Chapter 46

Varied Legacies of Modernism in Urban Planning

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A few years ago, Sharon Zukin captured the essence of the intellectual challenge confronting present urban scholarship when she wrote of the "new spirit abroad in urban studies" (Zukin 1992: 489). Bob Beauregard has perhaps most forcefully brought this challenge to the attention of planners, especially in the United States, through his image of modernist planning as suspended precariously over the "post-modern abyss" (Beauregard 1989, 1991). In other parts of the English-reading world Goodchild (1990) has perhaps performed as significant a function. Beauregard conveys some of the sense of disruption which planners raised in the modernist discourses of planning schools perforce have felt in the circumstances of the nineties, when many of the props of the modernist worldview – even the very idea of *having* a worldview – have seemed knocked out. Moreover, the usual instruments of planning and their supports seem in disarray as everywhere and at every scale the state retreats, reducing budgets as it goes.

By now, however, the paragraph above repeats a familiar litany. Most urban planners know the song, and some love to sing it. Many *have* to write new refrains. All sorts of new directions in planning have been proposed, and many pursued with vigor – including Beauregard's "reestablishment of mediative roles between capital, labour and the state." On occasion the response has been still more planning activity, though almost certainly with further reduced effect (see, for example, Yiftachel and Alexander 1995: 280). But it seems to me that few are prepared to excavate the legacies bequeathed by the modernist past. Like all archaeologies, such excavation requires time and patience, and difficult decisions – to dig deeper in some areas than others, to lavish more attention on some artifacts than on their companions, and to choose which belong in museum displays, or in the basement, or in debate on their functions.

The first purpose of this chapter is to excavate some of the modernist planning past. Paths to modernist planning will be treated somewhat eclectically. At each point, the chapter attempts to emphasize the complexity and often contradictory nature of the evidence. This exercise leads on to the brief consideration of the questions: What can modern urban planning contribute to a post-modern era? What are its limitations?

Modernism and Planning

What modernist approaches to urban planning have had in common was (or is) a sense both of the scale of urban problems and of the necessity of major interventionist activity towards their solution. Lewis Mumford captured this sentiment clearly when, in reviewing Jose Luis Sert's ABC of Urban Problems, Their Analysis, Their Solutions (Sert 1944), he wrote in The New Republic: "Mr Sert believes that our cities can and should survive; but the condition for their survival is the application of large-scale town planning which will embrace the reorganization of regions and countrysides as well." Scale, intervention, comprehensiveness: all are present here. As important was the sense that intervention could actually accomplish improvement: "...it is possible to attack the prevailing waste and muddle..." (Yorke 1939: 132).

The grand scale and optimism of modernism in planning has not precluded a sense that the creation of the better "city tomorrow" would probably be slow (Fry 1944: 48ff) MARS (Modern Architecture Research Group, British affiliate of CIAM – Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne, founded in 1922) wanted to solve the perceived massive problems of London's urban form, but recognized that "We must find a solution that will allow us to deal with London, even if it is to be the work of several generations and we but its progenitors…spare time to prepare a plan for London… (Banham 1960: 86–7; Fry 1944: 94ff).

There is little sense that the future will overturn what seems to be appropriate now. One of the prominent members of MARS, Maxwell Fry, noted during the Second World War:

Certain it is that the task to which we will turn so eagerly when peace comes does not lie within the power of a single generation to perform, but belongs more nearly to the century. Why therefore should we be deterred from the attempt to see the whole, and to frame principles which may help to govern the conduct of new generations. It were better to go only part of the way along a fine road than to reach the end of a blind alley (Fry 1944: 113–14).

It has often been noted how strongly modernism in planning represented a response to material conditions – what we might now call Fordism, machine production, the development of new building materials, "the new age of automobility" (Jackson 1985: title of chapter 9), and so on. Thus Le Corbusier in *Vers une Architecture* "extolled the achievements of engineers…and proclaimed the need for a more rational exploitation of the technique of modern engineering to provide on these foundations a solution to the problems of to-day…" (Yorke 1939: 45) – a paean to the *possibilities* to which modernist planning could respond, demonstrating a belief in the possibility of rationality.

