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Climate Change: Hope, Despair, and Planning

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Introduction

This paper is an experiment. It is inspired by an observation, not a hypothesis. The observation: Climate change is overwhelming the students that I teach in my upper division "Introduction to Urban Planning" course. The purpose for this paper: How can I engage students in thinking about climate change as a planning issue without glossing over or disregarding their growing skepticism about their own futures?

This paper is not so much about how I teach, or how I could teach. Rather, it is more conceptual with respect to planning itself. More to the point: how does planning fit into this emerging, and dark, worldview? Planning, after all, is a discipline steeped in hope, and climate change seems to be bringing forth, at least for some, a palpable wave of despair. This is a direct challenge both the to idealism (if not happiness) of my students and to the principles underlying the practice of planning itself.

What follows are the reflections of a planner on this observation, and some thoughts about how I can teach planning while, at the same time, placing that endeavor squarely in the world that my students are living in and anticipating. My own interests have long been focused on regionalism, regional planning, planning practice, and the importance of context for framing what plans mean and for creating meaning for what plans accomplish. These interests come both from my time in academia, but equally if not more so from my work in the community. I've been in Portland, Oregon, for over 32 years, and my ideas certainly mirror my engagement there. Together, these are interests grounded in the themes of place and practice, and those two themes pretty well describe what I have been caring about, personally and professionally.

Currently, I am a Professor in the Toulan School of Urban Studies and Planning at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. I teach both undergraduate and graduate classes, and have for a number of years. One of the classes that I enjoy the most is USP 311: Introduction to Urban Planning. This is an upper division, undergraduate course. I typically get somewhere between 70 and 125 enrolled every fall, and the course draws students from across the university.

Why do they take the course? For some, it satisfies an undergraduate requirement. Athletes frequently take the course because for those from the western US, it fits into a major that gives them access to in-state tuition rates. Some students are there because they are interested in pursuing real estate development as a career, though I've seen fewer of those in recent years. A large group has come from our

undergraduate Community Development majors, as the course is required for some of them, though that's changing. And some certainly enroll just because they're interested, curious about planning, and/or engaged in the Portland community where planning knowledge helps to create roles and power. In general though, few, if any, take the course because they want to be planners.

All in all, it's a mix, and I teach the course that way. My desire isn't to make them all planners necessarily, but to help them realize that, as Hans Blumenfeld put it many years ago, "...man is a planning animal." (Moses, 1987, page 409; Gowdy, 2010, page 2) They've been planners since they were born but may not know it.

I'd also like them to be able to decode what they see outside the windows of our classroom, or on the way to school, or in their own neighborhoods, something the planning and planners are good at. In the grand tradition of planning, I want to make the invisible visible, and in that way enable students to make more of the world around them and of which they are a part. (MacKaye, 1928(1990), page 148)

I have mostly been rewarded by this approach: though some students don't appreciate or really care about what I have to offer, enough do to make it exciting, interactive, and, for me, fun. The idealism of these students is important and delightful, and I want them to emerge from the class and their undergraduate careers with that interest in the world and its prospects intact. How could a planner want less?

Recently, and the impetus for this paper, is that I've noticed a growing sentiment of despair associated with climate change among the idealistic 20-somethings that populate my classes. Not coincidentally, I also notice this among the concerned 20-somethings that populate my kitchen on occasion, home for a meal or a night as they move, now, through their own lives. What I've noticed is that climate change is turning the previously hopeful into the newly despairing. That is, the sense that the future holds promise is being interrupted by a new sense that there might not be much of a future at all.

Hope, Despair, and Climate Change

Why is this? The sources for despair aren't hard to find, and have been addressed in the climate change literature:

- The problem is global in scale, a long way from the scale at which most people feel effective and connected. (Ostrom et al, 1999; Weber and Stern, 2011)
- Costs and benefits of acting are separated in time: costs are borne immediately while benefits may not materialize for years, or even in the same places where the costs are paid. (Committee on America's Climate Choices, 2011)
- Scientists can't communicate. (Sarewitz, 2004; Gowdy, 2010; Hoffman, 2011; Somerville and Hassol, 2011)

- ■ Those in power don't want to change. Indeed, some have gone so far as to suggest that crisis conditions will be necessary before world will declare "war" on climate change. (Nesse, 1999; Rangers and Gilding, 2009)
- ■ It's too late (Friedman, 2011) and/or things are changing much faster than we thought. (Hansen, 2012; Muller, 2012)
- ■ Someone should do something, quickly and at every scale, now... which, of course, is unlikely. (Kushner, 2009)

Many of these themes are reinforced in the popular literature about climate change. For example, Lester Brown, in his <u>Plan B 4.0:Mobilizing to Save Civilization</u> (Brown, 2009), lays out the case for immediate and substantial change. In short, civilization as we know it will collapse if we don't immediately change the path we're on, and history is our guide to understanding just how real that threat can be. The first 76 pages tell the tale of impending doom. The next 162 pages explain how it is technically feasible to redirect resources and activity to save the globe, with little or no discussion of the political or economic strategies needed to make it so.

