After the Post-Modern Abyss: Is the Discourse of Sustainability Planning's Saving Grace or Road to Perdition?

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Abstract:

The legitimation of planning as a mechanism providing rational societal guidance and coordination between the economic and social spheres, particularly for human settlements, became increasingly under challenge with the decline of the welfare state, a loss of faith in instrumental rationality and the rise of neo-liberalism and the market. This displacement of planning's traditional purpose and role has subsequently been recovered via the discipline's response to the increasing emphasis being focused on the importance of the quality of the environment. This has given rise to a new transcendent ideal: that of sustainability.

This paper will explore the rise of this master signifier – sustainability – as a codified set of discourses and practices which has come to occupy this central place as the organising principle of planning's new discursive field. Drawing on Lacan and Foucaultian genealogy, the paper will critically argue from a Deleuzian perspective that 'sustainability' is an ideology that stifles the potential for substantive social change. Rather than encouraging opportunities for immanence that may produce new potentials for our settlements and societies, it seeks to simply striate a new space of planning practices, discipline, control and regulation. This is via a territorialisation of the built environment that seeks to limit or constrain alternative opportunities and directions for social action that are contra to the ideological dogmas of sustainability.

All of which constitutes new purpose and legitimacy and, above all, authority for the discipline of planning and its practitioners while potentially sustaining existing social and environmental injustices, if not also creating new iniquities. These are injustices that planning traditionally attempted to address but now obscures under discourses and resultant imperatives of sustainability.

Key Words: sustainability, regulation, legitimacy, ideology, injustice

Introduction

> **In search of a new "vision" for planning…** many commentators believe
> that there is a need for a new vision, one which can "reach out to society as
> a whole, addressing its wants, needs and insecurities", a "vision to rank
> with those of Ebenezer Howard a century ago". There is a consensus that
> such a vision can now emerge from what has come to be called
> sustainability. (Davoudi, 2000, p.127)

During the latter part of the twentieth century the legitimation and value of planning
as an essential mechanism of government providing rational societal guidance,
management and coordination between the economic and social spheres for the
common good, especially for the built environment, became increasingly under
challenge (Beauregard, 1989; Dear, 1986; Friedmann, 1987). This was attributable to
a range of interrelated factors. One fundamental reason was the decline of the welfare
state's perceived ability to deliver public goods and the rise of neo-liberal values,
market deregulation and public choice theory in its place (Allmendinger, 2001;
Gleeson, 2001; Troy, 2000; Sanyal, 2005). Factors compounding this included a loss
of faith in planning expertise and the perceived effectiveness of instrumental
rationality to deal with emerging societal concerns, particularly those pertaining to
race, gender and the environment (Beauregard, 1991; Berke, 2002; Gunder, 2003a;
Marcuse, 2000). These concerns were further complicated by issues of urban decline
and fiscal insolvency in many first world cities that eventually gave rise to the
domination of market-lead values of competition and globalisation as the only 'game
in town' (Gunder, 2005a; Jessop, 2000; McGuirk, 2004). Levy (1992, p.81) writing
over a decade ago, attributed the loss of planning's central coordinating role to a loss
of planning's 'guiding principle or central paradigm' of master planning for the public
good 'and nothing has come along to replace it.'

Yet, even as Levy was documenting this lament, new guiding principles were
emerging for planning practitioners and academics (Gunder, 2004, p.303). In
particular, for many, the displacement of planning's traditional purpose and role has
subsequently been recovered via the discipline's response to the increasing emphasis
being focused on the importance of the quality of the environment in many planning
related discourses (Davoudi, 2000; Gleeson *et al*, 2004; Healey and Shaw; 1994;
Jepson, 2001; Murdoch, 2004; Wheeler, 2000). In retort to its loss of initial expert

purpose in the name of the public good, in the face of emerging environmental issues and in place of its traditional role of attempting to provide social justice across classes; planning and its related disciplines sought to develop new discourses and practices of environmental management. This gave rise to a new transcendental ideal: that of sustainability.

This paper will explore the rise of this master signifier – sustainability – as a codified set of diverse discourses and practices which has come to occupy this central place as the organising principle of one of planning's most important new discursive fields[1]. Drawing on Lacan and, to some degree, Foucaultian techniques of genealogy, the paper will critically argue from a Deleuzian perspective that 'sustainability' has been largely deployed, particularly under the label of 'sustainable development', as an ideology that maintains the status quo of class inequalities and stifles the potential for new social 'becomings'.