Urban planning, of course, had to do with a response to *problems*; using new techniques to address and to solve those problems: in the view of CIAM in the early thirties, "It is the uncontrolled and disorderly development of the Machine Age which has produced the chaos of our cities" (Sert 1944: 246). Thus modernist planning can be apprehended as optimistic and grand in scale; but there is another feature of modernism which seems striking. The conditions to which it responded

were not merely made more optimistic by the new material conditions available, but indeed were made more sombre by the "dislocations of the age" (James 1988: p. 600) – the wreckage, depression, even carnage and devastation to which modernist planning mostly responded in its formative phases. That modernist planning *became* a matter of centralized bureaucratic routine, remote from most citizens, does not mean that it always lacked a deeper and stirring response to appalling conditions – the powerful Burnham vision of making large plans to stir the blood (Moore 1921). After all, we usually learnt our planning history from texts which emphasized the origins of planning in the awful urban life of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries in just those terms – Goodchild's (1990) "early modern" planning.

With roots in those earlier times, modernist planning took shapes and substances in the thirties and forties. It represented a broad school which understood, albeit in varying degrees, the sources of the "dislocations of the age" as "laissez-faire policies, free competition, present system of allotment of land (arbitrary and excessive degree of subdivision)...new factors have appeared – the economic crisis of our times, the chaos of our cities, the air-raid menace..." (Sert 1944: 152). This diagnosis (and the medical analogy is intriguing) was hardly confined to Europe. The city was chaotic, problematic, it degenerated the younger generation, in the eyes of Latin American planners of the period. Planning was necessary to control the growth of the city precisely to overcome these problems (Outtes 1994). If modernist planning showed some consensus on the sources of urban ills, and if its practitioners shared the same complex of optimism, scale, and time in solution of those ills, that nevertheless left plenty of room for divergent approaches to the spatial solutions which could be proposed and sometimes implemented. There was little dispute in the thirties on separating CIAM's "four urban functions" in space: indeed, part of the modernist ideas of adjusting urban form to cope with other modern developments lay in accepting that "Industrial districts should be independent of residential districts (indeed, of other districts as well), and should be isolated by means of green bands" and that "Certain industries [e.g. Ford] will require vast areas; others will need only small areas, with allowances for possible expansion (Sert 1944: 152, 154; also Athens Charter clause 5 on p. 248).

But as Fowler argues, especially in a chapter called "Why did we do it: explanations for the postwar urban environment," contest between garden city expansion and compact city concentration meant that modernist planning spoke with multiple voices on the subject of remaking urban form (Fowler 1992). From the early thirties some modernists protested what they saw as too dispersed a garden city solution to the contemporary urban problem. For example, Thomas Sharp attacked the evils of the "town-country" suburban ideal, anxious that modern housing development was "wastefully eating up the countryside" and pleading for a return to the planning of "real compact towns" (Sharp 1932; Richards 1940: 125). Modernism gave us both the "forms and ideologies of Wright and Le Corbusier... the clashing ideals of Broadacre City and Radiant City," with effects expressed in both "the physical design and politics of our cities..." (Fowler 1992: 173–5).

These clashing ideals intersected in various and noncongruent ways with political differences. Modernism of course contained contests, one of which lay between those who favored the "withering away of government" in the face of self-sufficiency and individualism (Wright) and those who saw a need for massive government or

other hierarchical intervention to improve urban form (perhaps more Corbusian). For Le Corbusier "...a city for the machine age could never emerge from discussion and compromise: that was the path to chaos" (Fishman 1987: 239). And, of course, this contest sometimes appeared as a contradiction in the writing and practice of single individuals.

Authoritarian tendencies in *some* modernist approaches to city form have resonated most clearly in divided and segregated societies: thus "The experiment of Chandigarh...shows socially regressive traits. Especially symptomatic is Le Corbusier's cynically resigned acceptance of the caste system as a 'useful means of classification', the inhumanity of which he attempts to make more bearable by high architectural quality" (Lampugnani 1985: 130).