In the last 27 pages he returns to the theme that doom is around the corner, particularly if we don't mobilize fast enough. However, it is only the last 3 pages that finally get around to what the reader can do, and even then, it pretty much boils down to writing to your elected representatives, the very same representatives that a substantial portion of the book identifies as being the problem. The net result is a mixed message: immediate action is needed, technology exists to, theoretically at least, make it possible to reverse course, and getting there is dependent on our ability to all believe that things are bad and only going to get worse.

Though Brown's message is factually correct, its impact is hardly inspiring. When he writes, "With many US automobile assembly lines currently idled, it would be a relatively simple matter to retool some of them to produce wind turbines, enabling the country to quickly harness its vast wind energy potential." it may be technically possible but seems miles away from actually happening. (Brown, 2009, page 266) For young readers, those particularly who take the message of doom literally and at face value, and who observe little action on such "relatively simple" matters, it all adds up to the sense that the game is over.

A similar but different message emerges in Bill McKibben's <u>Eaarth: making a life on a tough new planet</u>. (McKibben, 2011) The book, like Brown's and many others, begins with a description of the disaster that is, and the disaster to come. His point is that the planet is changing much faster than we anticipated, and it has become a planet we've never experienced before. It's not a question of how to preserve what we have, but how to understand where we now find ourselves, mostly a place that no one would want to be. The title, "Eaarth," was chosen to underscore that earth is different now, and in fact doesn't exist in a form we'd easily recognize. McKibben identifies the ways that politicians and others have invoked the necessity of "acting on behalf of our grandchildren," but that most of them regard global warming as a distant threat rather than a current reality. (McKibben, 2011, page 11)

His prescription focuses on the notion that growth won't save us. That is, we can't outgrow this problem, either by creating new industries or increasing wealth across the board. McKibben states clearly that he favors a new green tech "Manhattan Project," but that he has little hope that it will happen fast enough to matter. (McKibben, 2011, page 52) In the first 103 pages of this 219 page book (counting the new afterword included in the 2011 edition), he paints a picture of fewer resources, more conflicts, and the return of warfare over resources.

In the second half of the book, McKibben paints a picture of the kind of vision we'll need to embrace. He writes:

> "My point throughout this book has been that we'll need to change to cope with the new Eaarth we've created. We'll need, chief among all things, to get smaller, less centralized, to focus not on growth but on maintenance, on a controlled decline from the perilous heights to which we've climbed." (McKibben, 2011, page 204)

McKibben recognizes that institutions, left up to themselves, will never change in these ways. To his credit, he has been engaged in starting an international grassroots movement to promote efforts to reduce carbon in the atmosphere through a wide range of local initiatives aimed at both cutting carbon and meeting local needs. However, like Brown's book, and many others, this one starts by reinforcing the undesirability of the world we're becoming, the necessity of the powerful giving up or using their power differently, and the overwhelming sense that it's too late, all themes that are combining to move the young in my classes from hope to despair.

In a recent article, McKibben hits many of the same themes, but with a sense of urgency and with less emphasis on the value of thinking of this as requiring adaption to essentially a new planet. (McKibben, 2012) Noting that the Rio+20 meeting accomplished little, he remarked:

> "Since I wrote one of the first books for a general audience about global warming way back in 1989, and since I've spent the intervening decades working ineffectively to slow that warming, I can say with some confidence that we're losing the fight, badly and quickly – losing it because, most of all, we remain in denial about the peril that human civilization is in." (McKibben, 2012, page 1)

Nonetheless, though the article focuses on the dire circumstances we're in, the failure of leaders to act, and the ticking time-bomb of our own existence on the planet, he concludes that it's "almost-but-not-quite-finally hopeless." Why? Because we haven't yet fully consumed the total carbon carrying capacity of the atmosphere, though we are clearly on a path to do that five times over. We're not out of time… yet. With governments of all kinds and in all places failing to make significant changes, and consumers finding new ways to save energy on one hand, and consume more than ever before on the other, McKibben calls, again, for creating a movement to demand change.

What has changed, for him is that to this point, the climate change movement has not had an enemy to fight. All movements need an enemy, and here McKibben

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identifies the fossil-fuel industry as the enemy to target. Rather than a changed "eaarth," the new targets are the companies and nations that plan on overwhelming the earth's atmosphere in their pursuit of profit. That a movement can do this is admittedly a stretch, but McKibben reminds us that apartheid in South Africa was brought down through similar means.

