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Résumé de l'article

Cet article examine le discours employé par Gerald Sutton Brown, le directeur du nouveau département de planification urbaine à Vancouver, de 1953 à 1959. Au cours de cette période d'urbanisation et de suburbanisation rapide, des changements dans les structures de la gouvernance locale et des débats sur l'avenir de la ville, Sutton Brown s'exprime publiquement pour populariser sa vision de la planification. Il compare alors régulièrement la planification au commerce, à la médecine, à la science et à la politique. Cet article suggère que Sutton Brown a employé les principes et le vocabulaire propre aux professions plus reconnues afin de gagner l'appui public pour ses projets de planification et établir l'autorité des compétences des planificateurs professionnels. Toutefois, sa stratégie rhétorique a contribué à cacher et à dépolitiser plusieurs des réalités de son programme d'urbanisme moderne. Même si le discours de Sutton Brown a été relativement infructueux face à des contraintes monétaires, politiques et pratiques, sa rhétorique a été importante parce qu'elle a démontré comment les idées modernistes pouvaient être utilisées pour promouvoir d'importantes transformations urbaine.

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Gerald Sutton Brown and the Discourse of City Planning Expertise in Vancouver, 1953–1959

Will Langford

This paper examines the discourse Gerald Sutton Brown, the director of the newly created Vancouver Department of Planning, employed between 1953 and 1959. Amidst rapid urbanization and suburbanization, changes in local state governance, and wider debate over the urban future, Sutton Brown began speaking in public to popularize his vision of planning. He regularly compared planning to business, medicine, science, and politics. I argue that his co-optation of language, images, and metaphors drawn from more established professions promoted planning projects and asserted the authority of the planning profession. However, Sutton Brown's rhetorical strategy obscured and depoliticized many of the realities of his high modernist planning program. Even if his discourse proved relatively ineffectual in the face of financial, political, and practical constraints, his rhetoric was important because it demonstrated one way that high modernist ideas could be mobilized to promote significant urban change.

Cet article examine le discours employé par Gerald Sutton Brown, le directeur du nouveau département de planification urbaine à Vancouver, de 1953 à 1959. Au cours de cette période d'urbanisation et de suburbanisation rapide, des changements dans les structures de la gouvernance locale et des débats sur l'avenir de la ville, Sutton Brown s'exprime publiquement pour populariser sa vision de la planification. Il compare alors régulièrement la planification au commerce, à la médecine, à la science et à la politique. Cet article suggère que Sutton Brown a employé les principes et le vocabulaire propre aux professions plus reconnues afin de gagner l'appui public pour ses projets de planification et établir l'autorité des compétences des planificateurs professionnels. Toutefois, sa stratégie rhétorique a contribué à cacher et à dépolitiser plusieurs des réalités de son programme d'urbanisme moderne. Même si le discours de Sutton Brown a été relativement infructueux face à des contraintes monétaires, politiques et pratiques, sa rhétorique a été importante parce qu'elle a démontré comment les idées modernistes pouvaient être utilisées pour promouvoir d'importantes transformations urbaine.

The city of Vancouver is often discussed in reverent tones. It is praised for its integration with the natural setting and its embodiment of the mantras of diversity, liveability, and sustainability.[1] However, this celebratory attitude towards the urban fabric emerged only in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In tempestuous urban debates, activists united to protest the radical change proposed by the advocates of high modernist planning. Plans to build an extensive network of express highways linking the far suburban reaches of the metropolitan area to downtown, to erect housing projects in the city, and to renew the downtown core with an imposing series of public buildings and large-scale commercial development were largely halted by new sensibilities and reform politics. These proposals, though, had their origins in the 1950s. During this earlier decade, a reorganization of administrative structures within the local state allowed planners steeped in high modernist logic to assume a prominent civic role. Amidst wider debate over the urban future, Gerald Sutton Brown, director of the newly created Department of Planning, began speaking in public to popularize his vision of planning. Between 1953 and 1959, he regularly compared planning to the practices of business, medicine, science, and politics. I argue that his co-optation of language, images, and metaphors drawn from more established professions promoted planning projects and asserted the authority of the planning profession. However, Sutton Brown's rhetorical strategy obscured many of the realities of his high modernist planning program.

Historians have variously examined the forces of urban change and the advent of new planning policies in the postwar years. The rise, fall, and consequences of freeways and urban renewal are well-discussed terrain.[2] Though the literature on the intellectual history of planning is particularly rich, the importance of language has rarely been a central concern of this work.[3] Yet a distinct focus on the discourse of planning expertise in Vancouver demonstrates one way that high modernist ideas could be mobilized to promote significant urban change. In framing planning in relation to business, medicine, science, and politics, Sutton Brown offered a particular rhetorical strategy worth closer examination.

Equally striking, however, was that Sutton Brown's activity in Vancouver took place in a fairly conventional context that mirrored developments in most North American cities. For one, as urbanization and suburbanization accelerated after the Second World War, there was wide debate over the future of cities. Ideas, issues, and prescriptions were subject to nationwide,

pan-continental, and transatlantic discussion. Generally, though, the urban question was played out in local debates in individual cities, as newspapers reported the views of planners, politicians, commentators, and visiting speakers. For another, with the perceived success of wartime planning and the fear of returning to the economic depths of the Great Depression, cities changed their administrative structures and employed new modes of governance in the late 1940s and early 1950s to put a greater emphasis on urban planning. Scholarship on the origins and professionalization of planning generally suggests that urban planning emerged from late nineteenth-century progressivism and became professionalized by the 1920s.[4] But, in fact, it was not until the postwar period that planning was incorporated into the workings of the municipal state in a meaningful way. Consequently, planning bureaucracies led by planners such as Sutton Brown proliferated. Planners were charged with organizing the delivery of basic services and overseeing renewal and freeway initiatives.

