation) and their infinite potential on its own terms. It is an invitation to focus on

the creative potential of Zoe's Web qualities, unmasking the limiting (even dystopian) narrative at the heart of orthodox economic theory: scarcity (Bina, 2013).

Extending co-creation allows us to revisit the economic imperative – one of our premises – where linear progress (gross domestic product growth in scarcity) is replaced by ideas of a pluriverse (Kothari et al., 2019), of reciprocity and honorable harvest (Kimmerer, 2013), of regenerative cultures (Wahl, 2016) and of co-species or critters collaboration (Haraway, 2016). In summary, we point to a journey towards the celebration of all life, where co-imagining the biocultural conditions conducive to life and its diversity *is* what matters. So we envisage inviting trees, for example, to co-imagine futures because it is now western-scientifically official: they are caring, sentient and wise, emitting chemical signals reminiscent of our own neurotransmitters (Simard, 2021).

In Practice – Three Horizons and 'Third Space'

We envisage an alternative route to the planning of just and sustainable futures, through the transgressive exploration of co-imagined Zoe's Web urban futures, and reverse journeys backcasting towards our troubled present, to enable the planning of pathways for their possible realisation. In bringing all these threads into conversation we aim to strike a balance between a limiting instrumentality that uses futures for strategic foresight and planning (Miller, 2018) and which too often paves the way to a rigid control of more-than-human life, and the abandonment of any prospect of collaborative agency to envision and realise desired change. A good starting point might be an adapted version of the 'three horizons' approach (https://www.h3uni.org/practices/foresight-three-horizons/) from the perspective of Zoe's Web and its regenerative qualities. Horizon 1 allows us to extrapolate current trends, knitting the mindsets of critters, plants and abiotic elements into our understandings of the practices driving change, and identifying both what is dying and emerging to seed hope in the present. Horizon 3 calls for a co-imagining of Zoe's Web desired urban futures, engaging seditiously with the wider realm of the possible discussed above. Finally, Horizon 2 introduces backcasting, allowing a bridge between desired urban futures and planning, identifying practical pathways on the way to the futures co-imagined in Horizon 3.

Envisaging this process to take place from the perspective of Zoe's Web, which widens the range and scope of sustainable and just agency, we appeal to the rich literature on co-design/co-production/co-creation. In particular we draw on Turnbull's (2003) notion of a 'third space' to engage with the horizons: an 'interstitial space' created through negotiation, allowing cross-fertilization between different cultural or knowledge systems, where "the notion of a single transcendent rationality" and the forcing of consensus or even integration, are rejected (p. 233). Instead, "the hidden power assumptions about the kinds of selves, objects and their relations that is presumed in the moral order, have to be allowed to become visible" (Turnbull, 2003, p. 234). A 'sharing space' for cooperation and co-evolution despite dissension, in this case, between trees, sapiens, neighbours and bees?

And yet we warn against embracing the notion of a 'third space' as panacea. It is not and, inevitably, it suffers from all the obstacles that have haunted others searching for sustainable and just futures: such processes and spaces need collaboration, humility, trust, reconciliation, time, and crucially, they are simply a means, and as such will depend on the worldviews (including beliefs, values and attitudes) that move each actor involved (Slaughter, 2012). Still, simply laying out the possibility of co-creating *Zoe's Web Urban Futures* seems a somehow revolutionary act: a step towards breaking the multiple dominant moulds gripping our urban imaginaries and precluding transformative change. Allowing trees, bees and other critters agency can, we believe, help.

Notes

5. See for example: for sustainable development (United Nations, General Assembly, 2015), for the environment and ecosystems (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021; United Nations Environment Programme & Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2020), and for the urban (UN-Habitat, 2012, 2015).
6. Here are three stepping stones to this contribution, with details of the traditions we lean on: the economy (Bina, 2013), nature (Pereira & Bina, 2020), and urban futures (Bina et al., 2020).
7. This is where we depart somewhat from the global policy agendas mentioned earlier, where the search for a new relationship with nature is largely framed in terms of reconnecting parts, rather than understanding humans and other-than humans as continuity of life forms. The implication is that a significant part of the imagined (and planned) futures are about how to co-design with nature, and find nature-inspired or nature-based solutions to socio-economic-technical problems. For an insight into the complexity and nuances (see Dasgupta, 2021).
8. Although radical nature would be experienced as such mainly by those holding (consciously or unconsciously) the dominant worldview.

