

## Vancouverism: Actualizing the Livable City Paradox

By Serena Kataoka

### Abstract

This article provides a cautionary tale about the progressive tendency to construct and improve upon livable cities. By showing how Vancouverism has actualized the livable city paradox – one part rural romance of living close to nature, and one part urban romance of diversity and complexity – it is able to draw out some of the pernicious implications of doing so. There are no ready solutions to the complex scenes that are sketched, but we can get a better sense for how to respond appropriately within and to these scenes, by looking backwards rather than ahead.

The “livable city” is a paradox parading as common sense. Participatory urban planning exercises across the continent aim to inflect “livability” with meanings particular to each place, without considering how the term has been made a topic of consultation.

The popular imagination has long been captured by an anti-urban animus, sold as rural romance (Jacobs 1992 [1961], 17-21). Hence, “livability” has been defined in suburban terms – as close to nature, healthy, child-friendly, and community oriented.<sup>1</sup> A popular rendition of the livable city would be the “suburban city” (obviously, a contradiction in terms). In contrast, planners following Jane Jacobs’ urban romance have moved beyond blunt distinctions between zones for living (close to nature) and zones for working (close to the financial sector), and so have redefined “livability” in urban terms – as diverse and complex. The livable city contradiction would seem to have been resolved with the conception of “urban cities”. But just as the rural romance has been haunted by what it hoped to have left behind (i.e., the complexities of the urban) the urban romance is haunted by the simplicity of the rural. Differently put, despite

<sup>1</sup> In the words of the father of suburbanization, in the Garden City: “all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination; and the certainty of being able to live this life will be the magnet which will produce the effect for which we are all striving – the spontaneous movement of the people from our crowded cities to the bosom of our kindly mother earth, at once the source of life, of happiness, of wealth, and of power.” (Howard 1965, 45-6)

(or perhaps in spite of?) planners' now widespread acceptance of urban complexity, popular demand for suburban simplicity persists.

Taking this persistent suburbanism seriously, Larry Beasley articulated a version of the livable city that is romance 'all the way down'. So-called Vancouverism describes a style of urban planning, and its associated architectural form, that is fast becoming a global model for central city revitalization (Punter 2003).<sup>2</sup> From a distance, its form looks like a random collection of spindly Le Corbusian towers hovering above green spaces (that together maximize access to 'light and air')<sup>3</sup> but the pedestals of these towers have been set in such a way that, on the ground, they seem more like low-rise buildings, with a mix of small commercial spaces and row houses, creating a street-level diversity of uses that salutes Jane Jacobs. This peculiar pairing of forms seems especially progressive because it does not appear to leave the rural or the urban behind; but as we will soon see, it is plagued by nightmares of every sort (Ley 1980). The problem is not that an even more progressive version of the livable city is called for; rather, the drive to move beyond the current state of urban affairs is itself the problem.

Beasley published the principles of Vancouverism in a retrospective article entitled "'Living First' in Downtown Vancouver" (April 2000). Many of the principles echo those of Jane Jacobs: to resist freeway construction, "to extend the fabric, patterns, and character of the existing city," "to develop a complete neighborhood unit at a pedestrian scale," "insisting on a rich housing mix," and "to bring an economic ecology to each district." But they diverge on an important principle. Beasley centers the very kinds of spaces, "open space and green linkages," that Jacobs was trying to de-center (in order to showcase the street as the

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<sup>2</sup> The City of Vancouver has received numerous Awards for its planning practices (e.g., from the UN Centre for Human Settlements in 1996), and for its livability (e.g., Economist Intelligence Unit found Vancouver to be the "best city to live" in the world's livability survey in 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Le Corbusier seems to have been remembered by planners for the Radiant City, even though Le Corbusier's stated purpose in assuming "an ideal site," such as the city of to-morrow (a.k.a. the radiant city), "was not to overcome the existing state of things," which is the common interpretation, "but by constructing a theoretically water-tight formula to arrive at the fundamental principles of modern town planning." (Le Corbusier 1947 [1929], 172.) Taking his plan for the ideal city on face value, and so focusing on Chadigarh, planners forget his socialist and spiritual principles and their underlying conceptions of architecture are forgotten. Lost is his willingness to advance his principles within constraints – as in his construction of low-rise workers' housing in Pessac (Boudon 1972).