Finally, Sutton Brown was a conventional planner of his time and was, therefore, trained and well versed in the methods and language of mid-twentieth-century city planning. Indeed, he kept his planning knowledge current by networking with fellow planners through conferences, professional journals, and correspondence. Paying attention to his rhetoric and his exercise of planning expertise is instructive, then, because it offers a window on the high modernist ethos of 1950s and 1960s planning. According to anthropologist James Scott, high modernity is best thought of as an exaggerated belief in the capacity of scientific and technological progress to meet growing human needs and bestow social benefits.[5] In their belief that planning could ensure postwar progress, prosperity, and welfare, professional planners of Sutton Brown's generation promoted comparable programs of radical physical change in cities across the continent.

These parallels begin to explain why Vancouver City Council hired a director of planning and why it got the kind of planner it did. Closer attention to the history of planning in Vancouver further illuminates some of the political and practical considerations leading to a greater reliance on planning expertise. And a consideration of Sutton Brown and his discourse says something about the brand of high modernism that dominated 1950s and 1960s planning, albeit under a number of structural and political constraints.

From the late 1910s, the Town Planning Commission (TPC), a non-professional (and business-elite-dominated) board, had carried out planning tasks in Vancouver. The commission was typical in that it served the city in an advisory capacity only and City Council regularly ignored its advice. Throughout the 1940s, council and the TPC were often in conflict over a range of urban development issues. The clashes played out against a backdrop of heightened concerns about Vancouver's postwar future, especially in the city's longstanding housing crisis.[6] Both sides came to see the creation of a department of planning within municipal government as desirable. For the TPC's planning advocates, it would ensure that council decisions were informed by professional planning expertise. And for the council, it would diminish the role of the TPC in critiquing the decisions of local government. By the early 1950s, City Council began to investigate the possibility of setting up such a department.

The sporadic TPC–City Council conflicts were, however, but a small component of why the council resolved in 1951 to create a standalone planning department within the civic bureaucracy.[7] The decision was made in a context of tremendous growth and activity in postwar Vancouver. Much of the development could be seen in the changing geography of the city. The new availability of government-backed mortgages, combined with economic prosperity, rising affluence, and pent-up demand, encouraged a boom in housing construction.[8] Undeveloped areas in southern parts of the city filled in. From the mid-1950s, improved building techniques and materials led to the construction of larger and larger high-rise buildings in the downtown core. Further, the relaxation of building restrictions in the city's West End spurred the replacement of two-storey dwellings by tall residential complexes that offered views of the mountains and ocean.[9] As urban space became denser, people moved to the city, young families had more children, and the City of Vancouver's population grew from 275,353 in 1941 to 426,256 in 1971.[10] As one historian has written, "Growing up in Vancouver in these years meant viscerally experiencing the capacity of governments, corporations, and individuals to radically alter the environment with the hope of creating a modern city."[11] New homes and businesses were also established in surrounding municipalities, prompting bridge-building and street-widening in the 1950s designed in part to accommodate commuters in recently purchased automobiles. But places such as Burnaby and Richmond were also becoming commercial centres in their own right. In West Vancouver, Canada's first shopping centre opened in 1950.[12] Tellingly, the population of the municipalities surrounding Vancouver increased from 113,334 in 1941 to 559,433 in 1971 as development kept "leap-frogging" to land further and further from the central city.[13] Put another way, the suburban population in those thirty years rose from a 20.8 per cent to a 60.6 per cent share of the total Greater Vancouver population.[14] The metropolitan character of Vancouver was increasingly becoming a lived reality.

As the pace of urbanization and suburbanization quickened, demands that the local state provide needed infrastructure and services mounted. City aldermen were part-time politicians, almost exclusively endorsed by the standard bearer of middle-class values and pro-growth elites, the ad-hoc Non-Partisan Association.[15] Aldermen, habitually successful businessmen involved in the city's real estate industry, maintained an interest in civic well-being but were generally content with preserving their dual role.[16] Indeed, Norbert MacDonald has argued that the non-partisan nature of Vancouver municipal politics meant that a council seat was rarely a stepping-stone to a career in provincial or federal politics.[17] As the extent and complexity of municipal government administrative responsibilities in the

postwar years proved burdensome, local politicians increasingly felt a need for specialist knowledge to help solve problems, guide decision-making, and facilitate prosperity. This was in no small part a product of the "culture of modernity" and mantra of progress that dominated the era's municipal and provincial politics.[18] From 1952, Premier W. A. C. Bennett's Social Credit government embarked on a program of high modernist highway and hydroelectric dam construction that served the development of the resource sector. The party won re-election in 1956 running on a slogan of "Progress, not politics."[19] Concurrently, Vancouver emerged as a centre for acclaimed modernist architecture.[20] In short, progress, growth, and modernization were broadly shared goals in 1950s Vancouver.

Influenced by local business interests and a number of consultant studies, City Council turned to new modes of governance to address these practical and political exigencies. The much-debated administrative solution came in three parts. First, a Department of Planning was approved in late 1951 to formulate a comprehensive plan for the city's future. A director of planning would build and lead the efforts of the department. Second, the director of planning would also serve as chair of the Technical Planning Board (TPB), a newly created bureaucratic body. The TPB was populated by civic department heads and designed to improve the coordination of service-provision,[21] though neither of these measures substantially lightened City Council's administrative workload, and aldermen voted in 1956 to create a Board of Administration (BOA). A further layer of bureaucracy atop the TPB, the BOA was responsible for the day-to-day operation of the local state and became increasingly crucial in policy formation. The BOA at first included the mayor, an ex-officio alderman, and two city commissioners. But the BOA was reorganized in January 1961 to give the two commissioners sole responsibility over administrative matters.[22] In sum, the creation of these administrative structures was emblematic of a more general expansion of government bureaucracy that gave planners and planning expertise a privileged and central role in the operation of the local state. It also signalled a shift in power away from elected politicians to professionalized experts.[23]

After advertising the position broadly, the City of Vancouver in April 1952 hired its preferred candidate, Gerald Sutton Brown, to be the first director of planning. The forty-one-year-old Sutton Brown was, according to an interview given in the *Vancouver Province*, "a man of medium height, lean-faced pipe-smoker with a precise English accent and a habit of thinking carefully before he speaks." Following his formative education at a Jamaican boarding school, Sutton Brown was educated as a civil engineer at the University of Southampton and slowly moved through the ranks as a planner. Between 1932 and 1952, he had held seven positions in different local governments in England. Each subsequent job was more prestigious than the last, culminating in a post as county planning officer for Lancashire during the Second World War, "the most senior position of this type outside of London." His wife was from Lethbridge, Alberta, and this likely explains why he applied for a position in Canada. He held Vancouver's director of planning job from 1953 to 1959, at which point he was promoted and appointed as one of two city commissioners. This suited him, as he had an affinity for administration.