Notes on Contributors

Olivia Bina is Principal Researcher at the University of Lisbon, Assistant Professor at Geography & Resource Management, Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Fellow of the World Academy of Art and Science. Through interdisciplinarity she searches for pathways that balance ever-smarter growth and technology with a recovery of the unlimited potential of human-nature connectedness.

Lavinia Pereira, PhD, is an Associate Researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences – University of Lisbon, she is a member of the research group 'Environment, Territory and Society' and of the 'Urban Transitions Hub'. She has been conducting research in three interdisciplinary fields: changing Humans-Nature relationships in the 'Anthropocene'; technological Urban Imaginaries in social-scientific literature and speculative fiction; and the Future of University as if sustainability mattered.

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Foreclosing the Future: How Finance Got There First

Rachel Weber

University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, USA

Foresight is engrained in the intellectual and professional identities of urban planners. Planners earmark the uses of land, negotiate the terms of bond prospectuses, and think through the implications of new transit lines. Anchoring this anticipatory enterprise are different forms of calculative rationality, scenario building, and visualization that find voice in planners' projections, forecasts, plans, and projects (Hopkins & Zapata, 2007; Myers & Kitsuse, 2000). These activities offer the promise, not only of cognitive access to the future, but also of the ability to transform those futures. Such optimism can border on hubris. As Beauregard (2015) notes, "Planners do not live in a radically contingent world. They assume the world is predictable and, thus, that they can expect the intended consequences of their actions to be realized" (p. 26).

However, planning's monopoly on the future is far from incontrovertible. In fact, it has been diminished by legitimacy crises provoked by neoliberalism, encroachment by other forward-looking disciplines, and critiques of "planning time" from both the right and left. Even planners themselves are aware of the limits of their own predictive powers. Helling (1998) writes "visions too often lack an explicit time path connecting historical realities and present trends to viable outcomes". Predictive techniques fall back on simplistic expectations as understanding how multiple, dynamic trends "extend forward and

interact with one another" is beyond the reach of most forecasting models. This leaves "only bland and cautious truisms or blue-sky wish lists … packaged for public consumption".

Planners' conception of time has been criticized as linear and mechanical. Derived from the field's roots in enlightenment thought, it tends to reflect the worldview of elites who have more control over their futures and who then justify and reinforce their privilege with narratives of "progress" and "betterment". In contrast, those burdened by pasts of deprivation and discrimination too often have their futures planned for them by others, or face barriers enacting their own plans (cf. Harjo, 2019).

Planning has ignored alternative temporalities that do not view time as inherently forward-moving and progressive. Conceptions of emergence, immanence, and duration stress instead that novel circumstances are continually decentering linear time (Connolly, 2011). They undermine social orders organized around predictability and punctuated by the exceptional emergency. Such a perspective exposes "the racially uneven distribution of harm, suffering, death, and futurity within late liberal societies" (Anderson et al., 2020, p. 623). Alternative teleological assumptions can be found in non-Western and indigenous cultures. For example, indigenous time is sometimes spiraling, unfolding, and circuitous (Harjo, 2019), and can confound attempts to harness or capture futures before they materialize. Afro-futurism and speculative fiction produce imaginaries as points of departure for commoning, de-growth, and radical spatial transformations (Bina et al., 2020).

My own critique of planning time draws from Marxist political economy, yet shares an emphasis on diverse knowledge practices and imaginaries with anthropologists and cultural economists. It derives from two decades of observing the financial arrangements that implement plans and large-scale development projects. In the remainder of my essay, I will argue that in order for planners to enact just futures, they must confront the countervailing maneuvers of financial capitalism. Financial actors, models, and legal tools colonize the future and often carve up its spoils by the time planners get there and demand a fairer share. Is it possible to envision future cities that are not anticipated and enclosed by real estate finance? Can public planning be strengthened as a bulwark against financially speculative futures, one more capable of making equitable claims on those futures?

We know that planners are not the only ones with interests in urban futures. Indeed, the future city is crowded with the speculations of architects, developers, appraisers, residents, neighborhood groups, and investors, among others. These actors share many of the same predictive tools and rely on similar assumptions about time, embedded in devices like discount rates (Weber, 2020). They are influenced by popular trend-watchers and consulting firms, who, as modern day prophets, harmonize diverse imaginaries into more uniform and influential expectations (Linovski, 2019; Powers, 2019; Weber, 2019).