Of course, this is different: targeting one nation's practices is different than targeting a wide range of companies and countries all working intently to get the most out of the carbon economy before someone else does.   McKibben holds out hope, but only if there is an immediate and overwhelming mass uprising, a high hurdle for a generation unfamiliar with movements, and for a world within which claims about the necessity of acting to prevent global warming is regarded as debatable.

Mark Hertsgaard, in his book Hot: Living through the Next Fifty Years on Earth, frames the entire discussion around the world that his young daughter would inherit, meeting McKibben's invocation of grandchildren and raising him substantially. (Hertsgaard, 2011) He acknowledges the role that hope needs to play in motivating people to make changes, but then presents the likely future as being a choice between pain and disaster, where "pain" refers to making sacrifices and "disaster" to the elimination of ways of life known by present residents of the planet. He writes:

> "...it is clear that the old arguments that pitted adaptation against mitigation were a false choice. From now on, humanity must pursue both adaptation and mitigation at maximum speed. That means, on the one hand, that we must make our households, communities, companies, and countries *climate-friendly*: that is, they must be able to function while emitting few if any greenhouse gases. ... At the same time, we must make our countries and communities *climate-resilient*: as capable as possible of withstanding the impacts of climate change, which even in the best case will be substantial." (Hertsgaard, 2011, page 73, emphasis in the original)

Hertsgaard, like McKibben and others, sees the challenge of climate change as almost overwhelming, but then consciously chooses to look for hope among despair. After painting the a picture of inaction, he recounts stories of both missed opportunities and heroic accomplishment, of reason for finding hope among the evidence of the pain-vs-disaster future looming before us.

Interesting to me, is that this paper that you're presently reading has just followed the same trajectory. The literature I've reported on, above, is all constructed in a similar way, presenting a comparable story: the world is going to hell, climate is out of control, it might not be too late, we know what to do, but we have to do it really fast and the "it" has a lot to do with what "they" are going to make possible. What leads us to deal with this issue in this way, and is it a good idea?

The sheer weight of the evidence of climate change is presented almost as a way to suggest that the unanswerable questions about politics and process just have to be answered, and in the affirmative, and right now. How do we turn the corner to something other than Pollyannaish visions of interests aligning? To real action and

results? And for an audience, the young, highly attuned to believing that we really aren't serious or we would be doing something significant right now?

Reprise: Hope and Despair

That the young would feel a sense of discontent, disempowerment, and disconnectedness, and that the world was more than they could handle, and less than they want, is hardly a new theme. In "The Rhetoric of Hope and Despair: A Study of the Jimi Hendrix Experience and the Jefferson Airplane," Chenowith makes the point that the seeds of despair were strong enough for both Hendrix and the Airplane to call for radical changes, though neither provided a vision for what that would be. The conception of freedom presented in the music was the absence of restrictions, but the music communicated a profound disinterest in what could or should be done. (Chenowith, 1971, page 44) Chenowith concludes:

> "If In sum, if the Jefferson Airplane's and the Jimi Hendrix Experience's statements were ambivalent, they contained contradictions largely as a result of the discrepancies between the myths of American culture and the realities of our national society. If their behavior seemed vacillating and confused, it greatly revealed the drift and doubt which presently characterize our culture. If both groups were deeply disturbed by the inadequacies of America, their stress was an appropriate response to our national deficiencies. In wondering how much power the individual can possess in a complex world, both the Jimi Hendrix Experience and the Jefferson Airplane, in an unconventional manner, have articulated one of the major dilemmas which all men face today." (1971, page 45)

Of course, planning has a long history of visionaries, idealism, and utopian pronouncements. Ebenezer Howard's "Garden Cities," and the writings of the visionary urbanists and regionalists in the first part of the 20th Century, river basin development through the actual construction of "new towns," were profound translations of hope into reality despite great opposition and suspicion. That actual places like Radburn were constructed was nothing short of miraculous.

Further, there are many times in history when despair must have seemed like the most logical and rational response. The Great Depression, the Cold War, and the War to End All Wars probably all elicited similar responses. The potato famine in Ireland, and more recent examples of famine and catastrophe in the developing world, not to mention the decimation of native peoples right here in Portland, Oregon, by smallpox, were and are times when many thought the world and the presence of people in the world was coming to an end.

A history of "hope and despair" in the course of human events would be useful here, but beyond the scope of this effort. The parallels between the dissatisfaction, growing cynicism, and outright despair among my students today with respect to climate change, and the ideas and concerns expressed during the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, as chronicled by Chenowith, are striking. Perhaps every generation has to go through this. Maybe I'm over-reacting. Perhaps.

Back to Hope

Still, as a planner, it's hard not to wonder what the impact of diminished hope, or the absence of hope, might be on our capacity to plan and to act. Planning is a fundamentally optimistic pursuit. We work with communities to envision better futures, and the whole enterprise is predicated on the notion that there will be a future. Maybe we need to explore what we planners might mean by "hope" in more detail.