As his resumé attests, Sutton Brown learned planning on the job during a period when the engineering-minded scientific management of urban space was becoming the discipline's dominant approach. This approach was high modernist. Indeed, in his new employ, Sutton Brown confirmed succinctly his understanding of planning as a progressive social instrument by underlying the text of a speech calling on a shared belief that "what we are all striving for is an improvement—*a substantial improvement*—in the human environment and in the efficiency of its operation—we are trying to make our cities, towns and villages better places to live in and work in."[24]

As a city planner he had a particularly important role in this endeavour. Soon after he was hired, Sutton Brown warned that "any slackness or lack of forethought at this critical stage in Vancouver's planning could prejudice the future." He emphasized that forethought had to be exercised by a planner, declaring, "To show imagination is easy, but to make the most imaginative use of limited resources, that is where the planner's skill is fully tested."[25] Sutton Brown, however, was careful not to overly aggrandize himself. He cautioned that "the techniques of planning cannot shoulder the burdens it was not intended to bear" and called on a broader movement towards the betterment of society. He believed that planning was an exercise necessitating collaboration: "All the skills of the subdivider, the architect, the entrepreneur and so on, must be used; all must contribute their best if planning is to succeed—and the public should not allow them to get away with less."[26]

The responsibilities of the new planning department were extensive, covering provisions for everything from streets and sidewalks to cemeteries, garbage collection to public works, police and fire protection to parks. Sutton Brown's main preoccupations, though, were with initiatives popular in planning circles: he pushed for implementation of a strict zoning by-law, the redevelopment of downtown Vancouver, the construction of freeways, and urban renewal. These were high modern initiatives: expert-managed technical solutions to perceived urban problems that involved the drastic alteration, regulation, standardization, and modernization of city space.

Of these proposals, the zoning by-law was designed to assign, regulate, and strictly enforce land use in the city according to function, and that had never been done. Next, Sutton Brown described "a brightly-landscaped city square in the heart of the downtown area, bordered by the new post office, civic auditorium, convention hall and sports arena, theatre and museum."[27] This civic centre was to be a focal point around which the rest of Vancouver would be organized and attract people downtown in the face of the postwar trend of suburbanization. In a similar spirit, the proposed network of freeways converged on the downtown peninsula, linking it to all reaches of the Greater

Vancouver area. Lastly, the urban renewal plans called for the public expropriation and clearance of some 713 acres of largely residential land considered to be a slum, to make way for private redevelopment and public housing.[28]

Sutton Brown firmly believed that his main task as planner was to convince Vancouverites that his proposals were necessary. To that end, Sutton Brown popularized his planning ideas and his vision of the role of planning through public speaking and the press, as well as at conferences. His words usually made their way into the newspaper in accounts of his guest addresses to a variety of civil society groups. In fact, these groups often wrote to the planning department requesting a speaker, demonstrating that they were cognizant of urban changes and interested in planning. Acting as an agent of the local bureaucracy, he tailored his message to each organization. Sutton Brown spoke to the Downtown Business Association of economic development, to the City of Port Coquitlam Industrial Council of protecting sufficient industrial land, to the Western Society for Rehabilitation of redeveloping slums, and to the Kitsilano Ratepayers' Association of maintaining property values.[29] But his message was guided by something more than rational arguments; his rhetoric was held together by a constant use of language, principles, and imagery borrowed from business and medicine and science, and in opposition to politics. By employing the language of other professions, Sutton Brown was calling on a shared understanding that business, medical, scientific, and apolitical expertise were imperative in society. He made these associations in an effort to advance the particular aforementioned projects and to establish his own profession as an essential part of government. However, his multiple conceptions of planning and his shifting rhetoric obscured many of the social, political, and economic contingencies of his high modernist practices.

I

Sutton Brown's use of business language and economic rationality guided much of his discourse and often permeated his disparate ideas, references, and imagery, and the results were largely unsurprising. In Vancouver, as elsewhere, business elites desiring honest, efficient, and economical government idealized the corporation as a model of effective organization and decision-making.[30] A similar outlook inflected the planning profession. Moreover, at the height of the postwar hegemony of Keynesian economics, planners shared the conviction that economic growth and mass consumerism were forces for social and political harmony.[31] For his part, Sutton Brown offered an idealized understanding of how business should be conducted and argued that the local state should operate along the same principles.

Sutton Brown drew directly on some of the main tenets of capitalism in his invocations of business principles and practices, insisting that a planner should draw on his "corporate experience" to conduct his affairs.[32] He likened the preparation and functioning of a modern development plan to "the techniques and processes normally adopted by big business. In these days," Sutton Brown concluded, "'private enterprise' would not dream of investing millions in an extensive capital program without the most exhaustive report by experts of every phase of that program, and a step-by-step analysis of its chances of financial success." Pointing to the scale of public expenditure on planning initiatives, he reasoned that "we would do well therefore to follow the practices of 'private enterprise' and not leave the future of this large and delicately balanced machine to operate on 'seat of the pants' decisions based on personal hunches rather than on factual analysis of the elements which should govern those decisions."[33] In making this comparison, he insisted that planning was of vital importance to ensuring the economic well-being of the city. However, for Sutton Brown that city was an abstraction defined only by economic interests. He simply assumed that what was good for business was good for everyone.