Not all actors with an interest in urban futures possess the capital and political-legal capacity to make their speculations material and modify the city. Although they share many of the same predictive tools and assumptions, the public and private sectors have different means of claiming, enacting, and appropriating future cities. In capitalist economies, the financial sector generally has a leg up. Money itself is a promise, "a future-oriented proposition whose liquidity requires a certain level of trust among strangers" (Ingram, 2004). Finance is "a realm of must, shall, and will, albeit one always defined by certain temporal limits, by the horizon of the near future" (Guyer, 2007, as cited in Riles, 2011). In contrast, comprehensive plans neither promise future revenues nor can be easily translated into the monetary terms that bridge present and future. They may be implemented through land use changes and infrastructure projects, like light-rail systems and parks (Hopkins & Zapata, 2007). However, such proposals are viewed primarily through the lens of present-day costs, which arouse more opposition than excitement. The revenue effects of plans for the collective are not as easily estimated and enclosed as private ones.

The ability of investors to speculate on short- and long-term price movements and exploit uncertainty for profit is sanctified in property and contract law. Capital has superior legal tools to claim and harvest revenues from the future, such as contracts like concession and redevelopment agreements, derivatives, and bond prospectuses. Contracts are agreements in the present to exchange something at a definite point in the future and compel contractual parties to make choices at discrete milestones. Private agreements are not often disclosed to the public, so capital can be more secretive and shrewd about its claims on the future.

In contrast, public plans are exposed, aspirational, open to interpretation, and often ignored. Unlike developers, planners have to contend with distributed authority, contested interests, and demands for public participation (Hopkins & Zapata, 2007). They may try to fix time through ordinances that enact zoning regulations or condition subsidies on the creation of community benefits, but heavily resourced private actors contest these legislated futures with lawsuits and by running political opponents.

To illustrate the ability of finance to claim the future, I offer the case of infrastructure privatization. In 2008, the City of Chicago signed a lease with Morgan Stanley and parking operator LAZ to capture the fare revenue from its parking meters in exchange for a winning bid of $1.2 billion (Ashton et al., 2016). The 75-year lease binds the city to this arrangement until the year 2083, a point in time by which our society may have renounced motorized transportation. Before signing the document, lawyers, appraisers, and planning consultants provided parties with parking projections. On their own, the parking projections might have been believed, dismissed, or ignored. Codifying this predictive knowledge into a several hundred-paged concession agreement, however, allowed the future to be transacted, speculated on, and locked in. With the document's clearly-defined deadlines and conditions, the contract holds the place of capital in the future (Riles, 2011).

There are opportunity costs to such arrangements: planners have fewer future resources to allocate when they have already been committed to financial capital. In other words, the financialization of the city encloses the future and forecloses alternative possibilities. If they are already legally committed to debt service and equity investors, revenues cannot be redirected toward environmental, public health, or racial equity goals. These revenues cannot reduce the burden of taxes which might make it easier for individual residents to enact their own futures.

Financing arrangements reconfigure state power and influence subsequent plans to create and circulate value for financialized infrastructures (Ashton et al., 2016). In the case of the parking meters, the City of Chicago agreed to accelerated rate increases and to implement non-compete clauses that committed the city to limiting the development or improvement of competing garages. The City's Department of Transportation even lifted rush-hour parking bans on 225 city blocks, allowing an extra four hours of meter-eligible parking on busy streets. In order to reduce the use of motorized transportation and confront climate futures, the city may want to repurpose parking spots covered by the concession for, say, bike lines. In order to so, however, the city would need to buy back the parking spaces from Morgan Stanley.

With public-private redevelopment deals, municipalities underwrite the speculations of individual beneficiaries like developers and their financial backers. For example, in the case of the Hudson Yards redevelopment on the west side of Manhattan, New York City agreed to supplement cash flows to the developer (The Related Companies and Oxford Group) with revenues from its general fund. These 'interest support payments' (ISPs) were made through annual appropriations and fell outside the project's value capture mechanism, which was the primary means through which the ambitious, 360-acre plan was subsidized. In 2007, the city projected that ISPs would cost $7.4 million through 2015. However, when losses piled up during the Great Recession, a provision in the

redevelopment agreement triggered the provision of ISPs to support the redevelopment authority's debt service payments. The city spent $359 million in ISPs by 2019 - over 40 times the amount originally anticipated (Fisher & Leite, 2020). For "too big to fail" projects like Hudson Yards and other cases of misaligned speculations, the state is left holding the bag.

