

**MICHAEL GUNDER
AND JEAN HILLIER**



Planning in Ten Words or Less

A Lacanian Entanglement
with Spatial Planning



PLANNING IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

For Adriana

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A Lacanian Entanglement with Spatial Planning

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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 symbolic¹ equipment of planning. The chapter concludes with an overview of the book’s structure.

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

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 an 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

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.

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 positivistic³ 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

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).

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, craft⁴ 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,

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).

what Foucault refers to as governmentality⁵ (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

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).

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

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).

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.

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 Wildavsky'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.

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 language⁸ 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

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.

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 metaphor⁹, metonymy¹⁰ and synecdoche¹¹ – ‘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

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).

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 School¹² 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).

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, Theodor 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.

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 Foucault¹⁴ 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

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).

practical, experiential, phronetic¹⁵ 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 uncanny¹⁶ 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 metapsychology¹⁷ 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.

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).

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 Imaginary¹⁸ 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

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