Planning in Ten Words or Less

A Lacanian Entanglement with Spatial Planning

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Spatial planning practice employs a discourse full of terms and buzzwords, such as 'social justice', 'environmental sustainability', 'public interest' or 'community engagement'. This book takes a Lacanian, and related post-structuralist, perspective to demythologise ten of the most heavily utilised terms in spatial planning: rationality, the good, certainty, risk, growth, globalisation, multiculturalism, sustainability, responsibility and 'planning' itself. It argues that these terms, and others, are mere 'empty signifiers', meaning everything and nothing. Drawing on examples of planning practice and process from the UK, North America and Australasia, it suggests that spatial and urban planning is largely based on the construction and deployment of ideological knowledge claims. Also that each of these contested ideals puts forward its own separate definition of the ten words in an attempt to dominate the theoretical debate. In addition, it perceives that the words themselves act as sublime objects of planning and societal desire for a 'better world'. The book concludes that planning in the 21st century should move on from seeking the impossibility of ideal and end-states to a process of contingent trajectory.

Whether or not one agrees with applicability of Lacanian psychoanalysis to spatial planning, this book is essential reading for planning professionals. This stimulating work draws on a range of literature and offers the startling conclusion that the ten most used terms in spatial planning are empty signifiers, empty rhetoric. A reader may occasionally be disturbed by the authors' global worldview. But, against the backdrop of economic and social turmoil, they are on the mark in arguing that planners – like everyone else – should work toward a just goal – that of the emotional, intellectual, and material wellbeing of the Global Other.

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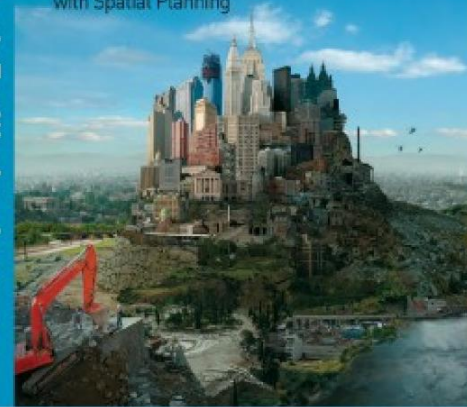

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Previously published works have been drawn on to partially produce this text. In all cases prior publications have significantly been revised and undated, in several cases whole papers largely form the basis of a discrete chapter in this work. Other articles have been pulled apart, deconstructed and re-territorialised in a manner constituting a jigsaw throughout these and the other various chapters. Published works drawn upon and reprinted with permission of the publisher include: Gunder, M. (2003) 'Passionate Planning for the Others' Desire: An Agonistic Response to the Dark Side of Planning', *Progress in Planning* 60:3, 236-319; Gunder, M. (2003) 'Planning Policy Formulation from a Lacanian Perspective', *International Planning Studies* 8:4, 279-294; Gunder, M. (2004) 'Shaping the Planner's Ego-Ideal: A Lacanian Interpretation of Planning Education', *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 23:3, 299-311; Gunder, M. (2005)

'Lacan, Planning and Urban Policy Formation', *Urban Policy and Research* 23:1, 91-111; Gunder, M. (2005) 'The Production of Desirous Space: Mere Fantasies of the Utopian City?' *Planning Theory* 4:2, 173-199; Gunder, M. (2005) 'Obscuring Difference Through Shaping Debate: A Lacanian View of Planning for Diversity', *International Planning Studies* 10:2, 83-103 (Chapter 7); Gunder, M. (2006) 'Sustainability: Planning's Saving Grace or Road to Perdition?', *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 26:2, 208-221 (Chapter 8); Gunder, M. (2008) 'Ideologies of Certainty in a Risky Reality: Beyond the Hauntology of Planning', *Planning Theory* 7:2, 186-206 (Chapter 4); Gunder, M. (2009) 'Imperatives of Enjoyment: Economic Development under Globalisation', in Rowe J. (ed.) *Theories of Local Economic Development: Linking Theory to Practice*, 285-300 (Aldershot, Ashgate) Copyright © 2009 (Chapter 6); Gunder, M., Hillier, J. (2004) 'Conforming to the Expectations of the Profession: A Lacanian Perspective on Planning Practice, Norms and Values', *Planning Theory and Practice* 5:2, 217235; Gunder, M., Hillier, J. (2007) 'Planning as Urban Therapeutic', *Environment and Planning: A* 39:2, 467-486 (Chapter 3); Gunder, M., Hillier, J. (2007) 'Problematising Responsibility in Planning Theory and Practice: On Seeing the Middle of the String', *Progress in Planning* 68:2, 57-96 (Chapter 9); Hillier, J., Gunder, M. (2003) 'Planning Fantasies? An

Exploration of a Potential Lacanian Framework for Understanding Development Assessment Planning', *Planning Theory* 2:3, 225-248; Hillier, J., Gunder, M. (2005) 'Not Over Your Dead Bodies! A Lacanian Interpretation of Planning Discourse and Practice', *Environment and Planning: A* 37:6, 1049-1066.

Chapter 1
Planning as an Empty Signifier

Introduction

> *Political language* … is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.
>
> George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*, cited in Watson 2004, 1

Cities are places of contested desire. Some of these strands of aspiration and hope are shaped and channelled into collective action for a better tomorrow through the deployment of techno-political narratives which strive to signify potentially better futures. These spatial planning narratives and the words that summarise and label them are largely predicated on the implication that something in the

present is lacking or incomplete. The city would be better, if only …

Spatial planning practice performs a dialogue between planning and urban governance that is full of signifying terms and labelling buzzwords, or 'weasel words' as Watson (2004) terms them, many of which imply innovative means to achieve desired states of urban well-being, such as deploying 'Smart Growth', 'new urbanism' or 'bohemian indexes' to plan for 'sustainable', 'globally competitive', and 'liveable' cities. We argue that these terms, and many others, are mere 'empty signifiers', meaning everything and nothing – comfort terms – all things to all people. These desirous states of living and being, which most of us would aspire towards and, accordingly, attempt to shape our cities to achieve, are often illusions, attained, at best, with limited success.

In this book we demythologise ten of the most heavily utilised terms in the spatial planning literature and practice: certainty, the good, risk, growth, globalisation, multiculturalism, sustainability, responsibility, rationality and 'planning' itself. Our analytical 'debunking' frame for this 'game of buzzword bingo' is predominantly Lacanian in origin and especially the contemporary Lacanian-inspired thought of Slavoj Žižek, although we also refer to other poststructuralist authors including Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida and touch on the sociology of Ulrich Beck, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony

Giddens, Jürgen Habermas and Henri Lefebvre. Our specific objectives in this book are:

- To engage with the ideological underpinnings of orthodox spatial planning theory and practice – city-making – from a post-structuralist cultural studies perspective.
- To understand the dimensions of desire, aspiration and fantasy embedded in our construction of human settlements and how our dreams are integral in the shaping of social reality and the actualisation or materialisation of our built environments.
- To illustrate how these desires are channelled by mechanisms of power in situations of contemporary governance.
- To consider alternative perspectives from which to engage with, and challenge, contemporary spatial planning practice.

We explore each of the ten heavily used, but often contested, planning words drawing on examples of planning practice and process from the UK, North America and Australasia. We conclude that 'city-making' in the 21st century should shed its tradition of seeking impossibly idealised end-states through means-end orientated planning. In place of this still largely instrumental form of planning, we suggest that spatial planning might be more effective as a process of contingent

emergence and trajectory without closure. We trust that the readers of this book will gain a new insightful understanding of city-shaping and the role that contemporary spatial planning plays in this process. We also wish to illustrate the important role of ideology in this approach. Indeed, we will contend that social reality is largely constructed by the materialisation of our fantasies through our actions. We hope that this book contributes to the exposure of such constructs and empty signifiers, including that of 'planning' itself.