The displacements, dispossession, and erasures wrought by financial capitalism in its search for yields have been well-documented by scholars (Fields, 2017). Fictional representations of dystopic future cities – balkanized, surveilled, and hyper-privatized and -polarized – abound and do not seem so far off from reality (Bina et al., 2020). From trailer parks purchased by private equity funds to personal data harvested by smart city operators, predatory finance is always prospecting for cash flows to extract from the next frontier. Threats such as climate change and pandemics expose the fragility of the financialized city.

To ensure that such bleak futures are not realized, planners must gradually disentangle the state apparatus from its dependence on the financial sector. To do so, they must develop compelling alternative futures that govern shared resources and demonstrate the robustness of their intentions for the collective over both the near- and long-term (time horizons of five to twenty years are not uncommon) (Myers, 2007).

Planners, supported by allied social movements, also need to double down on the intense, contested politics of the present. In order to challenge finance's projections and claims on the future, planners can downzone, conserve, reclaim property, and oppose privatization now. Whether using eminent domain to seize underwater assets or replacing municipal debt with federal contributions, capital planning can prioritize infrastructures for care rather than those for capital. In this way, the public sector can reserve space for the public in the future city.

Notes on Contributor

Rachel Weber, PhD, is a professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and is an urban planner, political economist, and economic geographer. Her work examines why cities adopt certain financial instruments and how the use of particular methods of raising capital affects who benefits from and pays for urban infrastructures.

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For Utopian Planning

Andy Inch [iD]

University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

The dominant cultural orientation towards the future in most late capitalist societies seems marked by pessimism. We know that things can't go on as they are. Every day we're burning through more of our fossilised past to prolong an inequitable and literally unsustainable present. Extractive and predatory, capitalism drives uneven development, locking societies onto ever more dangerous pathways that threaten the futures of life on earth. Put simply, if we keep doing what we're doing we're pretty much fucked.[9] Some of us will, of course, be more fucked than others. The most fucked of all will most often be those least responsible for the mess and they will have the least power to do anything about it.

Given all that, it might not be surprising that our imaginations seem haunted by dystopian images. Or that, even as policymakers increasingly talk the talk of transformation, there is cynicism that real change is possible. One of the key political challenges of the present is therefore to restore belief that societies can intentionally remake their futures, not only to avert catastrophe but to create conditions for life to flourish. This involves wresting control of the means of producing the future from the grip of the capitalist realists who claim there is no alternative to the neoliberal status quo.

The urban will necessarily be a crucial locus for any future-orientated political programme and just transitions will need to be planned transitions. If, as part of this wider politics, urban planning aspires to 'organise hope' in and against forces of pessimism and cynicism, however, then it has to show how societies can collectively imagine alternative urban worlds very different to our present, and demonstrate that there are pathways towards their realisation.

Calls for a more imaginative form of planning sometimes look back to the urban utopias of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for inspiration (Fishman, 1982). However, the histories of

utopianism and planning have both become associated with the dangers of insensitively imposing change on the rich relational ecologies that constitute lifeworlds. The historical ties between thinking about planning, ideal cities and the utopian tradition have therefore frayed over recent decades. Frederic Jameson, a leading figure in critical utopian theory, suggests a wider loss of faith in progress underpins this and asks whether: "the architects and urbanists [are] still passionately at work on utopian cities?" (Jameson, 2010, pp. 21–22).

In this piece I want to argue that attempts to revive utopian planning might start by reconnecting with wider currents and developments in utopian thinking. Drawing on debates about the value of 'utopia as method' I will speculate on ways of reimagining planning through the role it might play in '*educating desir*e' as part of the struggle for very different (and less fucked) futures.

From Anti-Utopia to the Education of Desire

The term utopia has a complex history. Its popular connotations are often negative, conceived as either a hopeless fantasy or a potentially dangerous blueprint that only authoritarian measures could realise. But these are accusations most frequently made by those opposed to the idea that a better society can be planned at all. In this sense they are both powerfully anti-utopian and anti-planning. Anti-utopianism is related to the dystopian mood I discussed above but it's not the same thing. Dystopias are representations of bad places, anti-utopianism is a wider political aversion to utopias or utopianism in general (Sargent, 2006).

Anti-utopianism often works to reinforce the hegemony of dominant powers by insisting that actually existing worlds are the best we can hope for, and that imagining other possible arrangements is either a waste of time or downright dangerous. Anti-utopianism therefore plays a part in fomenting cynicism about prospects for change. It is not just an idea either but a material force sustained by the violence of capitalism and the precarity, insecurity and vulnerability it generates (Bell, 2017).