As Reading points out in his book, usefully entitled <u>Hope and Despair</u>, hope itself is the ability to believe in and act on behalf of a future that we may never directly experience. (2004) To Reading, future-oriented behavior is the behavioral evidence of hope. Hope, then, is at the core of planning. Without hope, there is no capacity or willingness to plan. Reading goes on to connect hope with despair by noting that despair is the absence of hope. Its common manifestation is depression, a condition where there is no future, only the present in its most unrelenting form. Hope and despair, like the present and the future, are intimately related and shape each other. You can't, in fact, have one without the other.

In a more social vein, Reading notes that:

> "Morale is the social equivalent of hope. It involves a shared expectation by the members of a group that they can gain what they want by working together to obtain it." (2004, page 142)

In this case, morale rises or falls as the group's perception of its future prospects rises or falls. Members of a group collaboratively engage in future-oriented behavior. The task for leaders is to safely lead the group into the future. For a group, thinking about the future can be empowering and energizing, and/or cause for inaction and despair. In this context, hope is the basis for believing that humankind will find useful solutions to today's problems, and compelling ideas around which to build a better future.

Nesse explores the pairing of hope and despair as an evolutionary concept. (Nesse, 1999) Nesse has written widely on emotions. He notes that emotions can be useful to the extent that they can affect the future. With respect to hope and despair, he writes:

> "Events that indicate that our efforts will succeed arouse hope. Events that suggest that our efforts are futile foster despair. We experience hope and despair not at the beginning, or end, but in the midst of our long-term efforts." (Nesse, 1999, page 429)

He notes that we favor hope in ourselves and in others, and that people have an inherent bias towards hope. In fact, those in power favor hope and the belief that things will be better if we sustain our current commitments, as a means for maintaining order and stability, at times a criticism leveled at planning itself.

However, hope and despair are not opposites but are intertwined. Hope and despair condition our expectations so that emotions associated with outcomes develop during and not at the end of goal-seeking behavior. (Nesse, 1999, page 442) Further, depression, associated with despair, prompts change, but its propensity to inaction works against what might be precipitous, maladaptive change. As Nesse points out, "Depair has its uses." (1999, page 456).

In addition, both hope and despair have social dimensions. Hope enables individuals to have faith in others, and the willingness to view others as resources for dealing with adversity, setbacks, or challenges to the predominant plan. Nesse concludes:

> "Despair is useful at times for individuals, but at the social level it perpetuates the status quo. Herein lies a paradox—hope at the individual level is fundamentally conservative, but hope at the social level deeply threatens those on top." (1999, page 463)

Similar themes are struck by Baum in his book, The Organization of Hope: Communities planning themselves. (1997) Baum writes about his experiences in Baltimore stemming from his interest in both planning and communities. More to the point, he writes about the tension between community and planning:

> "People live in communities of memory. Planning calls them to create and join communities of hope. The language of the lived community is the language of origins and the past. The language of planning is the language of the future." (Baum, 1997, page 275)

However, as elusive as the future is, making it at least seem real or attainable is at the heart of planning. Certainly this is something that is easier to do when times or conditions are hopeful, less so when hope is hard to find.

Shome and Marx, writing on the psychology of climate change communication, note that:

> "…in order for climate science information to be fully absorbed by audiences, it must be actively communicated with appropriate language, metaphor, and analogy; combined with narrative storytelling; made vivid through visual imagery and experiential scenarios; balanced with scientific information; and delivered by trusted messengers in group settings." (Shome and Marx, 2009, page 2)

They note that there is a "finite pool of worry" among the public, that emotion can engage people but it can't keep them indefinitely as there are always new, more pressing things to worry about. (Shome and Marx, 2009, page 21) Over exposure to threatening issues can lead to emotional numbing, and it's important to acknowledge that there are a whole host of demands being placed on the time and attention of the public. They also note that people tend to discount future gains much more than future losses, and that it's important to bring the issue into the present as much as

possible to get public support for future outcomes claimed to be better than what seem to be the most likely outcomes given current circumstances.

Most important, they point to having the climate dialog in groups. The future, as planners know, is uncertain. In the absence of 100% certainty or knowledge, a group context for the dialog can help to bridge present to future in a manner that activates social supports and collective rather than individual goals. (Shome and Marx, 2009, page 29) This finding parallels other research on, for example, energy conservation where deeper and broader peer networks were found to produce more significant energy savings. (Peschiera and Taylor, 2012) In the face of uncertainty, a sense of being in this together helps to enable and encourage action that might otherwise be paralyzing for individuals.