This introductory chapter will begin by questioning the ontological nature of spatial planning. Is planning an art, is it a science, or is it merely an ideology? We will suggest that planning has dimensions of both art and science largely tied together via constructs of ideological illusion. The chapter will then suggest why the psychoanalytical insights of Jacques Lacan, and his adherents, are useful to engaging with the ideological constructs of planning and that of wider social reality. It will also outline why the application of Lacanian thought is often criticised. We then introduce the reader to the Lacanian concept of 'master signifiers' and the implications that these have for both the construction of knowledge and our identifications with others through our social, political and cultural networks, which in aggregate constitute society. We apply the concept of master signifiers to our ten contestable words of spatial planning to illustrate how we will deploy

this concept, as well as other aspects of Lacanian theory, to demystify the symbolic[1] equipment of planning. The chapter concludes with an overview of the book's structure.

An Introduction to Spatial Planning: Art, Science or merely Ideology?

> [P]lanners are strange characters. They traffic in fiction, and at the same time ask us to take it all seriously. Even more surprising, those of us who are not planners do take them at their word and grant them the authority they crave. This open-eyed reliance on fiction as a basis for public policy is remarkable, to put it mildly, and requires explanation. (Van Eaten and Roe 2000, 58)

According to the 19th-century founder of linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure (2006, 67), all words in any language have two dimensions. The first is the word's identity, what it looks or sounds like, the shape of letters or utterance comprising it. This is called its *signifier*. The word 'cup' is composed of the letters 'c', 'u', 'p', in that order and pronounced 'kʌp' in the International Phonetic Alphabet. The second

dimension is what it means, its *signification*. A cup is 'a small bowl-shaped container' (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1992, 283). A cup is an unambiguous word. Other words are more complex, with multiple significations, take for example the word 'sound'. It can be a adjective, noun or verb and mean to be 'healthy', or a 'noise', or a 'narrow passage of water', as well as mean, to 'test the depth of water'. Saussure (2006) observed that any connection between the signifier and what it signifies is largely arbitrary. Some words, such as 'democracy' or 'freedom', have many significations, often with conflicting meanings, which may be both of slight and of a more profound differential nature. Laclau (1996, 2000, 2005) argues that politics arise in the gap between signifier and its signification: where conflicting meanings are employed and we try to fill this gap. Here the signifier gives coherence to a grouping of conflicting meanings by signifying it or giving a general label of explicit connotation and agreement for this contested ground. Laclau (2003, 2005) calls this an empty signifier.[2]

We contend that planning is an empty signifier. The label or signifier, constituting the word of 'planning' acts as a holder of meaning: what it signifies, its signification. Another way of thinking about an empty signifier is that it refers to a word that acts just like a cup, which can contain almost anything as long as it can be poured or

placed into it, for example, milk, wine, oil, blood, water or sand. Planning is a signifier, similar to a cup, which can contain many diverse meanings and nuances. This can be narrowed down to some degree by putting another adjectival label before it, such as regional planning, urban planning, strategic planning, development assessment planning, communicative planning or spatial planning. For the purpose of this book we consider planning to be about the 'co-ordination, making and mediation of space' so we have chosen the term 'spatial planning' as delineated by the UK Royal Town Planning Institution (2001) and articulated in 21st-century British government policy (Doak and Parker 2005). This will at least allow the planners, the planned, and the topic of planning that we wish to address, to not be confused with, for instance, financial planners or wedding planners who have little to do directly with shaping the built environment. Yet, this focus on a partially defined 'spatial planning' still allows much room for contested meaning. We suggest that planning is inherently a contested and contestable term and will remain an empty signifier in this regard.

Perhaps one reason for planning's diverse and contestable meanings is its complex historical evolution. Planning largely evolved out of the art of architectural design and the science of civil engineering in the built environment. It was initially deployed largely to address issues of

public health and housing to offset the adverse impacts of industrialisation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with a general aim to produce a rational and progressive city (Ashworth 1954; Boyer 1983; Sandercock 1990). Its early adherents, if professionally qualified at all, were generally master design practitioners (Brooks 1988). However, the positivistic[3] social science model tended to dominate planning after the Second World War, especially in the United States (Banerjee 1993; Dagenhart and Sawicki 1992; Perloff 1957). For many planning practitioners, academics, or commentators, in the mid-20th century, planning was a scientific engagement with place making, often predicated on instrumental rationality and positivistic physical and/or social science (Faludi 1973; Friedmann 1987; Hopkins 2001). This scientific rationality still tends to dominate spatial planning education and practice in many parts of the world, although this worldview has come under challenge increasingly since the 1980s (Healey 1997; Hillier 2002, 2007; Sandercock 1998, 2004).

We agree with this challenge to purely predictive scientific planning for we argue that spatial planning can never be just about the facts which constitute empirical science – what we know to be true – because facts in science must be inherently observable and measurable. Facts must always inherently reside in the present and the

past, not in the future. Yet, we contend that planning is ultimately about what will, or might be, the future. Planning thus incorporates components of human values, desires and aspirations at its core. Analytical science's conceptualisations of causal relationships cannot fully engage with such intangibles. Intangibles, by their very nature, are unable to guarantee predictability to 'allow planners to propagate principles and laws across an undulating and often resistant social landscape' (Beauregard 2001, 437). Science has limited predictive power when it comes to human hope, ambition and values (Flyvbjerg 2001). We argue, therefore, that science and the application of facts have a definite, but limited application in planning practice, no matter how much we might wish to rely on universally applicable scientific techniques. Spatial planning practitioners, we suggest, also need to engage with other means of understanding when attempting to shape the world.

Eugenie Birch (2001) refers to planning as an art-form of design, craft[4] and presentation, while Heather Campbell (2006) describes spatial planning as 'the art of situated ethical judgement', since value judgement is an inescapable dimension of the planning process. In this light, Campbell and Marshall (2006, 240) suggest that planning is 'an activity which is concerned with making choices about good and bad, right and wrong, with and for others, in relation to particular places.'

We suggest that most planning theorists would agree (see, for example: Flyvbjerg 1998, 2001; Forester 1989, 1999; Healey 1997), although we indicate in later chapters that others would argue for 'better' or 'worse' choices, rather than 'good' or 'bad' ones in the quotation above.

With planning's loss of its architectural dimension in the latter half of the 20th century, Talen and Ellis (2004, 22) suggested that the literal 'art' in planning diminished, or at least its aesthetic dimension of 'the artistic side of urbanism'. The authors suggest that a 'review of city planning journals from 1960 to 2002 reveals that the artistic component of city planning is rarely discussed' (22). They call for a re-establishment of the aesthetic in planning as a merger of art, life and nature to create 'beautiful cities [which] inhabit the edge between order and disorder', that is between novelty and certainty of order (27).

We suggest that spatial planning practice has indeed an artful dimension. This is an art partially predicated on aesthetic values, but also one drawing on the wider emotions and affects of its constituents. Beyond aesthetics, Nigel Thrift (2008, 240) refers to this 'artful' manipulation of built environments, or cityscapes, as technologies and engineering of affect: 'a series of highways of imitation-suggestion' often producing behaviours of anxiety, obsession and compulsion. We

suggest that this 'art of affect' may impose ideological effects on the populace, what Foucault refers to as governmentality[5] (Gunder and Mouat 2002; Hillier 2002), and we suggest that this is a central mechanism of many contemporary spatial planning processes (Gunder and Hillier 2007a). Further, in this work we argue that planning both induces ideological belief and behaviours in the populace it plans for; and is, in itself, at least partially constituted as a discipline for its practitioners and supporters by a set of ideological beliefs.