In response to prevailing anti-utopianism, much utopian scholarship argues for an anti-anti-utopianism as a minimum necessary response to attempts to shut down the utopian imagination (Jameson, 2005). Understood like this, anti-utopian dismissals of utopianism need to be resisted as attempts to suppress political imagination and desire for change.

As Lyman Tower Sargent (2006) argues, all societies produce 'social dreams' and these can play an important part in stimulating the imagination, framing expectations and motivating action. Any project to transform society requires ways of imagining, constructing and critiquing alternative worlds. The forms such social dreams take, and the themes they engage, shift over time and across space, emerging not just in fictional forms but as political theories, social movements and in various pre-figurative practices inspired by the desire to live differently (Sargent, 2006).

The utopian imagination can be (and frequently) is flawed, of course. It is hard to convincingly imagine alternative worlds, and images of the future frequently say more about present preoccupations than they do about any desirable future state. Utopian fiction, ideas and practices have all variously reproduced colonial, racist, sexist, ableist, classist tropes. Too often perhaps they have been the preserve of the already privileged, rather than a more organic expression of shared social dreams.

A desire to distance utopianism from its association with authoritarian blueprints has contributed to a lasting mistrust of plans in contemporary utopian studies (perhaps paralleling an equal suspicion of utopia in planning studies?). In distancing the idea of utopianism from its association with blueprints, much recent utopian scholarship focuses less on utopia as a spatio-temporal

destination and more on utopia as a method for 'educating desire'. The phrase comes from Miguel Abensour's understanding of the heuristic function of utopia and was translated into English by the historian E.P. Thompson.

Acknowledging the contested meanings of utopia,[10] Abensour has argued for an interpretation of the utopian tradition as contributing to an ongoing dialectical struggle for emancipation. For him, William Morris's 1890 novel 'News From Nowhere', published in ten instalments in the socialist periodical *Commonweal*, marked a significant shift away from utopian blueprints towards a more heuristic form of utopianism that invited people to reflect and actively participate in an exploration of desire, "to teach desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way" (Thompson, 1977, p. 796; see Nadir, 2010).

For key subsequent theorists like Jameson (2005, 2010) and Ruth Levitas (2013), the function of utopianism is not to present images of fully formed future cities or societies as actual desiderata, but to use such images as a means of estranging ourselves from the present. Ernst Bloch's (1995) work has been influential in this shift too (in planning see Ganjavie, 2015; Gunder & Hillier, 2007). His monumental three-volume Principle of Hope assesses the utopian traces of possible futures that might be found across any number of social practices from architecture to jazz dance (though he didn't think much of that). Bloch's work has produced a focus on an open-ended utopian analytics, based on identifying latent tendencies immanent in the present, and assessing their potential to act as guiding images towards possible futures.

The shift towards a heuristic mode of utopianism significantly expands the utopian imagination. A wide range of everyday practices can be explored to examine their potential to educate desire and contribute to transformations. However, taken to extremes the turn away from detailed exploration of alternative societies or cities may itself reflect declining political faith in any *intentional* agency to remake the world (Garforth, 2009). Too much celebration of the open-ended, emergent play of immanent possibilities and too little focus on the destination may also detract from the work that is needed to imagine and construct systematic alternatives (Harvey, 2000; Levitas, 2013).

An embrace of open-ended utopian energies also creates interpretive challenges. As theorists of utopia have recognised, it means distinguishing between what Bloch called 'abstract' hope – essentially empty or even dangerous daydreams – and 'concrete' hope with genuinely transformative utopian potential. For both Bloch and Abensour, educated desire becomes 'concrete' and meaningful when it is rooted in real prospects. This doesn't mean realistic in the sense of being resigned to incremental or pragmatic solutions, however. Rather, it refers to a rootedness in the horizons, imaginations and aspirations of real struggles for a more just world order. For Bloch this was a Marxist commitment to revolution. For Abensour (2008) a radical dialectical theory of emancipation that stands against both the state and the market. Tensions between abstract and concrete hope cannot be willed away but need to be worked out in and through utopian practices. In this sense concrete hope, or educated desire, emerges in and through political movements as part of a wider cultural politics within which ideas of justice and freedom are given lived and felt meaning as horizons to work towards.