Local Solutions

Naustdalslid takes ups similar issues when he asks why society doesn't act on the scientific knowledge that it already has about climate change. (Naustdalslid, 2011) He makes the interesting point that climate change is man-made in two ways, first from the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in large amounts, and second, by climate science itself, since climate change was essentially invisible without it. (Naustdalslid, 2011, page 243) Traditional environmental problems, he maintains, rest on common knowledge, can be seen and identified in time and space, and the damage they cause is visible. Modern environmental problems, like climate change, are invisible and hidden from immediate perception, require scientific knowledge to be established, and can't easily be traced to their source with simple cause and effect relationships.

Perhaps more important, nature and society can be seen as interlinked in traditional environmental problems, but must be viewed as both interlinked and interdependent for modern environmental problems. His point: modern environmental problems like climate change are entirely new because they require revisiting fundamental relationships between nature, society, science, and policy.

However, this is not easy. Most people don't experience climate change directly, or they aren't aware that they do, making tacit knowledge, needed for motivating action as per the principles put forth by Shome and Marx, not readily available. Modern problems also require a new and higher commitment to interdisciplinary ways of knowing, but traditional science funders are slow to embrace it. Further, there is no "scientific solution" to climate change. (Naustdalslid, 2011, page 249) That is, solutions require changing both expectations and behavior, altering what are in effect billions of local decisions that combine to create global phenomena. He concludes that in this environment, and given the nature of the problem, we are more likely to get local collective action than top-down agreement.

Farber takes up this question of securing global results from local actions. (Farber, 2012) He notes that there are legitimate questions about the efficacy of

subglobal actions in response to global challenges. However, he finds that subglobal actions in response to climate change can make a significant difference in global climate and that perhaps most important, they help to create an environment within which actual global initiatives might one day succeed. He concludes, "Subglobal action is not a sure thing, but subglobal action is the best bet we have to bridge the time until a global regime emerges." (Farber, 2012, page 25)

Similarly, Rayner begins by asserting that the top-down, nation-state approach to addressing climate change has failed, largely because climate is not the same kind of problem that those approaches have successfully addressed in the past. (Rayner, 2010) Rather than focusing on the fear of climate change, he suggests that more could be accomplished more quickly by focusing on action, getting things done. He proposes a three-tiered approach: First, focus on the local and start taking action. Second, begin with adaptation to make the benefits of action concrete, and to bring benefits to humanity into the present. Third, take a bottom-up approach to mitigation using markets and energy modernization. In this construct, Rayner suggests that nations ought to focus on research and development, something unlikely to proceed quickly or well solely at the local level.

Norgaard, like Rayner and Farber, also takes up community level responses to climate change. (Norgaard, 2011) Her study of a Norwegian village, using ethnographic methods, found that there was a profound "social organization of denial" about the local manifestations of climate change:

> "…thinking about climate change is difficult for community members because it raises troubling feelings, feelings that go against a series of cultural norms. And these norms are in turn embedded in the particular social context and economic circumstances in which people live." (Norgaard, 2011, page 12)

Her conclusion: like Rayner, communication and contextualization are key. Making the global local, and vice-versa was crucial to moving forward. Finding new ways of knowing is essential to breaking through.

However, both turning away from national and international scales of action, and assuming that local initiatives will add up to global change soon enough, fight with the overwhelming and ongoing presentation of an impending climate change catastrophe (Hansen, 2012; Muller, 2012) As exciting as local initiatives are, and as compelling the presentation that people all over the globe are pulling together as never before (Hawken, 2007), presenting a hopeful dimension of the climate change issue remains a daunting challenge in the face of students predisposed, perhaps, to despair… and for good reasons! They're not nuts.

Morals and Ethics

If a scientific basis for validating local responses to climate change isn't enough, there remains an additional dimension that some are exploring: a moral basis. Speaking in moral terms about complicated global issues is, in fact, proposed by some

as the basis for "reframing" the debate. (Fahey, 2012) However, it takes practice and is something that we aren't as conversant with as we need to be.

Moore, Nelson, and their contributors explore the foundations and need to rethink human action in the world from a moral, ethical perspective. (Moore and Nelson, 2010) In essence, facts won't save us, and are, perhaps, distracting us from recognizing and remembering the foundations of what makes human action in the world distinctive and essential:

> "... a piece is largely missing from the public discourse about climate change, namely an affirmation of our moral responsibilities in the world that the scientists describe. No amount of factual information will tell us what we ought to do. For that, we need moral convictions—ideas about what it is to act rightly in the world, what it is to be good or just, and the determination to do what is right. Facts and moral convictions together can help us understand what we ought to do—something neither alone can do." (Moore and Nelson, 2010, page xvii)

Note that this is not about reframing issues, but about reconnecting with what makes humanity truly human, and with the responsibilities that this carries with it in the world we've come to know. It's not about a simple recognition of the facts, but a profound recognition of our moral obligations as human beings. This viewpoint provides, literally, a moral high ground for explaining not only our circumstances, but more importantly, the agency for hope.