Such patrician attitudes are sometimes considered characteristic of many planners in the whole modern period, whatever their differences on matters such as urban form. To the (mostly) French example of Le Corbusier could be added the British example of Abercrombie - not only evidenced in his plans and approach to grand planning solutions but in his personal style, nowhere better illustrated than in the film of the 1944 London County Plan, Proud City. As Abercrombie handles his monocle at the fireside his patrician tones tell the public what is best for them (on the film, see Gold and Ward 1994). American, Brazilian, Canadian... and probably Yemeni or Zambian examples could be added. All would reveal what Docker calls a magisterial attitude - confidence in possession of the finest ideas, as judged by the leading exponents of modernism themselves (Docker 1994: 14, 22). And this confidence has survived the fact that, despite its apparently long-range view, there have been frequent changes in just what the finest ideas are considered to be. Nowhere is that facet of urbanist modernism more apparent than in the early history of "socialist" Eastern Europe: "Three times in little more than ten years, everything had begun all over again – at the end of the war, in 1949 and again in 1956" (Åman 1992: vii).

Of course, in Eastern Europe this arrogance combined well with degrees of authoritarian rule. Similarly, one thinks of South Africa, the development of apartheid and the evolution of its planning in the same period (cf. Mabin and Smit 1997). Outtes (1994) outlines similar phenomena in the increasingly dictator-ruled Latin America of the thirties and forties, where "representative institutions typical of democratic societies were seen as inefficient through the eyes of the planners." For example, an author in the leading Brazilian urban journal noted "Let us claim the convenience of the new mentality which can see the benefits of single orientation" (Anon. 1940: 237). The culmination of such approaches may be found in Brasilia, "the modernist city" of Holston's (1989) account. And, of course, there is something eating away at these supremely confident and grandly assertive ideas. In Brasilia, it is the "Brasilianization" of the city as informality and popular alternatives cut into the grand plan of the earlier autocrats.

Alternative Modernisms

However, there is another tradition in modernist planning: a humanitarian (and sometimes socialist) one, with roots reaching back to the Enlightenment (Wolfe 1989: 62–77). In the quest to achieve humanitarian ends, urban planners are sometimes "considered to be socialist intruders on the rights of private property, and to

some extent they are," as Fowler puts it. A socialist tradition in modernist planning can be traced back to Tony Garnier's *Cité Industrielle* of 1899–1904 – a contribution whose "principles of city planning were perfected by CIAM, and decisively influenced the *Charte d'Athènes*" if Lampugnani is to be believed (1985: 52–3). A variant on these ideas developed in Soviet planning in the thirties: for example, N. A. Milyutin's compact linear city quarter proposed for Stalingrad in 1930, imbued with good social intentions and attempted in highly authoritarian times. As with Le Corbusier's rather fatuous assertion, "The law of the land is that it shall support houses (the law of gravity) and not that it shall support the unmerited ascension of private fortunes" (Le Corbusier 1947: 100), such examples show how anticapitalist and authoritarian planning could variously mix or remain opposed throughout the modernist period in planning, producing the puzzles of Wright, Corb, and others (Yorke 1939: 34). For such reasons it is necessary to recognize that the legacies of modernism in planning are varied indeed.

Murray Bookchin argues that the significance of planners lies in the fact that they exist at all. Their existence shows market society's distrust that spontaneous economic and social activity can express itself in a beautiful city, let alone a habitable or efficient one (Fowler 1992: 171). But if we are to draw towards one tendency which would capture some coherence in modernism, it would surely lie in the discourses of control in modernist planning and urban policy: control to address the "dislocations of the age." These two facets – control and improvement – have been expressed in innumerable ways.

From the Barlow Commission on the distribution of industrial activity in England (which The Economist called the "Royal Commission on the Enormity of London," August 13, 1938, p. 313), through so many daily activities of urban planners in thousands of zoned cities, to such extremes as controlling the urbanization of rural people in Maoist China, apartheid South Africa or Soeharto Indonesia, instruments of control have been critical to modernist planning. Viewed from outside, all such planning can appear to turn the rationalist bases of modernism into the irrational (e.g. Norval 1993). Yiftachel has suggested that "The very same planning tools usually introduced to assist social reform and improvement in people's quality of life can be used as a means of controlling and repressing minority groups" (Yiftachel 1995: 218). Hoch puts a related point both more philosophically and more strongly, at least when "good modern planning" occurs in an uncertain environment: "Rational planning in the service of humane projects ends up producing effects far more perverse and destructive than the alleged problems such planning is supposed to solve...if planning inflames the illness it is supposed to cure, it would seem prudent to stop planning altogether" (Hoch 1992: 207, 212).