The business principles he invoked repeatedly were economy, efficiency, and coordination. Sutton Brown's use of "economy" was connected to land and taxes. For one thing, it was the planner's duty to ensure that City Council got "the maximum out of the tax dollar."[34] In the long run, Sutton Brown insisted that planning would pay its own way by saving future tax dollars.[35] More intricately, though, he justified plans in the name of preserving property values in Vancouver, which he estimated at $509 million in 1954, and making the "best and most appropriate use of the City's best asset—its land."[36] His efforts to zone for a "high-density core" in the downtown maximized land use and guaranteed the city the largest possible tax return. Similarly, he largely validated urban renewal by arguing that clearing away old houses would stimulate private redevelopment and result in a consolidated tax base that would more than pay for the cost of acquiring and demolishing property.[37] Next, Sutton Brown alluded to "efficiency" when he insisted that plans should not be grandiose, but serve the practical mission of making the physical environment of the city more "useful." That logic supported the implementation of strict zoning regulations and the proposed construction of freeways that would facilitate downtown business, car use, and suburban expansion. "We shall have to embark, in the interests of efficiency and economy, on a balanced network of express highways converging in the centre of Vancouver," he reasoned.[38]

Sutton Brown's use of the principle of "coordination" related to how planning was carried out through "executive processes" that made decision-making a top-down exercise. He insisted that "the most essential factor of all in the planning function is the coordination of the several works and processes during the execution of the plan."[39] Sutton Brown applied this concept in his hierarchical management of the planning department. He acted as coordinator by delegating the actual hands-on planning work to his subordinates and their planning divisions. In the same vein, he lauded the Technical Planning Board as "a simple device which has worked extremely well in Vancouver," as it ensured "that all plans for the development of the city are

fully coordinated with all other department activities."[40] In such an administrative system, the collective weight of the bureaucracy was behind each and every recommendation put to City Council.

The growing power of the Sutton Brown, through the guise of the TPB, stemmed largely from Vancouver's new Zoning and Development By-law, a measure meant to coordinate and rationalize land use in the city but which ended up giving unprecedented powers to the director of planning. City aldermen were astonished by phrases in the 1955 draft of the law, like "in the opinion of" and "at the discretion of" the TPB. Alderman Bill Orr (a consistent if often singular critic of the planning bureaucracy) was quick to warn against "setting up empires" within civic departments. Most of this language was eventually changed, but the director of planning still gained explicit stewardship of the by-law and decision-making power on rezoning applications, development permits, and design specifications. Only the right to appeal rested with another body.[41] This shift in authority did not go unnoticed, and a number of parties spoke out against the growing authoritarian streak of the TPB and Sutton Brown. In 1954 the Apartment and Rooming House Operators' Association charged that in keeping a decision on illegal suites "top secret," "some members" of the TPB were "power happy." Given Sutton Brown's role as chairman, his complicity was likely in question. By August 1959, Alderman Frank Baker was publically suggesting that many architects and developers declined to appeal TPB decisions for fear of not receiving fair consideration in future dealings with the board.[42] It is unsurprising that the evocation of business practices did not please everyone, for while Sutton Brown insisted that planning was about making cities "better places to live in and work in," people's specific concerns did not figure in a process where business language and principles cast Vancouver as a profit-driven machine. The imperatives of economy, efficiency, and coordination were depersonalized calls to action for planning abstract future prosperity.

II

Sutton Brown's invocation of medicine in fact paralleled his use of business language. His allusions to the medical profession underlined the necessity of planning, and particular planning actions, in new terms. Indeed, his medical references often clouded with economic rationalizations. Bearing that in mind, Sutton Brown's allusions to medicine and disease showed a lineage to both the nineteenth-century public health origins of municipal regulation and the Chicago school urban ecology model that compared the city to the body and the natural world.[43] Most pointedly, Sutton Brown's use of medical language and imagery took the shape of a nearly formed metaphor of city as organism, a conception that portrayed the city in the most positivist of terms. Cities undergo growth and development in stages, but it is limitless: "The growth of a city is an irresistible and continuous process, which proceeds, sometimes quickly, and sometimes more slowly, dependent on the economic pressures affecting its growth."[44] Sutton Brown employed this construction, labelling any large city a "complex organism" and calling Vancouver a "young city" that had undergone rapid growth. The role Sutton Brown saw for the planner was to "promote and guide development" in a systematic and orderly way.[45] This was something of an antithetical construction. Where growth was inevitable and natural, it had to be controlled, lest it proceed in undesired and unnatural ways. The planner was charged with reconciling the two developments.

If the city was an organism, the downtown area was its heart. The conception of downtown as a special organ in the city was explained in the *Downtown Vancouver 1955–1976* study: "The Downtown Area is an essential element in the City's business, entertainment and cultural life. No suburban development is ever likely to provide such a variety of goods and services or the same locational advantages to businesses, government offices and cultural institutions as downtown. Furthermore it is the source of livelihood for so many, it is an enormous investment and is a major taxpayer. On no account therefore should this heart of the city be allowed to deteriorate."[46]

The reasoning was unified, in the end, by cardiac imagery. This conception justified specific projects for the downtown, including a civic centre of public buildings that would serve as a focal point for the city as a whole. Sutton Brown furthered the organism metaphor by explaining that while cities grow at the periphery, they also do so "by the replacement of worn-out building and services within its heart."[47]