Rather than encouraging opportunities for immanence that may produce new positive potentials for our settlements and societies, planning's deployment of the sustainability imperative largely seeks to simply striate a new space of planning practice, discipline, control and regulation. This is via a territorialisation of the built environment that seeks to limit, or constrain, alternative opportunities and directions for social action that are contra to the ideological dogmas of sustainability and its proponents. All of which constitutes new purpose and legitimacy and, above all, authority for the discipline of planning and its practitioners while potentially sustaining existing social and environmental injustices, not to mention inducing new forms of social disparity. These are injustices that are ultimately attributable to society's dominate cultural imperative of the market place driven by discourses, not only of sustainability, but also of capitalist competition and globalisation (Gunder, 2005a). Yet, the sustainability constraint acts as a mechanism to obscure and subsume these issues under the imperative to sustain the environment, which in itself, few, if any, would wish to argue against. Further, these are now largely overlooked injustices that planning traditionally attempted to overtly address as important issues of the urban problematic. Planning has marginalised its role of serving today's 'public good' in turn for serving the ability of the environment to continue to sustain wealth

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[1] Other new fields also include 'new urbanism', 'multiculturalism', 'smart growth', 'communicative planning', although this listing is not comprehensive (Gunder, 2004, p.303).

accumulation 'for future generations', regardless of the social cost that this may induce.

This paper will examine the concept of sustainability as a signifier of identification and belief. It will begin by tracing its rise to prominence in planning education and its emergence as a dominant planning theme. The implication of this emerging *doxa* will be explored and argued to be pernicious to social justice. This is of particular concern where diverse socio-economic and environmental issues are constituted under one mantel of a triple, or quadruple, bottom line of accounting constituting an all-embracing 'sustainability' rubric that purports to include consideration of the social good. This combination of characteristics is often operationalised under the catchall of 'sustainable development' (Naess, 2001). The paper will conclude that while attention to ecological sustainability is crucial for continued human survival, issues of social justice, human creativity and economic wellbeing cannot be subsumed as merely a quantified subset of the sustainability signifier.

The Rise of Sustainability in Planning Education

Gunder and Fookes (1997a, 1997b) reporting less than a decade ago on the content of Australasian planning school programmes did not use the signifier 'sustainability' at all. Their work found that, on average in 1995, accredited planning school curriculum had focused less than five percent of their total programmes on environmentally related planning issues. Over a quarter of all programmes had no formal environmental orientated papers; at most, one programme had 12 percent of overall course content focused on environmental issues. In contrast, all programmes had components concerned with social and economic issues averaging 12 percent of program content with one program devoting 31 percent of its content to these issues.

While ecological and environmental issues were undoubtedly addressed in most, if not all, planning programmes at the time of Gunder and Fookes' study, these issued lacked a focal point of attention necessary to shape them as a specific field of prominent concern within planning education. The concept of sustainability, while articulated in the literature (Jacobs, 1991; Healey and Shaw, 1994; Orr, 1992; Rees, 1995), was yet to emerge as a dominant marker or master signifier of planning educationist concern.

Friedmann (1996, p.96) was the first to note the emerging importance of sustainability in North American planning education when he reported on the adoption of sustainable development as one of five areas of planning competences for the University of British Columbia. Yet, Friedmann's article did not advocate the adoption of sustainability in his own idealised conceptualisation of a planning core curriculum. While the teaching of environmental justice as a planning issue was gaining support in educationalist circles of this period, (see: Washington and Strong, 1997) sustainability was yet to emerge as a universal concern for planning education. Dalton (2001) noted the both 'new urbanism' and 'sustainability' gave American planning programmes, especially those with a focus on civic design, a boost in the 1990s, yet still considered sustainability to be, at best one strand of many for twenty-first century planning education.

The number of North American planning schools offering a dedicated specialism in environmental planning increased more than threefold between 1984 and 2000 and this is now offered by 86 percent of all accredited ACSP schools (Swearingen White and Mayo, 2004, p.81). Swearingen White and Mayo conducted a survey of these environmental planning programs and found that sustainability was considered by respondents to be the most important foundational knowledge set to impart to students. It is interesting to note that environmental justice or its non-environmental variants were not reported in the survey findings as knowledge topics for consideration.