primary locus of urban vitality).<sup>4</sup> Whereas Jacobs depicts civic culture as developing organically and enlivening of streets and parks alike, Beasley presents open urban spaces as features that can be constructed from the ground up, and occupied by a marketable culture.

The first principle of Vancouverism given by Beasley is: “let congestion be an ally in a household’s profound first decision to live downtown or in the suburbs.” His aim was to attract homebuyers to downtown, and so he was trying to market downtown neighborhoods as a commute-free alternative for those who might also consider living in suburbs – in short, ‘would-be suburbanites’. Open spaces and green linkages are the downtown fix for suburban cravings for being ‘close to nature’ – as we can see in the marketing of Vancouverism. Developers have been on the front line of the marketing campaign, which could have led to a fractured impression, but a coherent image of Vancouverism was inaugurated by what has been billed as North America’s largest master-planned community (DA Architects & Planners 2009; Konotopetz July 7, 2005). After Beasley enshrined the principles of Vancouverism in a new Central Area Plan, and following on Expo 86, the bulk of the world’s fair grounds (204 acres) were leased as a single parcel to a single developer, Concord Pacific (Ley 1987).<sup>5</sup> The functional centre of this master-planned community is the condo; the Roundhouse community centre, seawall walkway, and so on, are just so many added features of the marketable unit. While each condo tower has a particular style, the overall image is the same: a minimal aesthetic with modern lines, combined with natural materials and stunning views of nature. Concord Pacific offers color schemes such as “Landscape, Seascape and Skyscape,” and uses the language of “craft” and “tradition” to describe their development practice (Concord Pacific, November 10, 2008). Such rural romanticism hearkens back to early suburban visionaries, and is used to open up psychological space for would-be suburbanites to willingly squeeze into tiny, pre-fabricated units. In fact, Vancouverism promises to satisfy the drive to be ‘close to nature’ without rolling over nature, and so in a sense it is more able to realize the suburban dream than the suburbs themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> It is tempting to explain away this divergence by highlighting contextual differences; for example, in Jacobs’ time “environmental sustainability” was not yet the tenet of progressive planning that it has since become, and whereas New York looks in towards its urban core, Vancouver looks out towards nature (across the ocean, and up at the mountains). While context surely matters, this paper is concerned with the significance of Beasley and Jacobs’ different approaches and aims.

<sup>5</sup> David Ley’s analysis of the development of this master planned community argues that it inheres a neo-conservative ideology, as against the romantic ideology that informed a somewhat contemporaneous development across the harbour. While sympathetic to Ley’s overall argument, this article aims to clarify the ways that romanticism is mobilized to construct the master planned community.

While marketing may draw buyers in from congested streets, something is needed to keep would-be suburbanites living downtown.<sup>6</sup> Since Concord Pacific condos are industrially produced, like Le Corbusier's "machines for living", it would have made sense to take up his prescription for a "state of mind" for living in them (1947 [1929]). Yet since this mentality consists of a rational spiritualism cued to "social equilibrium," it may be progressive but it is far from marketable these days – even in Vancouver (where 'zen' and 'karma' are common advertising by-words). Instead, Beasley invented a particular "live/work/play" tradition (in the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement that Le Corbusier railed against). The approach lends would-be suburbanites a sense of community – which on Jacobs' telling is a shared private identity (based on shared private interests, such as the suburban love of lawn care), as opposed to a civic culture (that is respectful of privacy, and develops in shared public spaces, such as city streets). Yet since Vancouverism only claims to put "living first," it does not impose a particular definition of living; it suggests a lifestyle that balances living with work and play. Leaving all the terms somewhat open means that almost anyone (with access to at least a cool ¾ of a million dollars) can become a member of the "live/work/play" community, and so the community can appear diverse. Details (e.g., Hong Kong-Canadian/designer/kayaker) are unnecessary because Concord Pacific Place residents share a lifestyle identity (enabled by a certain measure of affluence) that leads to questions such as "How do people back east/East survive the rat race?" While non-intrusive, these sorts of questions are indicative of the kind of prying that Jacobs associates with suburbanites.