Accommodating automobiles was key to facilitating both central and radial growth of the city. But by 1953, the number of automobiles on Vancouver's roads was contributing to greater traffic congestion. Sutton Brown commented, "It does not take much imagination to see that our current street system will not be able to absorb, by further local traffic improvements, the immense traffic flows that we must expect."[48] He warned that increasing congestion "will strangle the high-value downtown district unless sound planning comes to the rescue."[49] Falling back on medical imagery, he argued that instead of being in itself "a debilitating disease which will eventually injure downtown business," traffic congestion was "a symptom of unplanned and unorganized growth which may be considered the disease."[50] This portrayal was, again, contradictory. The metaphor implied that growth was completely natural, and yet dangerous if left alone. Nevertheless, this figurative conception of the city justified the role of the planner and the specific goal of constructing freeways. Sutton Brown insisted that a new network of "arterial roads" had to be built to improve traffic flow to downtown or (to follow his references to the body and fluidity) the city's heart.[51]

Sutton Brown's confounded use of the imagery of growth, disease, and medical practitioners was, however, most pronounced in his discussion of urban renewal. Moreover, his rhetoric betrayed a central dynamic of the postwar local state. The progress promised by the extension of welfare state uneasily aligned with the imperative of land-based redevelopment in

boosting local economic fortunes and improving the municipal tax base. On the one hand, Sutton Brown went to some length to emphasize that massive public intervention on behalf of private enterprise—intervention that "envisions not only the tearing down and replacing of slum housing areas, but calls for renovation of borderline areas and takes positive steps to stop slum areas from spreading"—was entirely normal. Vancouverites, he insisted, "understand urban renewal as not only a social instrument for relieving poor housing conditions, but also as an essential element of city growth." He went on to emphasize that "a redevelopment program becomes as natural a part of the city's normal function as say a paving program or a street lighting program."[52]

But for all Sutton Brown's efforts to reassure the public that this was natural, the imagery he employed was wholly about the unnatural. Every time he spoke of urban renewal, he talked in some shape or form of blight.[53] The blight occurred in areas where, for whatever reason, private capital did not reinvest in the land and buildings. To assemble the narrative, the "contagious" collar of "incipient blight" around False Creek "will spread from the centre like cancer" if left "untreated," extending "the loss of economic values to other parts of the city." Mere "palliative" action would not suffice. Rather, a planner had "a duty" to include in his plan "certain surgical operations which would cut away existing examples of inefficient, obsolete, and blighted development so that healthy new growth could take its place."[54] Sutton Brown's rhetoric seemed to oscillate between organismal affliction and agricultural plague. Nevertheless, he insisted on the urgent need for planning to guide Vancouver's physical development.

Importantly, Sutton Brown's use of *blight* did not just extend to the physical environment of the city. His comments about the area's residents betrayed the social engineering prerogative behind the redevelopment program: "They must be rehoused under at least minimum conditions for a healthy and useful existence. If they are allowed to spread into adjacent areas as rebuilding takes place, it will spread the loss of economic values to other parts of the city."[55]

Here he made it clear that the poor and generally non-Anglo-Saxon residents of the area at issue were themselves blight. New housing developments would improve housing conditions as much as they would segregate undesirable people by race and class. More pointedly, the rhetoric of blight was about moving people so that profitable and ordered redevelopment could take place on centrally located land. Sutton Brown noted, "If one considers that redevelopment is part of a continuing program, this program will likely involve radical changes in the physical shape of the city by relocating streets and changing subdivision patters to provide a more useful environment than previously." He spoke directly to the interests of local elites in declaring, "We stand to gain directly by cutting out the old substandard property and rebuilding for the most advantageous purpose, which may be to provide industrial and commercial sites for expanding metropolitan area."[56] The existing neighbourhoods were, implicitly, in the way and Sutton Brown's medical insinuations were about creating a platform for drastic action.

III

In a draft version of a speech he later gave to a Community Planning Association of Canada meeting at the Hotel Vancouver in November 1959, Sutton Brown framed his comments on the complexities involved in trying to assess the future of cities: "I am proposing to look at it from the point of view of one professional planner and his feelings on the matter." But he then, by hand, struck a line through the phrase "and his feelings on the matter."[57] His editorial amendment seems to have emphasized his desire to present planning not as a process based on an emotion but rather as a scientific profession.[58] This was consistent with Christopher Dummitt's contention that expertise was gendered as masculine in the postwar decades in an effort to re-establish men's authority amid modernity's rapid changes,[59] for it was the skills and techniques drawn dispassionately from the social sciences that formed the basis of the expertise Sutton Brown claimed. Such training and knowledge separated the planner from politicians and the public and gave his ideas a clearly delineated legitimacy.

Here, Sutton Brown was adhering to an established professional consensus. By the end of the 1920s, city planners believed that social efficiency could be achieved through expert scientific management, or Taylorism. As a result, planners put engineering-style quantitative analysis at the centre of their methodologies.[60] Sutton Brown was sure, though, to emphasize modern improvements in how planning was done in in the 1950s: "Today, new techniques are apparent. To begin with, surveys of existing conditions and trends and the gathering of basic data are an essential first step before any planning is commenced. In fact this initial survey stage is likely to take more time under modern processes that the preparation of the plan itself. Plans are today based on detailed analyses of all factors which should lead to proposals designed to meet the several problems of city development in the best possible manner—physical, economic, sociological and from the point of view of general amenity and appearance."[61]

He readily implied that only planners were qualified to do the job and insisted that planning departments be populated by personnel with "a high level of technical qualifications" based on function and specialization, and that they be trained to handle the "severe responsibilities" of the task at hand.[62] Further, the "calibre of personnel should be well above average since the ability to think constructively and with originality must be present to a much greater degree than is necessary in a technical department concerned to a greater degree with routine matters."[63]

Beyond this rhetoric, Sutton Brown actively worked to consolidate the planning profession in British Columbia. He helped form the Planning Institute of BC and was elected its first president in May 1959.[64] He also supported legislation to make British Columbia the first province in Canada "to legally establish the practice of community and regional planning as

a profession."[65] Sutton Brown's professional gatekeeping was certainly motivated in part by a desire to ensure better job-security, but it also came from a conviction in the capacity that the new scientific method would help produce social improvement.