Abensour's example of William Morris and *News From Nowhere* brings this home clearly. It was written for the socialist movements Morris committed his life to, and in response to the huge influence of Edward Bellamy's industrialist utopia *Looking Backward* which had horrified Morris in its depiction of a regimented future. Bellamy's novel had itself inspired the creation of hundreds of Nationalist Clubs by 'Bellamyites' across the United States. It is also widely credited as a significant influence in the development of Ebenezer Howard's garden city proposals. Positioning Howard's ideas in this way, as part of a wider movement for political reform, brings us back to planning and

helps correct any tendency to see the urban utopias of the past as ahistorical products of individual genius rather than understanding how they emerged from within, and spoke back to, the broader cultural contexts and struggles that shaped their political horizons (and limitations).

So What Does All of This Mean for Planning?

I have set out a simplified version of a complex set of debates here that are worthy of far more detailed consideration. For now, I want to point to seven reflections for planning that I hope emerge from this rapid detour through developments in utopian thinking:

(1) Restoring belief that societies can intentionally transform their futures requires imagining, exploring and opening up new possible futures. The standard tools of critical and explanatory social science on which our discipline largely relies are not well suited to this task. There is a need to engage with more heterodox, speculative, creative and constructive methods, entailing a rethinking of prevailing epistemology and pedagogy. Rethinking planning's relation to utopianism can play a role in this.

(2) Re-engaging planning with utopianism requires coming to terms with the ways anti-utopian thinking has influenced planning theory and practice. Despite the problematic legacies of modernist urban utopias, a commitment to transformative thinking requires a resolute commitment to an anti-anti-utopian urbanism and an anti-anti-utopian planning (as others including Leonie Sandercock (2002), John Friedmann (2000) have argued before).

(3) This would require getting 'passionate' about utopian cities again. But reengaging planning with utopianism also involves moving beyond any superficial invocation of the urban utopias of the past to understand utopianism as a dynamic archive of social dreams. Understanding how the utopian tradition has developed, reflectively, in response to criticism over recent decades may provide resources for such a re-engagement.

(4) The idea of 'educating desire' through the critique and construction of utopian possibilities suggests a conception of utopia as a method rather than a goal for planning, pointing towards a reflexive re-engagement with utopian urbanism as part of a pedagogy of hope. Importantly it invites us to ask whether planning as a discipline has ever engaged seriously with what it means to collectively understand, explore and act on desire for possible urban futures?

(5) More than a robust anti-anti-utopian planning is it possible to catalogue an inventory of desire as a resource for remaking urban futures? This inventory could encompass everything from traces of prefigurative hope, where the new is being built in the shell of the old, through to the elaboration of systematic alternatives. It would involve opening up the planning imagination to a much wider range of resources and could itself become a valuable aid for collective exploration of desire for more just, caring and environmentally sane futures.

(6) Because of the complexity of utopianism, utopian urban planning will always run multiple risks. This includes the dangers of sliding into abstract daydreams, of being harnessed to power in dangerous ways, or of revealing little more than the limits of the planning imagination. The only protection against these dangers is rigorous and ongoing debate about eu-topia, the good place (Friedmann, 2000).

(7) Eu-topian hope will become concrete when it emerges organically out of, or speaks back to, real struggles, rooted in creative, collective work to educate desire, generate shared aspirations and organise hope. Less about a re-founding of a planning movement or a return to the

past, this might be understood as a repositioning of planning as a creative part of wider cultural and political movements, capable of giving felt meaning to utopian possibilities in the face of pessimism and cynicism.

Notes

9. This is the only technical term that fully captures our current predicament.
10. Abensour traces this back to the ambiguity in Thomas More's neologism that could be read as either eu-topia meaning good place or ou-topia, meaning no place or nowhere.

Notes on Contributor

Andy Inch is a Senior Lecturer in Urban Studies and Planning at the University of Sheffield, UK and a Debates and Reflections Editor with Planning Theory and Practice. His current research interests include utopianism and the ways in which alternative futures can be imagined and realised through planning.

ORCID

Andy Inch 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3349-687X

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Dreams from People, Dreams for Communities

Marisa A. Zapata

Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, USA

In 1995, Tejano superstar Selena Quintanilla's English language debut album hit the airwaves. Both the album and its titular song, *Dreaming of You*, would spend months on various Billboard charts, including over two years on the Top Latin Albums list. Two key facts forecasted intense interest and at least modest success for the album and song. First, was Selena's popularity as a Spanish-language star. She needed no last name in her home state of Texas or Mexico where she was dubbed the Queen of Tejano Music.[11] The second fact? A few weeks after recording *Dreaming of You*, Selena was murdered.