Back in 1960, Donald Foley identified a strong ideological dimension to British planning; an ideological factor that 'tends to build around seemingly self-evident truths and values and, in turn, to bestow a self-justifying tone to its main propositions and chains of reasoning' (Foley 1960, 212). Eric Reade (1987, 98) also argued that planning offers an emotively satisfying ideology for its supporters; one that justifies their social position in 'what they do and are'. Reade attributed six dimensions to planning's ideological construction:

- It is 'a body of thought devised to serve an interest', in this case the planning profession (or possibly, more recently, cynics might argue, that of the development industry);
- It is one that 'relies heavily on unstated and often unconscious basic assumptions' about the 'big questions' based on

'presuppositions' that are often 'unclear';

- 'It is prescriptive' about 'states of affairs we "ought" to prefer', but 'frequently omits to mention that the states of affairs which it regards as self-evidently desirable can only be justified in terms of values, and instead seems to suggest that they have been shown objectively or scientifically to be inevitable or desirable';
- It 'tells us *how* to bring about the states of affairs which it urges', but subsequently, often fails to achieve this state when subject to dispassionate scrutiny;
- It 'appeals both to our emotions and to our intellect, but confuses us to which is which'; and
- It 'succeeds at one and the same time in being both very confused, and yet apparently forming a psychologically satisfying, coherent, interlocking system of explanations, providing a clear and understandable view of the world' that blurs distinctions of 'fact', 'value', 'theory' and 'untruth' … 'into an impenetrable web of mutual supportive arguments' (1987, 98 -emphasis in original).

The following chapters will test and show support for Reade's assertions as to planning's ideological nature. Planning, we also assert, tends to be both an ideology of belief and one of identification for its

practitioners as to what is 'good' planning practice behaviour. These practitioners, in turn – often while thinking that they are acting in the public's best interest – ideologically impose these beliefs (scientifically grounded, or otherwise constructed) as their professional normative values, on the public via their plans and other strategic planning processes. Consistent with Flyvbjerg's (1998, 2001) earlier findings, rationality in spatial planning will be shown throughout this work to not be always as evident as it is made to appear.

The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu's, concepts of *habitus*[6] and *doxa*[7] well illustrate this ideological process. Planning's key terms, especially the ten words primarily addressed in this book, provide the 'mental structures' – the holding 'cups' – necessary to produce a 'social space', or field of spatial planning for popular socio-political engagement. These place markers, as 'empty signifiers' are essential in order to construct and structure a dynamic *habitus* that produces, reproduces and evolves social practices, be they those of spatial planning and city-shaping, or society's wider issues constituting the 'common sense of the day' (see Bourdieu 2000, 164-172). The latter constitute Bourdieu's concept of *doxa*, the unquestionable orthodoxy of any one time and spatial location – including what we may lack but must strive to have (Chopra 2003, 426). A spatial planning example

would be the potentially contradictory rhetorical planning assertion that: we must be 'sustainable' to be a 'globally competitive' city (Jonas and While 2007)! In this regard, the 'habitus serves to transmit and "embed" attitudes, values, norms and beliefs of the social group or "social world" within an individual as to what constitutes desirous and appropriate sustainable behaviours as the individual practises those activities normally associated with such attitudes, values, norms and beliefs' (Searle and Bryne 2002, 8). 'Though thoroughly individualized, the habitus in fact reflects a shared cultural context', it is 'an unconscious formation' that 'develops as an *unconscious* competence' as 'a result of an experiential schooling stretching back to childhood' (Adams 2006, 514 – emphasis in original). Of course, the dominant *doxa* or 'ideology of any historical moment or spatial location – Bourdieu's "orthodoxy" – will of course reflect the orientations of the dominant social group(s)', e.g., the desire that *we all must share* in support of global economic competitiveness (Rankin 2003, 716).

So, in this light, is spatial planning practice merely an ideology, or can it still have dimensions of science or art? Or, can it have all three? Beauregard (2001, 438) attributes to planning both a scientific and craft (or art) dimension, but also states that planning is 'an ideology and thus infused with prescriptive judgements and normative visions'.

We tend to agree and suggest that ideological belief acts as the binding core of the discipline to tie all three dimensions to planning practice.

The Language of and in Planning

Whilst spatial planning practice may couple knowledge – scientific or otherwise – to public action (Friedmann 1987, 1998), it is through language[8] that planning debate is framed and focussed. What sells the 'vision' in the plan? How do we bundle complicated and often obtuse planning issues together in a manner where actors with contesting positions can grapple jointly with the problem? How do planners foster public debate and participation? We suggest that language is core to this process of belief, aspiration and especially, psychological identification, with desire and the concept of empty signifiers often playing a uniting role in this process.

John Forester (1989, 1999) documented how planners effectively focus attention, shape debate and generally try to minimise mystification, or other distortions in communications, as well as provide hope and understanding through their language games of planning practice. Other planning theorists, such as Bent Flyvbjerg (1998, 2001), take a less optimistic perspective and indicate how

planners often distort language and rationality in seeking their strategic ends. James Throgmorton (1996, 38) documents the important role of rhetoric and storytelling in planning practice, particularly when appropriately shaped and tailored to the perceived desires of their specific audiences. As Brent (2004, 216) observes 'illusion and rhetoric are indeed an important part of social reality, which is not based only on a rational instrumentality, but has strong aesthetic and narrative components – human cultural activity, with all its creative energy, and is a major part of social construction'.

We suggest that, just as images and catchy phrases sell commodities in our consumer-oriented world, they also encourage both debate and public acceptance of planning initiatives and ideas. 'What is seen and imagined, practiced and understood, as [planning] today operates through and as the materialization of publicity' (adapted from Dean 2001, 626). Iconic labels capture our hearts and minds. Images of desirous futures capture our aspirations. We identify with these sublime potentialities and wish to make them ours. In such a context the role of spatial planners is to create, mediate and facilitate common goals and visions of a desired future for our communities (Ferraro 1995). As Throgmorton (1996, 5) demonstrates: through the deployment of narratives and *tropes* – rhetorical devices such as metaphor[9], metonymy[10] and synecdoche[11] – 'good planning is

persuasive and constitutive storytelling about the future.' As Sandercock (2003a, 26) further asserts: 'stories and storytelling are central to planning practice, that in fact we think about planning as performed story'. We suggest that planning is more than mere 'science fiction' of what should be. Yet, until realised (if ever) these stories remain but virtual fictions and fantasies of what actors desire. It is these virtual hopes and aspirations that shape actors' subsequent actions.

Planning, then, has dimensions of science and art in its practice. It also has ideological dimensions, which appeal to our emotions and our intellects. Central to all three dimensions is the fundamental role of language and communication in planning, and the effects and affects these have on 'subjects', both planner and those for and with whom planning plans. The importance of language and communication has given rise to one of the most significant and influential fields of recent planning theory and practice: communicative planning (Innes 1995).

Probably the most important influence on what has become known as the 'communicative turn' in planning theory has been the work of the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas. Habermas examined issues of intersubjective communication and social action from a perspective of communicative rationality. His early critical theory of communicative action drew heavily on the work of the Frankfurt

School[12] and its basis in the work of Karl Marx and, importantly for our purpose here, Sigmund Freud.

Habermas wrote that his 'point of departure is the assumption that the development of interactive competence regulates the construction of internal behavioural controls' (2001, 131). He regarded language as a means of organising wants and needs that are communicatively structured and subject to interpretation. As such, the concept of reciprocity – or mutual recognition – in which actors define themselves in relation to one another, is important.

Habermas' general theory of communicative action was partly developed from Freud's psychoanalytical theory of distorted communication,[13] which Habermas believed necessarily presupposed non-distorted communication and 'the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus' (1972, 314). His wider concern was that the state is forced to deal with dysfunctional side effects of the economic process under fairly restrictive conditions. Habermas' desire was that communicative action might bring about 'social relations in which mutuality dominates and satisfaction does not mean the triumph of one over the repressed needs of the other' (1979, xxiv).

Habermas' 'desire' clearly resonated with the values of planning theorists. His work was developed initially by John Forester (1989, 1993, 1999) who was conscious of the importance of power in

decision-making, a dynamic which Habermas has tended to understate. Judith Innes (1995, 1996, 2002) applied communicative theory in practical consensus-building strategies in the United States, extending her work to incorporate consideration of complexity theory (Innes and Booher 1999, 2002), which itself has undergone a new iteration to include a psychoanalytical understanding (Medd 2002; Stacey 1996).