Those claims to science, though, were tenuous. Things like zoning parameters on the width of side yards and ordinances specifying that only houses of more than 3,000 square feet could have suites appeared nothing more than arbitrary.[66] Putting that aside, the *Vancouver Redevelopment Study* (1957) was the most blatant example of questionable scientific method under Sutton Brown's leadership. He explained, "This study derived the criteria for assessing [poor housing], defined the areas for comprehensive redevelopment, analyzed the social and financial structure of the families to be displaced, and determined the best overall use of the land in relation to the City's 20-Year Development Plan."[67] Yet the survey work was conducted only within a predetermined area and not in the city as a whole, covering those neighbourhoods along the eastern and southern sides of False Creek. Furthermore, the study exclusively covered those areas in the city where ethnic minorities lived. Study data on racial groups pegged the population at 32.6 per cent Chinese, 4.3 per cent Japanese, 1.1 per cent Negro, and 59.9 per cent European.[68] Even this last figure was misleading, though. An earlier independent study found that only around 30 per cent of the area's population was Anglo-Saxon. The other Europeans were members of Vancouver's Italian, Greek, Scandinavian, and Slavic minorities.[69] In any event, these matter-of-fact numbers conveyed only partly that the redevelopment project relied on established understandings of Vancouver's "cultural geography." In particular, the city's Chinatown was subsumed within the wider study area. But as Kay Anderson argues, Chinatown was a longstanding physical manifestation of dominant constructions of "other" and popularly known in terms of its difference from the rest of the city.[70] And even where other areas of the city were overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon in character, Vancouver at large could be read according to its "socially distinctive" neighbourhoods.[71] The social geographies of race and class were, thus, entangled in Vancouver's cityscape and urban renewal served to reshape them.

Tina Loo has recently argued, with regards to the urban renewal of Africville in Nova Scotia, that the emphasis on relocation was "an outcome of the progressive politics of the late 1950s and early 1960s and the solutions they offered to inequality."[72] In this sense, moving people to new housing would raise marginalized citizens' standard of living and promote their greater integration into mainstream society. Indeed, the *Vancouver Redevelopment Study* hinted at an integrationist aim: "The relocation programme should be flexible enough to allow members of the same ethnic group to remain together while at the same time discouraging the formation of ethnic enclaves." But as this excerpt makes clear, and as Loo and other scholars of urban renewal in Africville and Vancouver's Strathcona have acknowledged, the promise of progressive social welfare and the emphasis on useful redevelopment often barely concealed a latent racism and, sometimes, a social conservatism.[73] While the final report on renewal in Vancouver explained that the evaluation of housing was based on the age of dwellings, the exterior condition of the structures, and the prevalence of "incompatible land use," dominant attitudes towards ethnic minorities were part of the reason the survey was undertaken at all.[74]

The survey work itself was conducted largely in two ways. First, door-to-door canvassers asked residents census-like questions. Residents were never asked for an opinion. The second method called a "Windshield Check." A "Windshield Check" was nothing more than two guys, in a car, slowly driving through a poor neighbourhood and looking through the windshield to rate the exterior features of houses on a scale of "very good" to "very poor." In explanatory pictures included in the study, a "very poor" structure was shown to be an aging, wooden "multiple-dwelling unit." An exemplar of a "very good" home was a suburban house with a spacious lawn. The subjective preference for modernity and an understanding that single-family living was normative, therefore, guided the survey work.

IV

In many ways, as his reliance on science made clear, Sutton Brown looked to embody the role of an impartial expert. In discussing the TPB Sutton Brown wrote, "Clearly there is a considerable advantage to the City Council in receiving from a very experienced group of officials a factual report with an unbiased opinion." Aldermen would have "full knowledge of the factors that should govern decisions." Sutton Brown was sure to praise the unencumbered operation of the TPB. "The meetings of the Board," he explained, "are not held in public and the members thus are enabled without external pressures of any sort to thrash out on a realistic and factual basis the several problems concerning the development of the City upon which they are required to report."[75] This conviction made the planner something of an antithesis to the politician and depoliticized planning initiatives.

In his professional correspondence Sutton Brown also invoked his need to remain an objective party. In a letter declining an invitation for honorary membership in the Vancouver Historical Society, he stated his ideal: "As a matter of principle over many years I have not been a member of any society or association no matter how interesting or worthwhile its objectives might be. I have always tried to assist any such associations where I could, but the time usually comes when a society or association wishes to make representations of some sort to the city, and I have felt in my position of servant to the City I should be entirely free of any attachments."[76]

But even as he kept his involvement with civil society to a minimum, Sutton Brown was involved in his share of political meddling within the local state. He was more than once accused of keeping potentially controversial reports secret from the public and council until the last moment.[77] Conversely, other privileged information found its way into the newspaper. A proposal version of the 20-Year Development Plan was conspicuously

released the day before the civic election in December 1956. The release argued that a new coliseum should be built downtown and not at the Pacific Northwest Exhibition, as some aldermen advocated. Alderman Orr raged that the timing of the report had led to the defeat of the by-law providing the necessary funds for the coliseum and nearly caused his own defeat at the polls. He demanded Sutton Brown's suspension and an investigation, before being mollified by other city officials.[78] A similar leak occurred in August 1957. Council had asked the TPB to cut the capital expenditure proposed for their Five-Year Plan from $135,00 to $50,000, citing Vancouver's credit limit. The press subsequently was informed that the city's borrowing limit would actually be $77,000 over that same period, implying that City Council had lied. Alderman Earle Adams responded angrily by saying, "If the heads of city departments are telling the press something other than the information they gave council, then they should be stopped." Though it was not clear that Sutton Brown was responsible for the leak, his planning department was the beneficiary—$51,600 was the final approved spending total.[79] Clearly, then, he was not so much an antithesis to politicians as he was in direct competition with City Council for power and authority.