Since suburbanites are supposed to share an identity, some feel entitled to ask into others' private affairs, and are given opportunities to do so in "in-between" spaces (that are neither public nor private, such as front lawns). Even though the city has few spaces of this sort, Jacobs shows that suburbanites who move downtown do not enjoy or contribute to the safety or neighborliness afforded by clear distinctions between public and private. In her most famous example of how neighbors' eyes were drawn "upon the street" to look out for a little girl struggling with a man (who turned out to be her father), none of the residents of a new condo building looked out of their windows. The message is that they were not acculturated urbanites (Jacobs 1992 [1961], 38-9). They hid in their homes out of fear of invasions of privacy, like isolated suburbanites. This

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<sup>6</sup> That there is something different about those who bought into this "live/work/play" neighbourhood, from other downtown residents and business owners, can be seen on a map of recent municipal elections outcomes - Concord Pacific Place was the only neighbourhood on the downtown Vancouver Peninsula to vote for the conservative NPA candidate for mayor. The rest of the peninsula voted for the liberal Vision Vancouver candidate, Gregor Robertson, who won the race for mayor.

vignette can thus be read not only as a celebration of the safety of the streets provided by civic culture, but also as a warning of the troubles associated with having would-be suburbanites living downtown. Beasley catalogues these troubles in the final principle of Vancouverism: "... solutions must be found for the potential negative externalities. Noise, danger, over viewing, invasion of privacy, and insensitivity to the needs of children can limit the attractiveness of urban living" (April 2000).

In the absence of civic culture, "Vancouver's solution has been to create a humane, domestic building form for high-density housing, which can tend to become quite harsh for its residents if poorly designed." (Beasley April 2000) Hence the key functions of Jacobs' civic culture are provided by condo building design features. For one, surveillance cameras have their eyes on the streets, looking out for behaviors that are not thwarted in advance by the use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (Atlas 2008, 58). And so, not unlike the vision from Mike Davis' LA crystal ball (1990), a 'fortress city' is produced, divided between the affluent few who can afford 'security' (surveillance and policing technologies) and those who cannot (and so are cast as potential invaders). Police (and their social service counterparts) have contained the growing underclass (or more specifically the visible sex and drug industries that mark it) in the Downtown Eastside (Smith 2003). On this count, Vancouver fits the characterization of the 'dual city' (Mollenkopf and Castells 1991). But the domestic emphasis of Vancouverism gestures towards the other function of Jacobs' civic culture: to secure privacy. Soundproofing techniques and tinted windows seal each condo unit off from the next, so that respect is not necessary to preempt invasions of privacy from one's neighbors. Considering Beasley's training as an architect, it is not surprising that he prescribes architectural means of constructing quiet and secure contexts in which the conventional affluent family can move about and dwell, without giving up their culture of isolation.

In sum, would-be suburbanites sold on the rural romance of views of nature, are now living closer to one another (in high density and industrially produced units celebrated by Le Corbusier). With condo buildings rubbing up against green linkages, there are few in-between spaces (such as front lawns). Filling out this apparent urban landscape is a thin diversity that comes from the proximity of those who would have chosen different suburban developments, a diversity that is sold as Vancouver's urban romance. The livable city paradox is actualized. Yet because the "live/work/play" community is constructed in advance on a shared private interest in an affluent lifestyle, which can be carried and prided into in any space whatsoever (condos and green linkages alike), no space is safe. An architectural solution is provided, but it inheres social

sorting that contributes to the concretization of a dual city, and abdicates residents of responsibility for respecting one another (in terms of privacy at least).