Patsy Healey (1997) has developed collaborative communicative theory in a context of processes of governance. She is particularly interested in 'the qualities of the social relations through which collective activity in relation to urban management is accomplished' (Healey *et al.* 2002, 12), which has led her to explore interrelationships between theories of organisational management and communicative theories in a 'new institutionalist' framework (Healey 1999, 2002, 2003, 2007).

Organisational management theories regularly incorporate psychological and behavioural aspects (Haslam 2001). With regard to planning and management theory, Howell Baum (1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1994, 2000) has referred to the work of psychoanalysts (such as Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein and Wilfred Bion) with regard to examination of group culture, participatory consensus in planning decision-making and delusion in development partnerships and bureaucratic practice. Tore Sager (1994) has also drawn on Freud's

concept of parapraxis to explain planning dysfunction and misunderstanding as a consequence of failed communications.

Leonie Sandercock (2004, 139) has observed that, until recently, the contemporary planning and urban policy literature has lacked recognition that there is a need to understand both '*language and a process of emotional involvement*, of embodiment', in planning processes. Sandercock continues that this is especially so, because 'many planning disputes are about relationships, and therefore emotions, rather than [just] conflicts over resources' (139). She asserts that effective spatial planning needs to understand and work with the emotions that drive ethnic and other forms of urban conflict (Sandercock 2003b, 322).

One of the authors of this present volume, Jean Hillier (2002, 2003a), attempted to build theory that explains planning decision-making practice more fully than does Habermasian communicative action. She not only investigated the potential contribution of Michel Foucault[14] in terms of including power relations between actors, but also traced Chantal Mouffe's objections to Habermasian theory back to their Lacanian roots. Hillier made reference to Lacan to explain the impossibility of a complete and comprehensive 'truth' and hence agreement or consensus about an issue. She argued that agonistic dissensus may be understated, but that it is a key constituent of the

arenas and forums of planning practice. The other author, Michael Gunder (2000a, 2003b, 2005a), has also utilised Lacanian theory to expose pernicious elements of planning practices, hegemonic rhetorics and action, as well as to prescribe an agonistic alternative to consensual communicative planning.

Parallel to these developments in planning theory, the references to psychogeography in the work of authors such as Steve Pile (1996, 1998, 2000, 2005), Ed Soja (1996, 2000), David Gregory (1997), Jane Jacobs and Ken Gelder (1998) and Nigel Thrift (2000a, 2000b, 2008), have opened up spaces for psychoanalytically informed analyses of practices of everyday life; microanalyses of what people do, how and why they do it. Pile (2000, 84), for instance, suggests that 'cities are like dreams, for both conceal secret desires and fears, for both are produced according to hidden rules which are only vaguely discernable.' These 'rules' and practices may not be consciously articulated or readily observable (Lefebvre 1991). They reflect practical, experiential, phronetic[15] knowledges generated through 'the remorseless buildup of small and fleeting detail in speech and objects which "points" towards certain concerns'; 'the oblique, the transparent, and the haunted: the latent' (Thrift 2000a, 404-405). As Thrift (2000a, 405) continues, 'these are knowledges of what is permitted and prohibited, present and absent'. They also comprise the

uncanny[16] and the repressed, all of which are dimensions engaged by psychoanalysts in analytical practice with their patients, often referred to as the 'talking cure'. However, like the psychogeographers, we wish to extent this type of analysis from the individual to wider society so as to encompass an understanding of spatial planning: its art, its science and above all its ideology. We argue below that the work of Jacques Lacan, and that of his followers, offers us psychoanalytic perspectives from which to do so.

Why Lacan?

Arguably, one of the most significant French intellectuals of the latter half of the 20th century, Jacques Lacan was a neo-structuralist philosopher and practising psychoanalyst (Marini 1992; Foucault 1998, 279). Central to Lacan's theory of the individual as subject is a focus on belief, knowledge and desire. Lacan drew on Freud's metapsychology[17] and 'other theoretical traditions, prominent among them phenomenology and existential philosophy' derived from Heidegger, Kant, Kierkegaard and Hegel, 'structural linguistics' from Saussure 'and anthropology' from Sartre (Boothby 2001, 9). As a consequence, 'Lacan's account of symbolic subjectivity contributes

more to social theory than to psychological theories of the individual' (Dean 2000, 2).

Jacques Lacan's body of work (1988a, 1988b, 1992, 1994, 1998, 2006, 2007) has become widely influential outside the field of psychoanalysis as it provides a comprehensive critique of social interaction and ideology. As Bowie (1987, 133) writes, Lacan 'provides workers in other fields with a cautionary portrait of thinking-as-it-happens'. This creates the opportunity for self-reflexiveness, a way to think through complex issues of choice and responsibility (Sarup 1993), which we argue are extremely pertinent to spatial planning practitioners; responsibility being one of our 'ten words'.

Lacan was not a prolific writer, nor formally an academic. Rather he was a practitioner and teacher. His major written work was the *Écrits* (2006), originally published in French in 1966. The majority of Lacan's publications are transcriptions of his teaching seminar series that ran for 27 years in Paris from 1953-1954 until 1978-1979, two years before his death in 1981.

Lacan and his followers allow a new insight into how ideology shapes social reality. As Jameson (2003, 37-8) observes, we may attribute to Lacan 'the first new and as yet insufficiently developed concept of the nature of ideology since Marx'. Drawing on Lacanian-inspired work by Louis Althusser, Jameson states that ideology is 'the

"representation" of the Imaginary[18] relationships of individuals to their [r]eal conditions of existence', so that 'the individual subject invents a "lived" relationship with collective systems', such as the fantasy that we are wanted by society and that it will look after us, if we only give 'it', this 'big Other' with a capital 'O', what it wants. This, in turn, induces symbolic and materialised relationships of common practices and rituals (Krips 2003, 149), which we suggest are largely synonymous with Bourdieu's (1998) concept of *habitus* (Steinmetz 2006). It is the abstract aggregate of this 'big Other' – which constitutes society, and the illusions and fantasies that we generate about it and ourselves – that we respond to and materialise in our actions. This in turn, ideologically shapes the social reality that is observable in our behaviours and is articulated in language. That is, it constitutes our lived space.

For Lacan (2006, 300) 'the function of language in speech is not to inform but to evoke' an effect upon the other actors. Lacan engaged with language throughout his work, but it was in his teachings of 1969-1970 – *Seminar XVII,* that he engaged most directly with the power of speech when he proposed his *Four Discourses* (Lacan 2007). Lacan's 'theory of the four discourses is without doubt the most important part of the Lacanian formalisation' (Verhaeghe 2001, 19). The discourses represent, respectively, the language games, or

linguistic structures, which underpin and produce four fundamental social effects that resonate strongly with the roles and practices of planning (Bracher 1993, 53):

1. governing/commanding (the master's discourse);
2. educating/indoctrinating/administrating (the university/bureaucracy's discourse);
3. desiring/protesting/complaining (the hysteric's discourse); and
4. analyzing/transforming/revolutionizing (the analyst's discourse).

Each of the discourses affects how knowledge and desire is created and used as well as the conscious and unconscious ordering of the individual's relationship both with some 'truth' and society's capacity to (re)interpret and define the individual's conformity with normative behaviours (Stacy 1997).

Moreover, central to Lacan's theorising is the insight that while the human subject, or society, cannot exist without language; neither the subject nor the material world can be diminished to the symbolic – words and text – alone. Some type of symbolic structure, or system, is critical to enable us to constitute and integrate our perceptions of social reality. However, the relationships between structure (such as the class system) and agency (our individual performativity) within

our social reality are often symbolically obscure, because these relationships extend to a dimension external to language or even that of our imaginations (Hillier and Gunder 2005). Lacan (1988a, 1994, 2006) called this indeterminate registry, or dimension, the 'Real'. The Real resides completely externally to that of the symbolic or the image(ary). The Real is impossible to grasp, to visualise, or to describe. We therefore (albeit often unconsciously) deploy fantasy and illusion to obscure this 'impossible thing', a noumenon[19] that exists but cannot be symbolised or even envisaged (Žižek 1997a, 1999c, 78). The Real is a lack in the symbolic that provokes the subject to produce an imaginary element to obscure what is lacking and to give some type of consistency to what cannot be signified within language (Stavrakakis 1999, 27). Hence, what ensures the possibility of a coherently-appearing social reality is 'the intrusion of fantasy, especially the manner in which fantasy screens over the void, lack, or absence' of the Real that we fail to articulate or even conceptualise (Elliot 2001, 76). This insight on the Real, and the fantasies that it induces, are a core dimension of Lacanian-derived theory.