Sutton Brown nearly acknowledged this fact in an address entitled, "Whither Planning?" by calling, as a politician might, on the confidence of the public: "There is a great tendency to say we now have professional men appointed to do the job—they should get on with it, and we are no longer necessary. Now that may be true in some form of benevolent dictatorship, but it is catastrophic in a democracy. In a democracy, when inevitably we are interfering with the liberties of the individual to the public interest, the informed awareness by the citizens of what is taking place is absolutely vital."[80]

Elsewhere, he recognized that "a planning organization, however able and efficient, needs the full support of public opinion in what it is trying to do."[81] Critically, then, Sutton Brown's philosophy demanded public support and informed consent, but not political debate. He adhered to this philosophy, for it was through things like his speeches and good publicity that Sutton Brown campaigned for planning. A fine example of this latter point was a 13 November 1952 article and staged photograph showing a married couple of "average citizens" (that year's Mr. and Mrs. Vancouver) smilingly alongside the planner and one of his plans. But Sutton Brown did not depend on such rare moments of public relations bliss. Instead, it was through a consistent discursive reliance on the language, principles, and imagery of other professions that he tried to create a narrative about what planning was and why it was so necessary. Through this process, Sutton Brown made himself a political actor.

Sutton Brown's single-mindedness was clearest in how he spoke of opposition to urban renewal from Vancouver's Chinese community:

> To a large measure this opposition is due to misunderstanding of the processes and safeguards and is also due in part to some prejudice. Had we been able to proceed more quickly with our project and had we been able to establish an information centre in the redevelopment area, I feel sure that this problem would not have arisen to the same degree. I do not think that this opposition is going to prejudice the redevelopment program, but it will cause unnecessary difficulties. The Assistant Director of Redevelopment will have to be a sort of Admiral Crichton who must combine a high standard in all of the administrative and technical qualities with that of an accomplished speaker and soother of ruffled feelings.[82]

If anything, the misunderstanding was on his part. Sutton Brown neither recognized the local residents' sense of community nor grasped their objections. In the name of economic growth, scientific method, medical treatment, and impartial technical advice, he proposed to displace 23,600 residents, people he labelled "deportees."[83] His plans called for the demolition of eight schools, eight churches, three day-cares, and "some" social clubs. Sutton Brown intended to reshape the city but offered no assurances that what would be destroyed would be replaced. In doing so, he backed away from the public he purported to court, disavowed the political consequences of planning, and invoked laws, plans, and expert opinion. Sutton Brown even suggested that the city rezone areas with existing homes for industrial use, and the result would devalue houses and make them cheaper for the city to acquire and redevelop. At the time, Alderman Orr asked rhetorically, "How heartless are we anyway to tell people who have put their life savings into a piece of property, then expropriate at only a portion of its previous value, and simply say 'It's just too bad'?"[84] Sutton Brown undertook planning in the name of people, but those affected by planning were excluded from consideration.

In June 1955, the Kitsilano Ratepayer's Association passed five motions protesting the TPB that recognized the problem of representation. Residents spoke against the fact that the board had "no direct responsibility to the citizens and voters." They questioned the right of municipal government to delegate their authority to an unelected body and criticized the lack of appeal to City Council.[85] The president of the Vancouver Central Council of Ratepayers' Associations (VCCRA), the main body representing homeowners, repeatedly wrote to City Council with parallel concerns upon the creation of the BOA in 1956.[86] It would be more than a decade before these views were popularly held in Vancouver. In the interim, Sutton Brown had set up a fundamental contradiction. His insistence on the apolitical nature of planning was central to his efforts to validate a particular political vision of the city; however, it essentially worked to deny that plans were anything more than a guide to a better future.

Conclusion

Sutton Brown's efforts to advance his planning aims were checked by a number of obstacles. One was the time it took to plan, especially when multiple levels of government were involved. For example, in the absence of an empowered metropolitan government, the planning of the freeway system proved a complex affair and a final decision on just where the freeways would go would drag on into the 1960s, when Sutton Brown

was no longer director of planning.[87] A second constraint was financial. Where the municipal, provincial, and federal governments did come to an understanding on how to split the cost of urban renewal, the great cost of freeways discouraged the sides from committing to an agreement. The proposed freeway system cut across the jurisdiction of all the municipalities in the Lower Mainland, linked to federal and provincial highways, and crossed federal waterways. Who would pay for what was a serious stumbling block.[88] The City of Vancouver itself had little money. Funding initiatives from the federal and provincial government for freeways and urban renewal only partly eased this problem. Therefore, a clear third obstacle to Sutton Brown's planning initiatives was that major spending programs initiated by the local state had to be approved by plebiscite. Every municipal dollar spent on high modernist planning had to be approved by the Vancouver electorate and it was always a challenge to convince voters to endorse new taxes. Lastly, the details of planning were often contested. Be it conflict over the expropriation of land slated for urban renewal or downtown redevelopment, argument over zoning provisions, or debate over where to build a coliseum, everyday politics always remained part of high modernist planning. In sum, these issues made implementing change more difficult and undermined the authority Sutton Brown presumed to hold as director of planning. In large measure, Sutton Brown took to public speaking in an effort to overcome the obstacles he faced.

Therefore, one of the more striking features of Sutton Brown's discourse was its relative ineffectualness. While he made his ideas about planning more widely known, the projects he proposed had varying and generally limited success. The Zoning and Development By-law was passed in 1956, but the powers granted to the planning department to interpret it were lessened, compared to earlier drafts. Financing for land acquisitions relating to the civic centre were defeated by plebiscite, ending the idea, as taxpayers withheld their consent. Urban renewal and freeway initiatives dragged on into the late 1960s over monetary and bureaucratic wrangling until public protest stopped the plans. Limited clearance had by then taken place and three housing developments were completed by the early 1960s. This represented a fraction of what had been proposed. One of the clearances, of Vancouver's small African-American neighbourhood, led to the construction of the Georgia Viaduct. It was the only part of the freeway network ever built. Therefore, despite the absence of direct opposition to his plans, and in spite of his constant efforts, the Vancouver that Sutton Brown championed failed to take shape in the 1950s. His disparate arguments failed to persuade the public and politicians to spend on planning initiatives. Those in control of public tax dollars undercut Sutton Brown's authority as planner to act.