Selena was 26 years old when she was shot to death. As with any young person, her murder meant the end of imagined, beautiful futures, and the fulfillment of dystopian ones, especially for Mexican Americans. For Mexicans and Mexican Americans, as with other communities of color, Selena did not just reflect an individual. Many saw their families' pasts, their presents, and the dreams of utopian futures in Selena's life. She represented the dreams, hopes, and fears of communities of people. Selena's fame has not subsided, and she continues to gain fans from across the globe, and new Latinos finding inspiration in her work.[12]

Stories like this one can help planners develop cultural fluency when working with different communities. But more than just knowing who Selena is. How Selena's legacy has carried on, and that we continue to make new meaning of her can help us think about planning just futures in communities of color. Drawing on her story, I want to demonstrate how planners can first think of the people that live in the planners' imagined built and natural environments, who are represented in large data sets, and whose lives are penned in by abstract systems that demand exploited people. Putting people from marginalized communities first is how I believe we shift our current futures planning practice to a justice centered one.

From Certainty to Uncertainty

Selena grew up along the Gulf Coast of Texas. During her childhood, her family lost their business and economic security. Her parents chose to move from the certainty of poverty to the uncertainty of a child band making it big. But young Selena saw her talent as a way to end the poverty her family faced. She enjoyed singing, but she loved her family more.

Early land-use planning used grand visions, and later, rational planning to identify desired future places based on present day knowledge and trends. The future was something that could be created, and known. In contemporary land-use planning, we talk about how the future is uncertain, and that we should plan for uncertainty (Hopkins & Zapata, 2007). Scenario alternative generation (Zapata & Kaza, 2015), adaptive management (Susskind et al., 2012), and strategic planning practices (Goodspeed, 2020) suggest that we don't know for sure what will happen, and that planning is about being prepared and responsive.

Uncertainty rooted planning has helped to move planning away for chart coursing plans with rigid outlines despite many unknown factors that shape communities. For instance, what happens if climate change effects come to fruition? What if a global pandemic creates a migratory upper-middle class who no longer live where they work? Asking what-if questions, and creating plans for the most likely scenarios would help us to respond to these massive events. We sometimes even

disaggregate the answers to these questions and see how people from different positionalities are impacted.

Yet, neither the certainty of grand visions, nor today's pivot to the uncertain, rejects the systems that produce inequities and the certainties built into these systems. Selena's life did not depend on where the city planner worked with certainty or uncertainty. Planners make unjust decisions in both spaces. Without significant changes to the systems that create our places, people of color, people who are poor, and people who are otherwise marginalized will continue to be worse off than wealthy, White community members. Planners do not necessarily know how to get to a just future for people of color, but they could accept that the continued exploitation of and violence against people of color is certain without trying radical, and previously considered impossible actions. If we accept this as true, planners could think about uncertainty differently. Uncertainty, then, is not something we prepare to manage. Uncertainty is the path we consciously take to reaching a just future.

Plausibility

> Selena and her family decided to walk into uncertainty, their choice was not remotely grounded in plausibility. Selena's father assembled his English-speaking children into a band. He pushed them to sing Tejano and ranchero music. He took them to Mexico where Selena spoke Spanglish, a risk that might only be fully appreciated by other Mexican Americans. Her success in Mexico, male-dominated Tejano music, and English language pop music countered every plausible, and forecasted, future for a Mexican-American girl living in the Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Another recent shift in land-use planning that relates to uncertainty is on plausibility. Planning within the confines of plausibility means rejecting utopias and dystopias. Plausibility plays an important role in grounding planners and communities in a kind of reality, escaping both scare tactics to advance causes and time wasted on aimless utopian visioning (Hopkins & Zapata, 2007). Yet, when describing the importance of plausibility in planning to him, performance studies scholar Jose Muñoz responded to me at dinner one night: "But what do our communities lose when we fail to dream; when we are not granted space for dreaming?"[13]

I recently participated in a visioning process where we were asked to imagine various parts of our communities in 50 years. The process was run by people of color for people of color. Talking with people committed to justice who shared the lived experience of being a person of color opened up the beauty of the 'our' communities' dreaming that Jose had referenced. Afro-, Indigenous, and Latinx-futurism also creates spaces for us to imagine radical futures – utopias, dystopias, multi-dimensional places, and human and inhuman bodies. Chicano studies scholar, Catherine Ramirez wrote:

> Drawing from [Alondra] Nelson's definition of Afrofuturism, I define Chicanafuturism as Chicano cultural production that attends to cultural transformations resulting from new and everyday technologies (including their detritus); that excavates, creates, and alters narratives of identity, technology, and the future; that interrogates the promises of science and technology; and that redefines humanism and the human (2004, pp. 77–78).[14]

A recent *Interface* in this journal demonstrates the power and beauty of Black spatial imaginaries, and how they connect to urban planning (Bates et. al., 2018).