However, the application of Lacanian theory to the understanding of society is not without concern for some authors. For instance, numerous clinical practitioners of Lacanian psychoanalysis are 'suspicious of the wider "application" of the theory to those not

actually in analysis' (Parker 2004, 69). Alternatively, Lacan's teachings have been criticised by social theorists as being far too theoretical and void of empirical material (Sarup 1993, 26). Further, for others, the inability to reconcile the nuance of each particular psychoanalytical case to a meaningful universal and testable theory of the unconscious is a fundamental constraint for considering psychoanalysis a science, or by extension, a valid scientific body of thought applicable to the understanding of aggregate human behaviours (Fink 2004). In this regard, Lacan was unable to legitimise and advance Freud's psychoanalytical theory successfully as a *science* of the unconscious even with his application of mathematics (mathemes) and linguistics to Freud's metapsychology (Althusser 1996; Fink 2004; Morel 2000). Consequently, we view Lacan's work as best understood as a 'philosophy of psychoanalysis' from which subsequent understandings of society and culture may be derived (Althusser 1996, 93).

Within feminist theory the value of Lacan's metapsychology is hotly debated. While some regard it as a useful set of concepts from which to challenge phallocentric knowledges and patriarchal power relationships (for example, Judith Butler (1990), Joan Copjec (1989), Elizabeth Grosz (1990), Julia Kristeva (1970) and Juliet Mitchell (1974)). Others perceive Lacan as privileging masculinity, where

women are signified as a lack that is a substratum of the androcentric subject (for example, Luce Irigaray (1985), Germaine Greer (1999) and Dale Spender (1980)).

We agree with those feminists who defend Lacanian theory and contend that rather than interpreting his work substantively, Lacan's work should be used as an explanatory analytic tool for understanding power relations (Grosz 1989; Mitchell 1974; Ragland-Sullivan 1986), or bodily life and desire as significant explanations of causative relationships (Copjec 1994, 2002). While Lacan constructed his undeniably male-gendered theories without apparent acknowledgement of patriarchal domination, we agree with Elizabeth Grosz (1990) that Lacanian theorising provides scope to change our perspectives on power relationships and how they are replicated in society. Through transcending Freud's focus on biology, Lacanian thought permits us to understand gender domination in the context of the ideological constructs that constitute the social realities of society.

Our critical understanding of Lacan's teachings and their application to the sphere of social analysis owes much to the interpretation of Slavoj Žižek. Whilst Žižek's particular Hegelian and Marxist readings of Lacan are controversial (see Butler 2005; Dean 2006; Dews 1995; Gigante 1998; Johnston 2008; Kay 2003; Myers 2003; Parker 2004), Žižek does build up a rich and dense texture of

associations, which, we believe, afford useful explanatory insight. This includes, for instance, Žižek's (1993, 1997a) argument that the truth of the subject is always outside itself in the object. That is: we can never know ourselves because this truth resides in the unknowable Real, hence we look to the Other, i.e., society, to tell us who we are. Yet, this response is always inherently incomplete. If our symbolic identity is situated in the Other, this position radically challenges the traditional conceptualisation of the subject and object as mutually opposed. Žižek brings Lacan out of the clinic and into popular culture and everyday life, he deploys jokes and uses popular culture[20] to explain his philosophical positions and arguments.

A Dash of Lacanian Insight: Master Signifiers, Identity and Knowledge

In this section we introduce the Lacanian concept of master signifiers and how these function in language to allow us to create a symbolic set of identifications for ourselves and in our relationships with others in society. We, as humans, use words to describe to others who we are and what we believe are our truths. For example, someone might

describe themselves as *US-American, white, single, female, able-bodied, thirty-something, post-graduate* educated *planner,* who is religiously *agnostic,* but who believes in *sustainability* and *social justice,* who likes to *throw pots, cycle,* play *tennis, travel* and *cook Thai* cuisine, etc. The aggregate of these words would constitute a person's identifications such that they can convey to others. Yet each word is much more than itself. Being *US-American,* or a being a *planner,* each comprises a multiple range of subtexts constituting what it means to be and act as an American or as a planner. Moreover, being a *US-American* or a *planner* conveys a wide ranging set of contestable rules and values grounded solely in themselves: 'it is so because it is so, because it is our custom' (Žižek 2008a, 22). In Lacanian thought these identifying labels are called 'master signifiers'.

Identifications with a range of master signifiers constitute the subject as an individual in culture and wider society (Verhaeghe 2001). Master signifiers include descriptive signifiers, e.g., of bodily appearance, ethnicity and gender, through to more abstract signifiers of intellectual and spiritual beliefs (Bracher 1999, 45). The totality of a subject's master signifiers constitutes their ego-ideal, which comprises the core beliefs, values and a sense of self producing who, at least they believe, they are. Master signifiers thus describe and articulate who individuals are to others. Although Lacan (1988b, 2006) would argue

that there is always a lack in the subject's identifications that prohibits a complete identity, as a consequence, it is this search for completeness, which actually constitutes the human subject.

Each abstract master signifier of identification is in turn comprised of a complex aggregate of ordered words constituting diverse narratives of contestable sets of knowledges and beliefs. These contestable narratives give a master signifier its meaning, i.e., its signification. For example, the narratives explain what it is to be an *US-American*, or a *planner*. Master signifiers are thus empty words, or signifiers, without explicit meaning in themselves (Laclau 2003, 2005). They tie together multifaceted and often muddled and conflicting, arrays of narratives under one universal and iconic signifier. These narratives may be academic or cultural in context and may, or may not, also incorporate other master signifiers within their own particular description. While harbouring these diverse narratives, master signifiers permit us to amicably arrange, clearly outline and communicate our descriptive, as well as abstract, identifications.

Master signifiers are crucial for sorting out our sense of self in society's complex sea of conflicting and contradictory knowledges, beliefs and values. Without sufficient master signifiers to anchor our identifications we could be driven to psychotic madness. With too many, and/or if too rigid in their structure, we could be driven to

neurotic despair and obsessive self-sacrifice (Bowie 1991, 74). Master signifiers allow us to identify with others in our lifeworlds; they allow us to form our diverse groups and communities of interest. Master signifiers allow us to have shared and harmonious social identifications. Yet at the same time, in their competing sub-texts of what it means to be a *US-American* or a *planner*, they also allow us to accommodate difference and disagreement within, and across, each identification. They constitute and embrace the structuralisation of our sociopolitical life (Stavrakakis 1999, 30).

Lacan calls these master signifiers '*points de capiton*', 'button ties' that pin narratives, or networks of signifiers, to both the individual subject and wider society (Stavrakakis 1999), so as to order the world (Žižek 2008a, 30). Each master signifier is a 'nodal point … which "quilts"' sets of knowledges, beliefs and practices, 'stops them sliding and fixes their meanings' (Žižek 2002a, 87). Each provides an anchoring point or concise signifying label for a 'whole field and, by embodying it, effectuates its identity' (Žižek 1989, 88). What constitutes a signifier as a suturing and ordering master signifier, is that it is isolated from the rest of the narrative, the sets of knowledges, codes and beliefs that comprise it (Fink 1995, 77). While the master signifiers remain unchanged, 'their descriptive features will be fundamentally unstable and open to all kinds of hegemonic

rearticulations' (Laclau 1989, xiv). For example, sustainability has many contested interpretations, but the master signifier 'sustainability', itself, does not change (Gunder 2004, 302).