## Dark Corners of the Livable City

The obvious progressive response to Vancouverism would be to go beyond design, to nurture a properly civic culture (e.g. Flyvbjerg 2004). For example, if old downtown neighborhoods were extended into new ones, their neighborliness could serve as the basis of integration – Downtown Eastside residents talk about how they greet and look out for one another (Davies May 22, 2007). But as Jacobs noted, even when planted amidst a vibrant civic culture, would-be suburbanites do not necessarily acculturate. More important than this technical difficulty of integration, however, is the way in which civic culture's respect for privacy is actually part of producing the problems of social segregation and violence, to which it poses as a solution (c.f. Florida 2002).<sup>7</sup> One of the unintended effects of Vancouverism is instructive in this regard.

Those who actually bought into Vancouverism<sup>8</sup> lived such a balanced lifestyle that Vancouver became known as the "No-Fun City" (Paterson February 11, 2009). Towards the end of the 1990s, City Hall was eager to shake the image, and loosened up restrictions on liquor licenses and bar hours along a strip of Granville Street, and so the Granville Entertainment District was zoned into being (Boyd May 2008, 47-8).<sup>9</sup> Suddenly open until 4am, bars and clubs along the strip drew young (largely affluent) partiers from across the region. Debauchery and violence ensued, to

<sup>7</sup> Jacobs has been long identified as a gentrifier – a role that she simultaneously acknowledges and dismisses when she admits that she originally aspired to live in one of the fancy buildings in her neighbourhood. Perhaps most famously, is Gans' critique of her middle class romanticization of the working class neighbourhood that she lived in, which blinded her to the economic insecurity, criminality, and inability of many of her less-than-middle-class neighbours to upgrade their homes, to 'unslum the slums' (Sept 2006). The suggestion is that her urbanism misses the actual working of cities, and her activism misses pressing social issues of her neighbourhood in favour of an academic interest in talking back to Garden City thinkers. One might even suggest that she fits the profile of a "female gentrifier" (Fincher and Jones 1998, 192).

<sup>8</sup> I am referring to those who actually moved downtown, as opposed to those who merely invested in downtown Vancouver condos. Absentee owners, who buy condos in Vancouver as an investment or as vacation properties, are guesstimated in the local media to make up  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{3}$  of downtown condos. Regardless of the specific numbers, the role of such buyers, in driving up housing prices in Vancouver, has been identified as a problem by the City planning department.

<sup>9</sup> The zoning and liquor licensing regulations also discouraged entertainment venues outside the zone. This re-branding exercise was celebrated on city banners hung along the Granville strip that read "Fun City" in 2005.

the extent that bar owners forfeited some of their windfall profits by closing an hour earlier. Gangs were depicted as the prime aggressors, which made the violence seem exceptional, and so something that could be addressed by police and ever more elaborate surveillance practices (Lai Nov 2007).<sup>10</sup> The Granville 'circus' is a fun zone created to contain the youthful debauchery that is incompatible with either the balanced lifestyle of downtown neighborhoods, or the debased lifestyle of the Downtown Eastside; a 'triple city' of sorts has been produced. The convenient thing about such zones (like the slums that preceded and persist alongside them) is that they seem to contain the problems. The troublesome thing is that containment is costly – financially, to be sure, but also politically. The ethical and intellectual gymnastics that are required in order to legitimize containment become increasingly difficult.