Loeb echoes these thoughts with his association of hope with the human impulse to make things better. (Loeb, 1999(2010)) He writes:

> "…. hope rarely springs from certainty. Instead, it begins and ends in what stirs our hearts, where we place our trust, how we conduct our lives. As writer Norman Cousins explained: "The case for hope has never rested on provable facts or rational assessment. Hope by its very nature is independent of the apparatus of logic. What gives hope its power is not the accumulation of demonstrable facts, but the release of human energies generated by the longing for something better." The more we voice our beliefs and speak to these longings the more hope has a chance to emerge. We talk with new people, hear inspirational stories, build bonds with new communities. We no longer sit passively, immobilized by despair." (Loeb, 1999(2010), page 338)

For Loeb, hope is resident in what we do together, and how we understand ourselves to be part of both humanity and the world around us. In a later book, he writes that hope is an antidote to the fear that threatens democracy itself, and that it's not just a way of looking at the world, but a way of life. (Loeb, 2004, page 4) We draw hope and strength from what we do together and from what we see others doing, and in so doing, we legitimize our own hope through accomplishment.

In a similar vein, Hulme concludes:

> "…climate change is not a problem that can be solved in the sense that, for example, technical and political resources were mobilized to solve the problem of stratospheric ozone depletion. Instead, I suggest a different starting point for coming to terms with

the idea of climate change. I believe that human beings are more than material objects and that climate is more than a physical category. I suggest we need to reveal the creative psychological, ethical, and spiritual work that climate change is doing for us. … We need to ask not what we can do for climate change, but to ask what climate change can do for us." (Hulme, 2009, page 326)

Parenthetically, some planning theorists have engaged planning and plan making through a similar lens. Combining facts, values, myths, and current conditions and trends in plans through planning can and should be viewed as the stuff of storytelling. Throgmorton, notably, identifies a number of roles that planners can play—advocate, scientist, politician—and the forms of discourse and communication that go with each. (Throgmorton, 1996, page 40) He demonstrates that planners are most often called on to blend those roles, creating new roles "that explicitly link passion, reason, and power." (Throgmorton, 1996, page 42)

From this observation, Throgmorton goes on to distill a definition of planners as "authors of persuasive and figure-oriented texts (plans, analyses, articles) that reflect differing or opposing views and that can be read and interpreted in diverse and often conflicting ways, and planners achieve persuasiveness by attending to key principles of fiction writing and reader-response theory." (Throgmorton, 1996, page 51) In other words, planners, through their plans, can and should, in this view, be seen as (aspiring) persuasive storytellers. It's not a question of facts or values or myths or trends, but one of facts and values and myths and trends. In short, the wide range of human experience through time and in place, and related through the range of ways that people make sense of the world and its prospects, both individually and as groups.

Hope and Action

Orr takes up this connection between hope, action, and humanity when he identifies the things needed to be done as the "sensible" course of action. (Orr, 2011, page, xv) Orr writes that "hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up." He views hope as carrying with it an imperative to act, making it different from mere optimism and quite different from despair. Whereas optimism assumes an outcome, hope is about changing the likely outcome. Orr writes:

"I know of no good reason to be optimistic about the human future, but I know many reasons to be hopeful." (Orr, 2011, page 324)

Orr associates courage with hope, in much the same way that Moore and Nelson associate morals and ethics with the human responsibility to be truly human in the world. Orr looks at optimism as the easy way out, and underscores the difficulty and hard work needed to dream and act based on hope… to authentically have hope in this world.

Orr views most of what we're doing to be "green" as "walking north on a southbound train. We make progress while overall, travelling backwards. Or, as I've

reminded my students, though we'd like to believe that a Diet Coke will cancel out that chocolate éclair we had at lunch, it won't. Orr, though glad to see local initiatives in response to climate change, is much less optimistic about their collective global significance, certainly more than professed by Farber, Rayner, and others. He believes that there is little margin for error and no time for delay, that climate change is emblematic of a deeper lack of regard for life, something that local initiatives don't address, and that power is on the side of keeping local initiatives local, and therefore marginal.

What does Orr propose? He writes:

"… those of us concerned about climate change, environmental quality, and equity (should) treat the public as intelligent adults who are capable of understanding the truth and acting creatively and courageously in the face of necessity… They will have to see the connections between what they drive and the wars we fight; the stuff they buy and crazy weather; the politicians they elect and the spread of poverty and violence. They must be taught to see the connections between climate, environmental quality, security, energy use, equity, and prosperity. They must be asked to think and to see. As quaint and naive as that may sound, people have done it before and its worked." (Orr, 2011, page 330)

His prescription is planning: to present and engage people in a higher vision for the future (perhaps the moral vision of Moore and Nelson) than the one we currently have. He concludes:

"Humans have a remarkable capacity to screw up good things. But it is still possible to create a future that is a great deal better than what is in prospect. Ironically, what we must do to avert the worst effects of climate change are mostly the same things we would do to build sustainable communities, improve environmental quality, build prosperous economies, and improve the prospects for our children. … Hope, authentic hope, can be found only in our capacity to discern the truth about our situation and ourselves and summon the fortitude to act accordingly." (Orr, 2011, page 332)

Back to Planning

That planning is the basis for moving forward, and that much of what we need to do can be found in examples of what people say they want, is precisely the message put forth by Peter Calthorpe. (Calthorpe, 2011) Calthorpe breaks down the global carbon emissions challenge and then addresses it systematically through the kind of sustainable community building that Orr issues as his challenge. Like Orr, Calthorpe presents sustainable urban development as what people say they want, and actually create when given the chance. However, Calthorpe goes further, suggesting that sustainable urban form is not only the most desirable outcome for our cities, but is also the least-cost option for addressing carbon emissions, a central driver of climate change.

Like Calthorpe, Newman, Beatley, and Boyer associate resilient cities with what is needed to make it through crises, particularly environmental crises. (Newman,

Beatley, and Boyer, 2009) They present hope as a choice and as what provides confidence and strength. For these authors, hope is what sustains resilience, and building in resilience is what is needed to cope with changes in global environmental conditions. They present strategies for achieving resilience that merge Calthorpe's prescriptions for urban form with the suggestions of Rayner, Norgaard, and others for enlisting communities in addressing climate change: make it local, use prices, learn as you go, engage and discuss, build green, and demonstrate your principles with all public projects.

For planners, the implications here are striking. Nesse presents the emergence of hope and despair as part of the evolution of adaptive fitness for humans and groups. How hope and despair operate for individuals is different than what they mean for groups. While despair becomes an impetus for change on the part of individuals, planners need groups, communities, to embrace the future with a sense of hope if that future is to be materially different than current circumstances suggest. Baum and Norgaard, however, remind us that community exerts a profoundly conservative impact on planning, since belonging to a community carries with it, most often, a desire to forestall change or destabilizing thinking, acting, and influences.

With respect to climate change, the ability to imagine the future only as a diminished version of the present leads, according to this analysis, to inaction. It's not so much that engaging my students requires me to present an overtly, overblown hopeful vision of efforts to counter carbon emissions, but that when the balance tips towards believing that it's too late, then even taking steps towards limiting carbon emissions, and adapting to climate change, seem to be no more than a salute to despair.

Nonetheless, there are real reasons to believe that there is hope for our response to climate change. As Gowdy notes, we can plan and people can change. (Gowdy, 2010, page 38)   For planners, the challenge shifts from setting the world right to making the development of visions and goals expressions of constructive, desirable, even exciting ways to act with respect to the future. And, as current experience suggests, and Nesse predicts, the threat to the status quo is more than sufficient to prevent changes and to maintain the order benefitting elites. The future is central to what planning is, and finding and understanding the social construction of hope is a profound challenge for planners. After all, the social construction and collective creation of hope is what planning is.

Five Things We Can Do

What can we do?

More to the point, what can I do with my students and in the classroom? To respond to the observation that despair was running hope right off the road? As a planner, I'm predisposed to finding hope. How can I better anticipate the way that

this predisposition is communicated, particularly to those increasingly skeptical about the appropriateness of hope as a response?

Broadly speaking, it will take time. This is not a situation that will be turned around by a simple finding of fact or a quick burst of rhetoric. The future is looking more complicated, and our consideration of the future will likely become more challenging.

To move things forward, there are at least five avenues that flow from this discussion and that could be useful. First, we need more philosophers to join the theorists, and we need to draw more from the humanities to balance the social sciences. If planning is a basic human activity, the challenge for planning is to keep the focus on what makes us most human, and on hope as the essence of what we articulate when we plan. Climate change is the perfect issue to challenge the foundations of planning scholarship. On one hand, it encompasses all that the natural, social, and policy sciences have to offer, including the tremendous challenges posed by incorporating science in policy making and planning.

On the other, it speaks directly to that aspect of the future that is both aspirational and values-based, the territory where science and facts are useful but hardly sufficient for guiding decision makers simply because the decisions to be made are about the world to come rather than the world we know. Entire books have been written about why we disagree about climate. Knowing the categories of disagreement, naming them, reframing them, and dissecting them, while interesting, is not going to enable us to make progress on this issue. Understanding more about the link between the human condition and the condition of the climate might.