Ten Contestable Words: Demystifying the Symbolic Equipment of Planning Practice

Master signifiers related to spatial planning and engendering contemporary policy discussion include: *certainty, the good, risk, growth, globalisation, multiculturalism, sustainability, responsibility, rationality,* and *planning* itself. This inventory, of course, is not comprehensive as terms such as 'new urbanism', 'liveable cities', or 'environmental justice', could be readily added to the list (Gunder 2004, 303). These 'empty' signifiers have given up explicit, concise, significance to secure multifarious points of view, chains of significations constituting conflicting narrative, or unique interpretations pertaining to particular situations, all under one common label (Stavrakakis 1999, 80). In this book, we will examine these ten master signifiers and the contestable knowledge sets that vie to articulate what each master signifier means.

Diverse sub-texts or narratives – sets of knowledge, stories, and symbolic practices – describe and support their master signifiers prior to any hegemonic rearticulation or fine-tuning as to what these master signifiers should actually embody. For example: the dissimilar narratives of regional science and communicative rationality, both fundamentally support the master signifier *planning*. These diverse sets of knowledge also constitute our normative behaviours, the subcodes that fix the master signifiers, describing their ambiguous characteristics, acceptable behaviours and values (Bracher 1999, 45). The acquisition of these knowledges, stories and practices constitutes learning, which also includes the disciplinary and professional codes that constitute spatial planning and related urban policy disciplines.

This introductory chapter has introduced arguments that spatial planning, while drawing on art, craft and science, largely acts as a set of ideological beliefs for its practitioners. We contend that this is not a derogatory claim. Rather it is an interpretation that can lead to an improved understanding of planning practice and hopefully make us better practitioners and recipients of spatial planning. We introduced Lacan and his strengths and weaknesses, the concepts of master signifiers, Lacanian identification and the narratives that contest for meaning within each abstract master signifier. Finally, we have begun to suggest what this might imply for our ten words of planning

deconstructed over the following chapters. In doing so the wider aims of *Planning in Ten Words or Less* are:

- To develop stronger and deeper theoretical perspectives for understanding spatial practice and governance. We contend that spatial managers and planning practitioners need strong theoretical foundations in order to understand and to be able to transform current practice effectively.
- To demonstrate how spatial planning policy responses often attempt to achieve impossible end-states without possibility of clear definition, let alone material achievement, constituting a supposedly 'better' social reality and spatial order. These are often ambiguous end-states that constrain and structure our urban policy responses by excluding other potential alternative responses to address problems and make appropriate improvements.
- To broaden the potential of spatial planning's ability to engage with issues of repressed desire/aspiration and deflate the pernicious illusions we sometimes sustain in our current spatial planning processes about city-making and our wider hopes for the future.
- To fundamentally challenge spatial planning's solution-led

orthodoxy and demythologise several of the frequently unquestioned notions current in spatial planning processes. This is in order to delineate the potential of alternative planning processes that may be more open to continued social movements of dynamic change, progressive community self-determination, spatial planning innovation and ethical responsibility.

Book Structure

In Chapter 1 we have hopefully persuaded readers why our approach to spatial planning is useful for understanding contemporary city-making. We considered how the art or science of *planning* is largely ideological in its techno-political policy intent and tentatively explored the mechanism of hegemonic articulation deployed in its shaping of the built form. Personal and group identification is central to this process. We then introduced the ten words selected for investigation as systematic of contemporary near-universal planning practice orthodoxy.

In Chapter 2 we commence with a detailed discussion of the place of 'lack' in Lacanian thought, commencing with the primordial maternal lack of young humans yet to be integrated into language and

culture; and how it is then deployed in contemporary political and technocratic processes to inspire desire for a particular solution or policy process. Examples will be used to illustrate how this is nurtured as a popular desire underlain by a promise, or illusion, of harmony and fulfilment, which, of course, never materialises. The metaphorical framing of spatial planning fantasy will be discussed and its ideological power in shaping and guiding desire for specific community aspirations as the only 'correct' consensual belief will be explored. The chapter will argue how it is the desire for veracity of prediction – truth – which we claim is synonymous with the desire for *certainty* towards the unknowable future, which underwrites the very ontological purpose of spatial planning and gives it its popular support.

In Chapter 3 we will examine the concept of the *good* from a Lacanian perspective. We first consider the impossibility of the idealised, utopian city where 'good' for all can be achieved. We will suggest that fantasy and misrecognition are central to this process. The metaphor of the city as healthy body will be explored in this context. The chapter will then provide an appreciation of how our personal striving, to be perceived by the Other as 'good', shapes our very concept of self and our wider outwardly-materialising behaviours which, in turn, shape our empirically measurable social world. The

chapter will also consider what constitutes 'good' urban behaviour, at least for our agents of governance, and how this is shaped through our media and other arenas of socio-political life. The chapter will then have regard to the fantasy constructs deployed in this manner to shape 'our' desired cities: what they ought to be, but without questioning for whom!

Chapter 4 takes the discussion of the desire for certainty as a core human 'good' further, drawing on Ulrich Beck's concept of *risk* society. We start with a discussion of realism and constructivism as alternative ways of constituting knowledge in the social sciences, including spatial planning. We then expand the constructivist position into a discussion on representation and non-representation, which introduces and draws on the Lacanian Real. Derrida's concepts of undecidability and hauntology are in turn engaged to argue planning's very ontological being as papering over of the fear of risk and uncertainty of the unknown risky future. We will suggest, however, that the ontological nature of planning, to provide an illusion of certainty towards the future, impairs its ability to engage with emerging problems. Planning is largely solution-driven, and without a solution to frame an emerging issue, spatial planning, as currently practised, has great difficulty tackling the new.

In Chapter 5 we explore the American signifier *Smart Growth* to

consider the concept of economic growth in the contemporary world of finite carrying capacity. We use this metaphor of American city and regional planning to explore both the dominance of liberal global capitalism and how much of the orthodox international response to city shaping and making is derived from its hegemonic values. The Lacanian concept of *jouissance* – pleasure – will be defined in this chapter and then further explored in the subsequent two chapters. However, as we will explain, with Lacanian *jouissance* 'we are not dealing with simple pleasures, but with a violent intrusion that brings more pain than pleasure'. We will argue that to enjoy in such a context 'is rather something we do as a kind of weird and twisted ethical duty' (Žižek 2008a, 343).

Chapter 6 builds on Chapter 5 to argue that city policy management in areas of spatial planning and economic development are largely predicated on the imperatives of competitive *globalisation.* Our primary focus is on the way the Lacanian concepts of *jouissance* and desire are deployed by both markets and governance to create desiring citizens who respond appropriately. We introduce Lacan's (2007) Theory of the Four Discourses, with particular focus on the discourses of the 'master' and 'university/bureaucracy'. We conclude the chapter by asking the question: in whose interest is enjoyment actually articulated and achieved?

In Chapter 7 we expand further on Lacanian *jouissance* in the context of *multiculturalism*, largely drawing on Žižek's (1993) conceptualisation that the Other always steals my enjoyment. We also engage further with Lacan's discourse theory (2007) and introduce the discourses of the 'hysteric' and 'analyst'. We illustrate how difference constitutes the contemporary metropolitan city. Yet we argue that this is, by necessity, a difference of exclusion and agonism that should be engaged with, not papered over by fantasy constructs of tolerance that, again drawing on Žižek (1997a, 1999c, 2008c), are shown to be mere arguments of, at best, subtle racism.

Chapter 8 explores *sustainability*. We argue that sustainable development is the now dominant spatial planning narrative, although perhaps implicitly trumped in achievement at the city-region level by the desire to be a 'globally competitive city'. Sustainable development is explored to illustrate how the term acts as a foil to give the appearance of doing something about global warming and the environment, when in effect it is largely deployed to maintain the priority of economic growth for achievement of global competitiveness. We suggest that sustainable development is considered so wonderful for all of us, for as we drive our hybrid car we can think we are saving the environment and making our cities better, when in reality we are simply perpetuating the idea of

economic growth or ‘business as usual’.