The high-profile violence on Granville is being revealed as one instance of normalized hetero-sexual relations between people who are socially licensed (by inebriation and 'sexy' clothing) to perform the usually hidden practices of 'mainstream' virility (Boyd 44-73). As noted by police working in the district, the reasons given for the vast majority of fights are rather mundane: "He touched my girlfriend. He looked at my girlfriend. He looked at me" (Eustace March 26, 2007). In addition to fighting one another, virile (affluent) guys in the District commonly use date-rape drugs to take the physical fight out of the extreme sexual violence they exert on women. As it becomes clearer that gangs are not the primary source of violence in the Entertainment District, and that 'normal' youths are instead, then what? Common sense suggests that nothing really needs to be done because 'boys will be boys' and they will grow into men (who will buy a condo in Vancouver or a house in the suburbs). But there is a niggling sense that the violence associated with normalized hetero-sexual virility is not so easily left behind. We can get this sense from Jacobs' story about eyes on the street, which ends with the neighbors turning a blind eye to the altercation between a man and a young girl just because it was discovered that he was her father. In the end, these exemplary urbanites behaved just like the suburbanites she criticizes. We cannot know whether it was in fact a case of 'domestic' abuse, but what is strange is that in the countless readings and re-readings of this scene, the possibility that it was has been (dis)missed by planners. It is much easier to celebrate the safety and diversity provided by (and for) a public identity than to question our practice of turning a blind eye to the private

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<sup>10</sup> For example, the EnterSafe system is used by all the bars in the Granville Entertainment District, and since 2007 they have been networked. It scans all North American drivers licenses, so that patrons are made to feel as though they could made 'accountable' for their actions, and as witnesses to others' actions. A case involving gang shooting, in which no one stepped forward as witnesses, is cited as one of the situations that would have been solved by the EnterSafe system.

realm – which sets aside a domestic zone in which sexualized violence can play out, largely unchecked. In the Entertainment District violence of this sort becomes painfully visible.

A number of disturbing implications follow from accepting the private realm as a key condition of possibility of civic culture, but two are particularly relevant here. First, what appear to be random acts of violence in the public realm are, in some measure, applications of violent practices honed in the private realm; so the minimal ‘safety’ provided on the streets against sexualized violence should be taken as an admission of the private production of this violence, which exceeds the generous ‘domestic’ zone it is afforded. For those who do not have a domestic zone to call their own, so-called ‘homeless’ people (Mitchell 2003), there are no doors behind which sexualized violence can be comfortably tucked away. A significant threat that the ‘homeless’ pose to the affluent few is to make ‘domestic’ violence painfully visible, which would be even more visible if this threat were articulated. Hence, other reasons for policing ‘homeless’ people out of public spaces must be developed, which is quite difficult considering that street involved people in Vancouver do not pose a significant threat to affluent bodies (Gordon 2006). Private property is made to seem sacred and so its protection can be sought at any cost. Fear of property ‘violence’ has reached ridiculous proportions in Vancouver, where even the garbage of affluent people is now under lockdown (Sullivan and Capri November 2006), and the ‘homeless’ in the city are contained in some ten square blocks of the Downtown Eastside – whose streets thereby come to function as an extensive open-air private area that the affluent few can avoid (out of respect for others’ privacy) or tour for adventure (Razack 2002). We need not feign naïve to normalized heterosexual violence, which means being continually surprised by its outbursts. Fear of the possibility of outbursts leads to punishing (in advance) those who have no ‘domestic’ space to hide sexualized violence, and lest we forget, to dismissing (in advance) the practices of sexualized violence that are comfortably tucked away in ‘domestic’ spaces.

This feigned naïveté hints at another implication, which is that so long as we constrain our view to the public realm, we are unable to get a sense for how cities are configured, and so in turn, we are unable to plan appropriately. Since Jacobs mobilized public politics to secure the private realm in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, feminists have argued convincingly that the private is political (Friedan 1963). Planners could and should try to get a sense for what widened conceptions of the political might mean for how we can approach place (Butler and Scott 1992). Instead, it continues to be accepted that urban planning is a state activity, which is by definition, public (e.g. Sandercock 2004). This makes sense considering that most urban planners are state employees,

but it is surprising, given the rich histories of economic planning (Hall 1998). Perhaps the confusion comes from the more recent memory of the welfare state, which assumed responsibility for dealing with negative social externalities of the capitalist system. Significantly, the social service function that the welfare state took up was developed by the neighbourhood house movement (Addams 2007[1938]) – which has a history dating back to 1894 in Vancouver, before the city functioned as the provincial metropolis (McDonald 1981). It developed prior to (but not precluding) the state as we know it, as separate from the private realm, in cities of our making (Magnusson 1981).