Second, we should look at planning education as a much broader enterprise than we may have previously supposed. In <u>The Penn Resolution</u>, an interdisciplinary group of architects, landscape architects, planners, urbanists, and urban designers lay out a new charge for planning education, calling for the creation of a new kind of multidisciplined urban designer able to both engage the transition to a post-carbon world and cope with the challenges of climate change. (PennDesign and Penn Institute for Urban Research, 2011)

The echoes between this language and Benton MacKaye's exhortation for a new kind of regional planner in <u>The New Exploration</u> is remarkable. (MacKaye, 1928(1990)) MacKaye saw planning as a means for human beings to play a conscious role in evolution. As such, a planner would need to be someone able to engage the world in all of its dimensions. He wrote:

> "Here we have the function of every sort of "planner": it is primarily to uncover, reveal, and visualize—not alone his own ideas but nature's; not merely to formulate the desire of man, but to reveal the limits thereto imposed by a greater power. Thus, in fact, planning is two things: 1) an accurate formulation of our own desires—the specific knowledge of what it is we want; and 2) an accurate revelation of the limits, and the opportunities, imposed and bequeathed to us by nature. Planning is a scientific charting and picturing of the thing (whether logging railroad or communal

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center) which man desires and which the eternal forces will permit. The basic achievement of planning is to make potentialities visible. But this is not enough. Visibility is only part of revelation. The mold must be rendered not only visible but audible. It must be heard as well as seen. The regional planner, in revealing a given mold or environment, must portray not alone for the sense of sight, but for that of hearing also. Indeed he must portray in terms of all the senses." (MacKaye, 1928(1990), page 147)

Third, we should point to real examples of hope arising in the face of despair, and challenge ourselves and our students to not get stuck on ideas about the future that may be not just fruitless, but wrong. Solnit writes, for example, about "redemption amid disruption" in her chronicles of the emergence of community in a profound way when catastrophe happens. (Solnit, 2009) In her case studies of communities that arise in the wake of disaster, she notes that the profound human desire for community and connection blossoms when old relationships get overwhelmed and set aside. She writes:

> "Disaster reveals what else the world could be like – reveals the strength of that hope, that generosity, and that solidarity. It reveals mutual aid as a default operating principle and civil society as something waiting in the wings when it's absent from the stage. ... A world could be built on that basis... This is the only paradise that is possible, and it will never exist whole, stable, and complete. It is always coming into being in response to trouble and suffering; making paradise is the work that we are meant to do. ... These paradises built in hell show us both what we want and what we can be." (313)

For those of us in the Pacific Northwest, a more local example can serve a similar purpose. In May, 1980, Mt. St. Helens erupted, blowing away over a thousand feet of mountain, leveling 230 square miles of forest, and profoundly altering a presence on the horizon that literally anchored sense of place for millennia. The eruption and subsequent destruction was described as no less than a catastrophe of epic proportions. However, in the intervening 30+ years, something equally profound has occurred: What had been assumed to be a landscape of violence, destruction, and devastation was rapidly becoming something else. (Goodrich et al, 2008)

From the perspective of hope and despair, Mt. St. Helens is a story of profound hope: a new, interesting, and rewarding world opening up in ways that reward curiosity, engagement, and action. The volcano and its blast zone are huge, overwhelming human scales of thought and action. There is no escape. At the same time, its rapid evolution is opening up new opportunities for the relationships of people and communicates to the landscape, and for our ideas about what's possible.

Like climate change, the science can tell us some things, but it can't help us understand our values in relation to the place, the mountain or to its eruption. On a smaller but still impressive scale, the Mt. St. Helens experience gives us a first hand way to experience the value of caring for the future of a place that is in no way like what we thought it was. Consequently, as an example, Mt. St. Helens helps us

understand and experience ways of knowing and caring that will be important as we encounter and try to decode the changes coming with climate change.

Fourth, we need to take a fresh look at participation. The research seems to suggest that there is more hope in community than in individual action. We're all in this together, though it might not always seem that way, particularly in a charged political environment where a sizable group is loudly working to deny that anything is happening at all. How can engagement in planning focus more on building a community of interest focused on the future? How can engagement become less bureaucratic and more empowering and fun? What do planners need to accomplish, and how can they accomplish that without killing the potential for broader, longer run discussions of the future and the steps we, as communities, can take together?

Fifth, intertwined in all this are the paired themes of thinking and doing, thought and action. Planning without action is not up to this or any task. We need to see results from what we do. The apocryphal "plan on the shelf" exists when we plan without acting, and too much of our planning happens without directly leading to the change that was promised or believed to be necessary.

It might be useful, then, to take a step back from our portrayal of planning as a profession, to embrace a different notion: planning as craft. Professions rest on specific knowledge, and restricting access to that knowledge. Craft, on the other hand, results from the learning that occurs by doing. More than ever, planning, and planning education, need to develop contemporary means for synthesizing the visionary, pragmatic, and idealistic foundations for identifying a future worthy of collective hope. Planning and planning education might both benefit from making craft a centerpiece, and in that way, making plans not just vessels for hope, but tools for acting on hope as well.

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