If one follows texts such as that of Åman (1992), such a comment strikes one as more than apposite in describing the kind of planning which characterized Eastern European cities in the fifties – and one could make similar points in relation to Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa.

Separations

It is easy to understand the reconstructionist thinking which preoccupied planners in so many parts of the world at the close of the Second World War. The great hopes of

such planners – if they shared the aims of the Planning School at which Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, a prominent member of CIAM, taught, then there was an orientation to create a planning mindset:

The School seeks to create...a corps of trained men [sic], possessing the necessary breadth of outlook and technical knowledge, whose collaboration with and ultimate succession to those who now perform similar tasks will, it is the Association's hope, ensure happy and ordered development in the place of the chaos which the nineteenth-century has left us (Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction 1947: 4).

But these apparently laudable aims tied into some very specific ideas about the organization of urban space and society. Tyrwhitt concluded a textbook chapter of 1953 with a long quote from Giedion, clearly one of the moderns, which specifically thinks in terms of the distance there should be between residential and industrial sections...(the modern town planner) thinks no longer in terms of streets and axes, but in terms of population groupings (Tyrwhitt 1950: 145; the same points were made by MARS member Jane Drew, 1994).

This modernist thinking clearly lent itself to apartheid, in ways which Wilkinson and Japha have illustrated perhaps more clearly than any other authors (Wilkinson 1983; Japha 1986): a marriage of modernity and racism, something not dissimilar to what Bauman explores in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989). But more important, Baumann shows us that the holocaust – while not a predictable result of modernism – was rendered possible by modernism, and that such enormity fits easily with modernist "planning" in a variety of fields.

Does this urge to control disorder and create separations characterize all modernist planning? Or do some valuable artifacts lie in the modernist soil, awaiting exhumation, free or potentially free of the urge to control even though possessing the means? Reading the recent planning (and broader urban studies) literature raises images of the "terrifying landscape of postmodernism" (Dijink 1993). Authors such as Christopherson (1993), Davis (1990), and Judd (1994) certainly terrify with the awful prospect of increasing proportions of urban populations walled out of what a decreasing proportion is walled into. In some places, which may be the image of the future, the walled out already outnumber the walled in: in this sense the postmodern city "all comes together" in São Paulo, not in Los Angeles (pace Soja 1989). What effective future can possibly await those who now occupy the declining spaces, shrinking consumption patterns, and increasingly hideous images which may soon, if not now, form the lot of the world's urban majority? In cities like Johannesburg, Jakarta, or São Paulo, the collection of huge groups of people whom "the system of labour cannot or will not use" is not a marginal phenomenon: it is central to the politics of the future. Approaches to nonpaternalistic incorporation of the excluded are painful and take enormous amounts of resources, especially time, to develop.

The scale of the global urban problem is immense. There is a temptation to seize the initiative armed with the large-scale view of modernism. Behind the notion that urban life in much of the world is not environmentally "sustainable," lurks the probability that urban society is not politically sustainable unless "something" happens. Already new dislocations threaten the new age of privatized urban space, though such threats may seem more remote in midtown Manhattan than in Salvador do Bahia. Modernist ideas leap forward to address these dislocations, but they do so

disjointedly and ineffectually. The acceleration of market and technological change seems to deny the modernist recognition that intended urban change may be slow. That recognition in any event is under attack whenever it can be accused of implying that the walled out should "wait on time," in Martin Luther King's still ringing phrase. Physical proposals put forward to relieve the conditions of the excluded seem destined to deepen that exclusion, as both low- and high-density urban forms, both mixed and single uses, appear to turn against them in the hands of the "city builders," to employ Fainstein's (1994) phrase. Greater democracy is welcomed, but weakened; it seems to have little effect on reducing the controls binding the lives of many.

But the great dislocations of this apparent *fin de siècle* seem to call for a grand drama. Can parts of the modernist legacy be exhumed to contribute heroic roles? If cities globally are descending into greater segregation, fragmentation, and control, in which large and even majority sections of populations suffer on the wrong side of the walls, what can the modernist tradition offer?