The penultimate Chapter 9 engages with the signifier: *responsibility*. We consider the traditional placed-based concepts of responsibility and city-shaping largely deployed in contemporary orthodox planning practice. We then broaden this concept of responsibility, drawing on Lévinas, Derrida, Iris Marion Young and, primarily, from Lacanian-derived literature, what is often titled an ‘Ethics of the Real’ (Zupančič 2000) to argue for an ethics for planning and city-making that is globally conscious. We suggest that such an ethics might involve practising an understanding of responsibility that is predicated on a premise of ‘avoidance of avoidance’, especially when we are aware of the global implications of our actions. The chapter concludes with a reflection on these implications for contemporary placed-based planning.

In Chapter 10 we summarise the prior chapters in the context of the signifier *rationality*, its relationship to *jouissance* and the materialisation of ideology. We consider the rationality which has traditionally underlain spatial planning and argue that it is often not a rationality of balancing facts, but rather a rationality of balancing desires. We then consider the spatial planner as a Lacanian subject. We suggest the need for alternative ways forward beyond continued imposition of transcendental ideas and the ideological deployment of

language to structure our cities within wider social reality. From this perspective we indicate how spatial planning might engage with new potentials, inclusive choice and openness, rather than its traditional focus on exclusion and enclosure of a prescribed orthodoxy seeking only one, or at most a few idealised, but limited, end states.

1 That which can be put into language, either spoken or written text.

2 Sometimes Laclau calls it a floating signifier. An empty signifier is 'strictly speaking, a signifier without signified' (Laclau 1996, 36). However, it is not possible for a signifier to have no signification. What the term implies is that the signifier has been 'emptied' of any one particular meaning and takes on a universal function of representing an entirety of ambiguous, fuzzy, related meanings such as a social order, an ideal or aspiration, or a difficult to define concept, such as 'planning'. It no longer signifies a particular phenomenon but can articulate different elements, to which it stands in relation and becomes the privileged nodal point that binds these particular points into a discursive formation (Laclau 1996, 44).

Where a signifier can indicate different significations in different contexts – i.e., its meaning is indeterminate or 'suspended', Laclau (1996, 2005) terms this a floating signifier. For example, the term 'sustainable development' has signified different meanings over time. For the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* this understanding, or signification relates to an ecological balance (Meadows *et al.* 1972) is in contrast to the WCED/Brundtland definitions of sustainable development which integrated environmental rhetoric to

developmentalist ideology (WCES 1987) – as will be discussed in Chapter 8.

For simplification in this book, we will use the term empty signifier to stand for both empty and floating signifiers.

3 A philosophical system recognising only material facts and observable phenomena, deployed in science to develop predictable models based on cause and effect (Giddens 1974).

4 Perhaps the descriptor 'craft' is a particularly useful dimension for planning for 'craft blurs the boundaries between universal principles and particularistic applications' of planning practice (Beauregard 2001, 438).

5 Governmentality is a mentality of governance and management on the part of the state to set standards of normality for populations co-variant with a mentality of self-governance of individuals in society to conform appropriately to what is expected of them as responsible citizens: i.e., to act normally (see Dean 1999).

6 *Habitus* is a set of acquired guidelines for thought, behaviour, and taste. These acquired criteria, or dispositions, are the consequence of the internalisation of objective social or cultural structures through the life experience of an individual or group (Bourdieu 1998).

7 *Doxa* denotes what is taken for granted in any particular society, the unquestioned ways and values that constitute the dominant common sense of a culture (Bourdieu 1977).

Wildavsky (1973) went so far as to claim that planning, at least for its adherents, is a faith, i.e., a set of unquestioned beliefs without factual

foundations. Because human actors ‘can only create the future’ they desire ‘on paper’, they transfer their ‘loyalties to the plan’ so that ‘the process of planning becomes holy’ (Wildavsky 1973, 152). While planning might not have been reified as a secular faith for all its practitioners, let alone its vociferous opponents, such as property developers, protesting residents, or environmentalists, we suggest that there might be some dimension of validity in Wildasky’s assertion. Wildavsky (1973, 127) observes that we ‘think through language’. He therefore draws a link between how we ‘think about planning’ and ‘how [we] act’. We turn to consider language and planning in the next section.

8 Here, we differentiate the word ‘language’ from that of ‘narrative’ or ‘discourse’. When we refer to ‘language’, we are referring to the general text and speech acts that we use to communicate. Narratives or discourses are sets of sentences constituting speeches, arguments and conversations that have become institutionalised into a particular way of thinking. However, in this book we will also differentiate between discourses and narratives with the former used to denote particular technical psycho-linguistic structures seeking to evoke an effect on the listener within speech and writing (after Lacan 2007) and narratives used in the wider context of sets of sentences comprising meanings, practices and arguments. Accordingly, narratives, such as planning narratives, contain explanations and claims justifying ‘truths’, values and beliefs, i.e., they claim legitimacy as knowledge and set the boundaries of acceptability.

9 A metaphor is a descriptive signifier that may be used to give signification to an object or action where 'it is imaginatively but not literally applicable', e.g., the world is a stage (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1992, 745).

10 A metonymy is 'the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of a thing meant' or signified, e.g., 'Crown for king, the turf for horse-racing' (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1992, 747 – emphasis removed).

11 A synecdoche is 'a figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or vice versa' e.g., 'new faces at the meeting', Italy won by two goals (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1992, 1237).

12 The Frankfurt School was an informal name for a group of famous German thinkers drawing on neo-Marxist critical theory, sociology and philosophy including Max Horkheimer, Theador Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and more recently Jürgen Habermas. The School held that basic socio-economic concepts had to be integrated with psychological concepts due to a belief that an emancipated society and an autonomous self were interdependent (Wollin 2006). Habermas (1979) similarly believed in the interdependence of forms of social integration and forms of identity.

13 See Habermas (1972), Chapters 10-12.

14 Foucault also initially engaged in psychoanalytical discussions of Freud's and Lacan's theories of the subject in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1979).

15 From Aristotle's intellectual virtue of *phronesis* – a virtue of excellent judgement in human affairs developed through learning from experience

(Flyvbjerg 2001).

16 Freud's (2003) unheimlich or 'unhomely'.

17 Psychology concerning the fundamental assumptions of the Freudian theory of mind (Boothby 2001).

18 That which can be put into images, either in the symbolic realm of media, art, or in human consciousness, or human dreams.

19 An object that is independent of human perception, appearance or observation. Kant (1934) called it a 'Thing-in-itself' in contrast to a phenomenon that can be observed.

20 For example, his analyse of the Director's Cut of the Ridley Scott's film *Bladerunner* is deployed to explain and illustrate the above position about the truth of the subject. Žižek (1993, 40-41) illustrates how for the film's main character, Deckard, this truth is inherently ambiguous – is he human or robot? Is what appears as his subjective truth only an artificial construct of his manufacturer to give him a sense of human identification?

Chapter 2
The Lack of *Certainty*

Introduction

> … underlying the production of cities are the hidden workings of desire and fear.
>
> Pile 2000, 76

To some degree most, or perhaps all, people desire to be safe, secure and to have control over their environment in order to sustain their regular and habituated ways of life: what the British sociologist Anthony Giddens[1] (1991) calls a desire for 'ontological security'. These concerns apply to all dimensions of the built and natural environment, from issues of our personal physical security, well-being and sense of belonging; through material considerations, such as housing and employment needs; to the protection of our wider heritage

and ecology (Brand 1999; Dupuis and Thorns 1998, 2008; Grenville 2007).

Spatial planning as a discursive set of practices and processes plays a central role in all of these dimensions (Pleger 2001a). Further, we suggest that one of planning's fundamental purposes and key justifications is to produce an illusion of certainty in order to provide a sense of ontological security in an unpredictable world. This is particularly so in relation to the future, or what Friedmann (1987, 168-169) refers to as 'the veil of time':

> The desire to know what does not yet exist but may happen at some future time is a very powerful human desire … [yet] Despite the invention of various ingenious methods for spying through the veil of time, the outlook for social and economic forecasting is fairly bleak.