Sutton Brown rhetoric, however, was important because it demonstrated one way the ideology of high modernity could be mobilized to promote significant physical and social change while obscuring and depoliticizing the consequences for the people subjected to the transformations. Sutton Brown's comparisons of planning to business, medicine, science, and politics concealed many of the realities of his planning program. He employed business language and principles to explain how planning should be conducted and purportedly to ensure the future well-being of the urban economy. Sutton Brown's conception ignored the fact that, though his initiatives were made on behalf of the public, the very same public was excluded from the decision-making process. He disregarded the specific social and political contingencies of his plans and operated with the abstract understanding that what was good for downtown business elites and the bottom line was good for everyone. Sutton Brown used medical language and metaphor to emphasize the imperative of downtown redevelopment and the construction of freeways flowing to the heart of the city. Planning, though, did not amount to a readily apparent question of health. Rather, it had to do with influencing social processes by shaping the physical environment of the urban area. Sutton Brown invoked scientific method to portray planning as objective and factual, and to justify the planning profession. However, this masked the subjective nature of the work he did and the plans he drew up. Lastly, Sutton Brown distanced himself from politics, portraying the planner as an impartial authority. In practice, though, he campaigned to gain political support from government and the public for his plans.

In all of this, then, Sutton Brown's discourse obscured the contingencies of the planning program he advocated. Moreover, his disparate metaphors, allusions, and imagery failed to galvanize the political support needed to overcome the practical and political obstacles that slowed the progress of planning projects. While progress, growth, and modernization were broadly shared aims in 1950s Vancouver, the discourse of city planning expertise was not always decisive in driving urban change.

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1 See, especially, John Punter, *The Vancouver Achievement: Urban Planning and Design* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003).

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Sisters Bridge in Three Administrations," *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (2004): 648–673.

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5 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 4–5.

6 See Jill Wade, *Houses for All: The Struggle for Social Housing in Vancouver, 1919–1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994).

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9 Patricia Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1980), 142–144.

10 Ibid., 168.

11 Christopher Dummitt, *The Manly Modern: Modernity and Masculinity in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 10–11.

12 Walter Hardwick, *Vancouver* (Don Mills, ON: Collier-Macmillan Canada, 1974), 48.

13 On the "leap-frogging" patterns of suburban development, see ibid., 127–142. For census numbers, see Roy, *Vancouver*, 168.

14 Norbert MacDonald, *Distant Neighbors: A Comparative History of Seattle and Vancouver* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 156.

15 Paul Tennant, "Vancouver Civic Politics, 1929–1980," *BC Studies* 46 (Summer 1980): 3–27; Fern Miller, "Vancouver Civic Political Parties: Developing a Model of Party-System Change and Stabilization," *BC Studies* 25 (Spring 1975): 3–31; Andrea Smith, "The Origins of the NPA: A Study in Vancouver Politics, 1930–1940" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1981).

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17 MacDonald, *Distant Neighbors*, 170.

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19 Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province 1934–1972* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 100–102, 201. On high modernist hydroelectric development in British Columbia, see Tina Loo and Meg Stanley, "An Environmental History of Progress: Damming the Peace and Columbia Rivers," *Canadian Historical Review* 92, no. 3 (2011): 399–427; and Loo, "People in the Way: Modernity, Environment, and Society on the Arrow Lakes," *BC Studies* 142–143 (Fall and Winter 2004–2005): 161–191.

20 Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe, *The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938–1963* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997), 6.

21 The TPB consisted of the director of planning, the city comptroller, the city engineer, the corporation counsel, the building inspector, the supervisor for land and rentals, the medical health officer, the superintendent of the Board of School Trustees, and the superintendent of parks commissioners. It met for the first time on 23 October 1952. Two city commissioners were added to the TPB in 1956. "Notes on Planning Organization and Accomplishments 1952–1962; Prepared for Commissioner G. Sutton Brown," file 10, 77-F-2, PRS 648, director's general files, City Planning Department fonds, CVA; "New Commissioner Terms Himself 'A Cautious Man,'" *Vancouver Province*, 9 December 1959.

22 "Mayor Walks Out as City Post Filled," *Vancouver Province*, 9 December 1959; "Elected Officials Leave Board," *Vancouver Province*, 18 January 1961.

23 For a more detailed exploration of these developments, see Will Langford, "'Is Sutton Brown God?' Planning Expertise and the Local State in Vancouver, 1952–1973," *BC Studies* 173 (Spring 2012): 11–39.

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26 Sutton Brown, "Whither Planning?," 2, 7.

27 "Vancouver in 1976: 900,000 People, 140,000 More Cars," *Vancouver Sun*, 8 February 1955.

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32 G. Sutton Brown, "Urban Renewal: Municipal Organization and Policy," 21, paper presented at the Fourth Session of the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation Urban Renewal Seminar (1959), file 11, 77-F-2, PRS 648, CVA.

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57 Sutton Brown, "Whither Planning?," 1.

58 On the history of the planning profession in postwar Canada, see Langford, "'Is Sutton Brown God?'"; Stephen Bocking, "Constructing Urban Expertise: Professional and Political Authority in Toronto, 1940–1970," *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 1 (2006): 52; Kevin Brushett, "People and Government Traveling Together: Community Organization, Urban Planning and the Politics of Post-War Reconstruction, 1943–1953," *Urban History Review* 27, no. 2 (1999): 44–58; Christopher Fullerton, "A Changing of the Guard: Regional Planning in Ottawa, 1945–1974," *Urban History Review* 34, no. 1 (2005): 100–112.

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72 Tina Loo, "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada," *Acadiensis* 39, no. 2 (2010): 26.

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