Democracy

In some cases, the very sweep of the modernist tradition has precipitated its rejection. It has become difficult to speak of planning without some embarrassment in many parts of central and eastern Europe (as reflected in papers and discussions, for example, at the Association of European Schools of Planning conference in Lodz, Poland, 1992). Despondency pervades the ranks of those who sought (or in some remaining cases seek) to bring planning ideas into practice elsewhere, particularly in North America, and probably more generally in the larger cities of Asia and Latin America, not to mention Africa. In the midst of the despondency, resignation, and ignorance which characterize the response, the arrival (or return) of democracy in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and South Africa suggests cases in which some of the older precepts may again be tested – and tested in the increasingly common circumstances of exclusion and control not merely of some minority groups, but of attempting to overcome the social, economic, and political exclusion of a majority (cf. Häussermann 1996: 222–30).

In a world of increasingly divided cities, suggested in phrases from recent publication titles such as "distorted cities" (Beauregard 1994), "fortress city" (Christopherson 1993), "urban control" (Judd 1994), "new walled cities" (Davis 1990), and "landscapes of power" (Zukin 1991), the reconstruction of cities after apartheid seems a beacon of hope to many planners worldwide. Discourses of progressive change confront the urban observer everywhere in South Africa, and indeed appear accepted if not hegemonic across the wide political spectrum. The modernist predilections of the ruling ANC are demonstrated in its election manifesto, the Reconstruction and Development Programme, which refers to "coherent vision," purposeful effort," "fundamental transformation," and "comprehensive redesign and reconstruction" among other examples of unequivocal modernist language. The difficulties of the project are rarely confronted, but any successes will be significant for the exploration of modernist planning in contemporary cities (Turok 1994, 1995; Harrison 1996).

Thus the Brazilian, Hungarian, and South African experiences at once attract and puzzle: for their cities are not the only ones "distorted" by modernist planning

(Beauregard 1994). These "non-northern/western" cases provide prisms (undoubtedly different from the prisms of Shanghai or Bangkok) through which to examine the varied impact of modernism on urban planning. Among the intentions of this chapter is the commencement of such an examination. To do so seems particularly apposite at a time when "segregation, fragmentation and surveillance" have become key features identified in the newer literature as characteristic of "post-modern" cities (Watson and Gibson 1995; Pagano 1993). If modernist planning approaches can now contribute to improving the lives of urban citizens in South Africa, their relevance can surely be considered elsewhere.

But the approaches to urban planning remain embedded in certain elements of modernism, despite the explicit rejection of "modernism" by some of the practitioners. For example, the key idea that urban form is wrong powerfully persists in South African planning discourse, where it is precisely the dislocations of apartheid which allow that persistence. Thus the first postapartheid planning law, called the Development Facilitation Act, sets out general principles which are intended to guide decision making on land development. They explicitly include such CIAM concepts as compacting the city and achieving order in various ways; but more fundamentally, they reflect the powerful modernist traditions – one that hopes to accomplish the better city through urban form, and one that believes the world can be guided through principles. The persistence of these modernist precepts in a country which has experienced radical democratization is an enigma until one recognizes the imperative to change the world, postapartheid, which can produce law similar to the Brazilian rhetoric of the forties: "The ideal, in a measure of this kind, is not wasting efforts in piece-meal activities but defining the general rules and following them inflexibly, during decades and decades" (Anon 1940: 237, cited in Outtes 1994).

Modernist Planning in a Postmodern Period?

Some have suggested that much planning thinking now "bears little resemblance to the positivist approaches that dominated a decade ago" – however we characterize the period, "there is certainly a different drumbeat" (Moore Milroy 1991: 187). Yet interrogation of the continuing legacies of modernism may defy that interpretation. And, again there is diversity, from near-total rejection of urban planning to the embrace of certain elements of the modernist tradition by new regimes. It is the South African example which is easiest to explore here, though others could be added.