Core to spatial planning practice is the provision – or at least the appearance of provision – of future 'certainty' in a complex, unstable, dynamic and inherently uncertain world. As Christensen (1985, 63, 1999) wrote, 'planners hate uncertainty as much as other people do, and spend their working lives trying to reduce it'. Other authors also indicate the need for planning practice to offer certainty: 'Planning

means, essentially, controlling uncertainty – either by taking action now to secure the future, or by preparing actions to be taken in case an event occurs' (Marris in Abbott 2005, 237). Moreover, as Silva (2002, 336-338) observes:

> Dealing with uncertainty is a duty of planning. Basically, all planning approaches in one way or another manage uncertainty about the future … [Regardless] 'of reality, planners, managers, and politicians persist in their efforts to impose certainty (administratively, bureaucratically, legally, and politically) in an uncertain world.'

What purpose does a blueprint, a master, or a strategic plan serve, but to provide a template of future certainty of land use or spatial design? Even if the planners drafting the plan realise that it will never completely achieve its projected end state, planners, and the public, must 'continue in their faith that their [original] plans will be successful, and [completed], so planners and those "planned" have the belief necessary to carry on planning' (Gunder 2004, 301). Or, to paraphrase Wildavsky (1973, 152), if we cannot put our faith in achieving our desired future, we should be able to put our faith certainly in our existing plans and planning for the future, which reside

in the here and now.

Wildavsky indicates the perceived value of regulatory planning in the seeking of certainty as compared with the unpredictability of a discretionary planning system in which the play of politics could lead to uncertainty of outcomes (Tewdr-Jones 1999). In this regard, planning practice and its related regulation act 'as a process in which knowledge, risk and public concerns are [first] constructed' to produce unambiguous rules that ensure predictable and consistently reproducible outcomes (Lidskog *et al.* 2006, 89). Or, at least they provide the illusion that this will be so in a traditional modernist view of a project's progression to a materially better world.

In maintaining a belief of control and future certainty, deficiencies or lacks must be quickly addressed and solutions prescribed. We suggest that the political or technical deployment of a 'lack' or 'deficiency' is a powerful planning and political trope for response and action. For who would wish to live in a 'deficient' city lacking in *safety, competitiveness, sustainability* or some other shortfall? As Laclau (1996, 2000, 2005) has illustrated, the identification of lack represented by an empty signifier: such as a lack of *order* or, perhaps, *security* and the subsequent hegemonic articulation of its resolution, provides a powerful and emotive political tool; one that underlies much political discussion at local and national scales (Stavrakakis

2007, 76).

Spatial planning practice is often centrally involved in processes of identification of 'lack' and its subsequent resolution (Yiftachel 1995). Indeed, planning may play a key role in giving the *appearance* of de-politicising much of this hegemonic function, at least for city-making and region-building, by introducing what appears to be a technical rationality to the identification and resolution of an urban (or rural) problem. This is particularly evident if policies are legitimised by being worded as scientific narratives, consistent with wider dominant cultural imperatives (e.g., public choice theory) and similar consumer-oriented contemporary values. In this role, spatial planners quantify the politically qualitative lack as a measurable symptom. A lack of economic competitiveness thereby becomes a lack of transport-efficient urban form, a lack of adequate infrastructure, or a lack of available commercial land for development (Filion and McSpurren 2007; Scott 2007, 2008). A perceived lack of safety and security becomes symptomised as high crime rates and anti-social behaviour to be 'cured' through effective urban design, including perhaps, gated communities (Dupuis and Thorns 2008). A lack of sustainability is resolved with urban containment and intensification and the 'better' management of energy consumption and waste-streams to reduce the city's ecological footprint (Gleeson *et al.* 2004, 351).

Laclau (1996, 122) argues that the construction of a solution to fill an identified public or community lack is a social operation. The constructed 'universally' desired answer which then dominates and provides the only acceptable solution is thus a 'pragmatic social construction': a vision or a desired state. It is inherently utopian. Moreover, this 'vision' is inevitably contaminated by particularity. Each vision is a 'unique, one off,' universal, which tends to serve a hegemonic function for a specific powerful group with vested interests: 'precisely because the universal place is empty [as in empty signifier], it can be occupied by any force, not necessarily democratic' (Laclau 1996, 65). The visions of dominant groups (such as professional experts, vocal residents or other pressure groups, or political or business elites) attempt to fill and resolve the identified deficiency. Consequently, the identification of a lack and its hegemonic resolution are both highly contestable and ideological (as is any deconstruction of them) representing the 'incommensurability between the ethical and the normative' (Laclau 2000, 81).

We develop this concept further in the following sections, where we engage a detailed discussion of the role of 'lack' – a fundamental Lacanian concept – commencing with the primordial maternal lack of young humans yet to be integrated into language and culture (Ruti 2008). We then further explore how the concept of lack and its

metaphorical slippage and framing are deployed in contemporary political and technocratic processes to inspire desire for a particular planning solution or policy process. We draw on case studies to illustrate how such 'solutions' are nurtured as a popular desire underlain by the promise, or illusion, of harmony and fulfilment – which, of course, never quite materialises. We conclude the chapter by demonstrating how it is the desire for security and fulfilment – that we argue is synonymous with the desire for certainty towards the unknowable future – underwrites the very ontological purpose of spatial planning and gives it much of its popular support.

The Concept of Lack: Thanks Mum!

The desire to overcome 'lack' and to become 'whole' is central to Lacanian theorising and defines the Lacanian subject. The infant 'in the first months of its life is unaware of any distinct identity of its own separate from that of its principle care giver' (Harding 2007, 1768). To be whole is being nurtured and secure with Mum, to be separated is to be incomplete and lacking. The infant then begins to realise that it must vie for the mother's attention in competition with another adult, or another child, or with her work. As Blum and Nast (2000, 198)

suggest, the infant's desire and subjectivity are constituted in its recognition that it is not the only object of the (m)other's desire. This sense of lack drives the child to attempt to regain the central position as its (m)other's (or primary care givers) desired object. At a certain point of 'development the child comes to associate the absence of his [*sic*] mother with the presence' of the mother's partner or other sibling; initially, as a rival object, 'then as the one who is presumed to possess the' object of the mother's desire (Dor 1998, 115). In this manner, the infant works out a signifying relation to name the cause of its mother's absences by summoning up this symbolic other that has displaced the infant; the metaphor for the mother's desired object.[2] The human subject arises from the infant's original relationship with its (m)other: that is, 'by its desire for her desire – [it] identifies with the imaginary object of her desire insofar as the mother herself symbolizes it' (Lacan 2006, 463).

The Lacanian object of desire is a lacking but desired abstract 'Thing'. It is an imaginary object. Lacan's object of maternal desire functions as the injunction 'no' in the symbolic system 'as causative of a lack-in-being' (Ragland 2004, 2). Language and the cultures built by, and in, language separate us from our primordial state of original completeness with Mother. We fundamentally desire to return to this state, but, of course, cannot. This symbolic separation from the

primary care giver is inherently fearful and the subject's fundamental repressed desire is to return to an idyllic state of maternal bliss. This impossible desire will drive the subject through life via metonymical displacement and metaphorical substitution where this initial 'desire is taken captive by language and its original nature is lost' (Dor 1998, 118).

This subject may materialise his/her desire sexually, or more often, through sublimation into alternative cultural activities that supplement the subject's existing identifications. This might be to become part of a 'prestigious' (or even infamous) club, profession, or 'gang', to acquire particular identity defining beliefs, knowledges and attributes, or the acquisition of material symbols of consumer success and distinctiveness (Apollon 1994; Stavrakakis 2007). This forgotten and hence unconscious infantile compulsion drives and shapes all human subjects. While needs may be met and specific fears overcome, desire is seldom, if ever, achieved and, if so, never sated. This is because we always desire more as we seek to repeat what we can never duplicate; our initial experience of maternal enjoyment beyond that of mere satisfaction (Lacan 2006, 431).

For Lacan, desire and subjectivity are inseparable. Subjectivity is characterised by uncertainty, anxiety, alienation, a desire for ontological security, originally that of the infant in relation to the