When and where does utopian and visioning, pessimism, and plausibility-based planning then fit in? Should they all play a role in planning for just futures? Public planning happens, at least with the intention, to plan across racial groups. Plausibility may make sense in racially mixed, public planning

for people who are White. Historically their utopian dreams have not imagined or actualized a racially just present or future – do they even see us in their futures?

But there is a consequence of saying no to utopias and dystopias. Professional planning practice asks people to be rational first and foremost, and creativity is often seen as an arts and craft fair. Everything becomes surface – the intensity of feelings about past, present, and future, the power of laughter and performance, and the practice of expression are carefully white washed over. While emotion and creativity are limited, our futures planning processes are often complicated, and focused on secondary, large data sets with limitedly diverse people, processes that privilege equality over equity. Rejecting the certain pessimistic future, people of color know will unfold, denies our reality and dismisses our experiences in our communities; rejecting imagined pessimistic futures for privileged people may just keep them more honest. Asking us to dream and imagine deeply across racial groups may be asking people of color to share private worlds and dreams.

Conclusion

Despite Selena's family being in the United States for several generations, Selena's positionality as a Mexican-American living in poverty was not surprising. Her rise to super-stardom was, of course, against the odds. Selena's murder was not predictable, but still fit into a stereotype of violence within Latino communities.

When we talk about abstract systems or the physical infrastructure of cities, we often lose sight of the individuals that live in them. Their lives are out of focus as we aggregate their experiences, and we come up with better planning processes and new techniques to engage futures. Shifting futures planning work to focus on people of color, in ways that make sense and matter to them, offers a different way to move forward to a just future. Selena's story helps us see what it means to live knowing certain truths and rejecting the plausible. Her story educates us about the experiences, dreams, and fears of many Texan Mexican Americans. I have not described the cities where Selena came of age, not because the houses, transit, and other city infrastructure does not matter, but because it should come secondarily to the stories about Selena, and people who saw themselves in her.

What we know for certain – no more data, no fancy forecasts, or even co-production needed – is that people of color will continue to have less, live shorter lives, experience higher rates of incarceration, homelessness, police violence, live in places with higher pollution rates, worse flooding, have our communities displaced, gentrified, or specifically segregated, with resources cut off. People look to those who move out of poverty as proof that the systems that produce our places can be just, and systemically, some people of color are able to overcome poverty. But what that system requires, is that people and families of color walk into great uncertainty in order to have a chance at real, long term stability, often at great risk to themselves.

As planners perhaps we should ask ourselves – as a profession, where do we want to locate ourselves in relation to this present-day reality, and certain future? If the answer is justice and equity then futures planning should leap into uncertainty and embrace the utopias, dystopias, and plausibilities imagined, dreamed of, feared, and experienced in communities of color. I am asking planners to do what we ask people living on the edge to do all the time – look at the certainty of continued hardship for people of color, and choose the uncertain path. I am suggesting that we deliberately walk the uncertain path towards justice, and be active seekers of the just future.

Notes

11. Tejano music comes from Texan Mexican Americans, and reflects the mosaic of cultural heritages that influenced Mexico and Texas. Unfamiliar listeners are most often surprised to discover the Germany and Czech presence, most notably through the accordian.
12. The podcast *Anything for Selena* inspired me to write about Selena here. It is also a wonderful example of how one life story maps on to broader societal issues (Garcia, 2021).
13. To read about Munoz's concept of queer futurity, see Muñoz (2009). *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity*. NYU Press.
14. Art that Ramirez describes in her piece was inspired by experiences in the Texas Rio Grande Valley where Selena would later grow up.

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Notes on Contributor

Marisa A. Zapata is an associate professor and director of the Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative at Portland State University. She is committed to achieving spatially – based racial justice by supporting communities to act for equitable futures. Dr Zapata believes land-use planning expresses our societal values.

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