South Africa's cities, and those of the rest of southern Africa, have been shaped in large and small ways by very modernist conceptions of planning – the achievement of structures which would support the society and economy of apartheid (Robinson 1990). Such an application of planning may be recognized as one designed, like that Yiftachel has described for Palestine/Israel (Yiftachel 1995), to promote social control and economic retardation – though its origins may be rather different. The opposition to apartheid planning based itself, of course, on an alternative but very much a modernist conception of planning – planning intended to redistribute power and comfort in a comprehensive and rationalist way, predicated on the notion of continued change in what seemed to be the relatively unilinear processes of economic development of the period. Thus conflict over the shape of the cities was essentially a conflict, heightened in the late seventies and early eighties, between two

rationalist movements and planning approaches, despite their basis in conflicting "nationalisms." King notes that in "developing countries...it was thought that modernism would save cities from Europe's industrial-capitalist urban chaos" (1992: 146). Both the rationalist views of urban South Africa sought to do just that, one through planned oppression, the other through planned emancipation.

Meanwhile, the legacies of the modernist past in urban planning continue to weigh heavily on the conception of action. As Peter Marcuse (1993) points out, divided cities are nothing new. But there are new forces which promote division, and perhaps fewer which oppose. Globally, the roles of metropolitan governments and planning have weakened (Yiftachel and Alexander 1995: 280). Dramatic changes underway in urban space have more to do with Fainstein's (1994) city builders than with governments - and they tend to deepen the divides, not to overcome them by some magical "edge city" incantation (Beauregard 1995; Wilson 1995). Among the challenges will be to develop the certainty in planning which allows progressive planning to channel private development in socially useful ways (Christopherson 1993: 410, 419). These are lessons usefully learnt from São Paulo (Guedes 1992) to Santa Monica (Shearer in Krumholz and Clavel 1994). And in the most peripheral parts of the global community of divided cities, such fundamentals as class and gender relations remain little addressed. There is plenty of scope for new intellectual contributions to planning theory here - not to mention hearing the stories of planners from the South.

Some Conclusions

"City planning in Australia has failed to improve the welfare of our city dwellers..." wrote Leonie Sandercock (1976: 1) some years ago. Not only has urban planning failed to realize the dream of improved conditions of urban life, as Sandercock suggested of Australian planning, but in South Africa (and perhaps elsewhere) it has actually deepened patterns of oppression which it has taken decades to overthrow. However, the nature and impact of planning are much more textured, nuanced, and varied – some would say paradoxical or contradictory – than this contribution to racial and other forms of oppression would suggest. In most parts of the world planning has long included an ambition to improve urban life for less exalted parts of city populations, and these reformist, sometimes even revolutionary, sentiments have coexisted with less salubrious sentiments.

Modernist planning tried to remake the shape of cities to deal with the dislocations of its formative age. It fell on harder times as the dislocations became more complex and less obvious; indeed, it has fallen into some disrepute. We are now in a period when city form seems to be remade beyond the control of planning. Modernist planning has gone into retreat. But as city form is left to the private city builders, we end up with fortresses. Thus we hurtle towards new dislocations – where will we turn when movements arise which challenge those dislocations, which demand new city forms? In the South African case it is clear that we turn to elements of the modernist planning project to overcome the fragmentation and exclusion of apartheid; but this occurs because of the legacy of modernism within the liberation movement: perhaps also negatively, because other instruments do not yet present themselves.

The narrative of contemporary change in Johannesburg, São Paolo and Budapest is partly about the problems of "finding a means to handle, politically, waking up in a postmodern era while equipped only with the politics and planning practices of a modernist past" (Mabin 1995). The preliminary explorations reported here indicate merely how substantial some of the difficulties are, how some intersect with the experiences recounted from other parts of the world, and how some of the approaches to change which emancipatory movements find themselves adopting are full of difficulties and dangerous limitations. Attempts to confront some of the disabilities of the modernist forms under distinctly postmodern circumstances with the aid of modernist planning ideas are surely relevant to a wider frame.

The politics of urban emancipation in societies marked by massive unemployment, historically substantial but very incomplete proletarianization, disaffection, and industrial decline as well as particularly deeply etched patterns of social and spatial fragmentation are not matters of merely idiosyncratic interest. They certainly bear comparison with other societies in the South, and much greater similarity with cities in the global North can regrettably be anticipated in years to come.

Much of what has happened in social theory in the past 20 years or so has been about disempowering White, male, Western, and indeed modernist, figures, authors, theories – and the empowering of "other" voices. Does the "inclusion" of "voices from the borderlands" (Sandercock 1995) mean displacement of the modernist past? Or can some of its varied legacies survive in the new theories and practices of postmodern planning? Can we be postmodernists and still be planners when we grow up?

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