Community-based initiatives are heralded as acts of radical urban planning (Sandercock and Attili 2009), but by enabling ‘at risk’ neighborhoods to provide for themselves, they also incidentally deliver on the neo-liberal promise of self-sufficiency (Rose 1999). There is no easy way out of this complicated scene of empowerment and self-administration. But by training our eyes on the empowerment of people to better address their social service needs, we mistake the widened public realm of the welfare state for the extent of political space (Magnusson 1996), and dismiss how this self-administration facilitates the smooth accumulation of capital by the affluent few – by servicing a population to be more labour-ready, and relieving the affluent few from confronting the exploitative social relations that they benefit from. Again, we need not feign naïve to the social relations that produce affluence and poverty, and so find ourselves continually surprised by demands for economic and social security. Responsibility for delivering on these demands is pinned on individuals – with the liberal myth that we are each free to make our own fortunes in the private realm – but the structural production of those demands is becoming more and more difficult to (dis)miss with growing recognition of ‘shadow cities’ (Neuwirth 2005), and the feminized post-industrial working class (Hall 1996). Tellingly, this urban configuration resembles the one that the neighborhood house movement was responding to before the turn of the last century.

It is both foolish and self-serving to continue to hold onto our naïveté. The romanticism with which Jacobs has been taken up by planners, such as Beasley, is dangerous not so much because of how they get her work wrong (which most do, considering that her version of urbanism was only meant to apply to endangered great cities rather than large towns

such as Vancouver),<sup>11</sup> but because of how they get her right. The zones of privacy that they secure are like any place, in that they are constituted by: social sorting processes, such as gendering, and capitalist social relations (Massey 1994). For those who insist on private and public zones, the entrepreneurial politics that emerges from the private realm is surprisingly functional and efficient; but to be clear, this mode of politics is anything but 'progressive', hearkening back to the medieval city (Weber 1986 [1958]). In this regard, Vancouverism can be seen as 'regressive'.

## Back on the Rack

In the final throes of a collapsing resource industry, and piggy backing on liberals' 1972 electoral win for creating a "livable" city, Vancouverism paved the way for neither a post-industrial city (the suburb of Richmond, where Microsoft recently located its multicultural research and design centre, has been more successful on this front) nor a post-modern city. Some suggest that it skipped over these options by marketing an integrated way of life whose economic geography is as yet undefined (Hutton 2004); but although many people invested in Concord Pacific developments, few actually bought into Vancouver as a place to "live/work/play", and so, many of the condo units in Vancouver's new neighborhoods sit empty or are rented out to passers-through. Rather than becoming swept along by the progressive story and looking ahead, we might be better prepared to map this geography if we were looking backwards. But we tend to like to feel progressive, and so Vancouverism remains a model for revitalizing cities. Beasley is in demand as a consultant in places across the Western world and increasingly the East as well (Beasley Dec 2007). In all fairness, he has been able to pull off feats that many an urban planner can only dream of – imposing extraordinarily high development cost charges, for instance. As the head of the Planning Department, Beasley was positioned like a medieval lord – perched atop a hill, with minions collecting arbitrarily imposed dues

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<sup>11</sup> She asserted: "Towns, suburbs and even little cities are totally different organisms from *great* cities. We are in enough trouble already from trying to understand big cities in terms of the behaviour, and the imagined behaviour, of towns. To try to understand *towns* in terms of *big cities* will only compound confusion." (Jacobs 1992 [1961], 16). The only city in Canada that was in the running for great city status was Jacobs' second chosen city, Toronto – which may not have quite the proportions of New York (with around 5 million residents in the city-region, as compared to New York's 8.3 million), but on Jacobs' estimation, her second home was a great city. In 1997 she called for Toronto and the surrounding region to separate from the rest of the province, and to establish a new order of government – to shake off the constitutional status of municipalities in Canada as "creatures of the province" (Kennedy 20-4 Oct 1997).

from those merchants who wanted to construct a city below. And true to medieval form, the merchants' vocational organization – the Board of Trade – functions as the defacto city government. So perhaps more significant than the particular principles presented in "Living First," is Beasley's counsel that planning departments should couple consultation and discretionary power – which is discretionary precisely because it can operate behind closed doors (i.e. in private).

Beasley has tellingly referred to himself as "an unelected politician". Although the extensive consultative planning exercises he initiated had democratic appearances (including more than 20,000 people), they can be more accurately described as having used education to secure 'buy-in' from 'stakeholders'. Education has long been the primary means of inculcating a demand for urban planning in Vancouver; in the first, this demand was meant to pressure the provincial state to develop legislation enabling municipal planning (Fournier 1989). So Beasley and his predecessors have worked in the private realm – through education – to gain legitimacy for their use of public office to undertake more 'progressive' ways for developers to construct Vancouver. In addition to these successful marketing campaigns, planning has been institutionalized in vocational organizations, such as the Town Planning Institute of Canada (founded in 1919) – which, like their medieval predecessors, act as gatekeepers to cities' workshops and markets.<sup>12</sup> As the head of the School of Community and Regional Planning at UBC, Beasley now exercises discretionary power (albeit exercised in tandem with consultation) over the imaginations of planners who want a vocation in planning. Calls for increased participation within those halls, and its attendant workshops, will surely be heeded; but we should not mistake public participation for political empowerment.

It is certainly possible to get beyond Beasley and his ilk – to gain entry into planning, and perhaps even to refine the tools of the trade – but there is no getting beyond the complex urban sites in which we are situated. To Beasley's credit, his "Living First" romance actualizes the rural-urban paradox that we have inherited (albeit in a violent and exploitative affluent register). Advocating civic culture, as a general solution to its apparent dangers is not only disingenuous (ignoring pervasive social processes and relations), it is also self-serving. The private realm that civic culture secures is where vocational organizations reign, and there are professional benefits to having gatekeepers, such as tenure (yet another medieval urban institution). Thus there are political reasons

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<sup>12</sup> In Canada, this gatekeeper function is so strong that it interferes with the state's capacity to deliver on skilled immigrants' dreams of working in their vocation. The so-called 'accreditation' problem is personified by the taxi drivers with PhDs, and is front and centre in immigrant settlement policy development (Wayland 2006).

to challenge the drive for 'progressive' planning, especially for those who do not belong to powerful vocational organizations (homemakers, temporary foreign workers, dumpster divers, and so on). To emphasize, the point here is not that we should get beyond medieval urban politics and its attendant rural-urban paradox (generally remembered as the tension between feudal lords and merchants); rather, it is to suggest that we develop a more robust understanding of its contemporary configurations, so that we are not 'surprised' by (and so fearful of) its workings and effects, and more importantly, so that we can engage in more respectful and nourishing relations, here and now. Such calls for thinking in and through our everyday ways of living are nothing new (Lefebvre 2003[1970]), but the insistence behind them is. With the rise of 'progressive' planning (in public) there is an attendant rise of 'regressive' politics (in private), and in turn, an increasing comfort with public institutions using medieval techniques of calculating half-truths and administering punishments (Foucault 1995 [1977]). This mode of politics could land any of us on the rack for no good reason, but for many partial and incidental ones.

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*Serena Kataoka is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Victoria, where she has taught Urban Politics and is currently responsible for training and coordinating teaching assistants. Threading through her academic research, community-based work, and artistic interventions is an interest in challenging how we conceive “civil cities” and experimenting with other modes of living together. Her current research examines how Canadian urban regions are formed through the colonial administrative technique of “pre-emption” (i.e. settle now, survey and pay later).*