In the UK, sustainable development emerged as a key planning narrative during the 1990s, especially in relationship to the tension created over the demand for housing provision in the countryside (Murdoch and Abram, 2002). The Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI, 2001) report *New Vision for Planning* placed sustainability as a central watchword of the RTPI's new conceptualisation of spatial planning (Batey, 2003, p.332). Yet recent reforms of British planning education (RTPI, 2003), with its shift to more technological and generalised education and focus on life-time learning, leave limited room for the initial development of key competencies, including those of sustainability. Of particular concern to this author is the limited scope during the one year enrolment period in the new accredited professional master programmes for development of critical research skills predicated on a detail understanding of policy analysis and social science theory. As Davoudi (2000, p.133) cautioned *a priori*, this

short time period of instruction may be sufficient for technically orientated professional training. Yet, it is insufficient to develop skills of ethical judgement and critique necessary to fully engage critical debate over issues beyond that of blind accept of dominant values and cultural imperatives, such as those of ecological modernisation and globalisation, shaping the discourses supporting the arguments behind sustainable development.

Sandercock (1997) was one of the first Australasian based planning educators to assert the need for ecological literacy as a key constituent of planning education, yet her article did not use the signifier 'sustainability'. Richard Cardew (1999, p.135) argued for the importance of integrating environmental management into urban planning education, where at best, in Australia, 'environmentalism may be regarded more as sustainability, where energy use and transport issues are given more prominence than water quality, water movement, waste management and habitat protection.' Cardew argued, drawing on both Australian and New Zealand models, that planning students need greater exposure to scientific approaches in environmental management, perhaps best delivered as a consequence of collaboration between planning and environmental departments. It is interesting to note that Cardew considered sustainability a socially orientated concept, rather than ecological, at least in the planning education discussed within his article.

Cardew's desire was then being fulfilled, at least, in New Zealand. Dixon (2001, p.6) observed that the dominance of neo-liberal values and that country's planning regulation focus on sustainable resource management, was putting pressure on planning education programmes to 'shift from design and social concerns to a more singular focus on scientific', legal and environmental knowledges; raising the question: was 'sustainable development the new goal of planning?'

Sustainability is now a regularly used signifier in the planning education related literature, but this literature has supplied, at best, limited definitions of the term, often using environmental education, or competency, or literacy, and sustainability interchangeably, as does Thomas and Nicita (2002) in their overview of the state of Australian university education for sustainability. Bruce Glavovic (2003, p.25), the head of New Zealand's second largest planning school programme, viewed sustainability as the core concern for planning education where 'a good planning education should therefore provide the quintessential foundation for understanding

sustainability issues, and transmogrifying this understanding into workable sustainability solutions.' Yet, sustainability, even as a core for planning education, appears to remain an undefined ideal with the contemporary educational literature consistently having difficulty in defining what exactly is meant by the signifier, and especially how it should be operationalised. For example:

> Sustainability is still being conceived here as a condition or established trend towards the operational realisation of which the whole process – education for sustainability – is susceptible of being directed… But the issue is, how to frame that ideal – which does not spring in us fully formed – and how to turn it into a political reality, a set of guidelines and constraints for collective and individual decision making (Foster, 2001, p.156).

The following sections explore the signifier 'sustainability' from the perspective of Lacanian and Zizekian philosophy. This is a view of the world that considers social reality itself to be an aggregate of shared illusions or ideological constructs. Subjects, as participants in society, materialize the symptoms, or artefacts, of their ideological belief sets via their actions and behaviours. In this worldview, sustainability acts as a highly valued identity-shaping concept for its adherents, especially planners, even though, when asked, all have great difficulty in concisely and comprehensively attempting to define and operationalise the concept. Yet, it is this very fuzziness that gives sustainability its ideological power.

Sustainability as a Master Signifier of Ideological Identification

The label sustainability is used in a manner that Markusen (2003, p. 702) refers to as a "fuzzy concept".

> A fuzzy concept is one which posits an entity, phenomenon or process which possesses two or more alternative meanings and thus cannot be reliably identified or applied by different readers or scholars. In literature framed by fuzzy concepts, researchers may believe they are addressing the same phenomena but may actually be targeting quite different ones.

Sustainability is a concept that everyone purports to intuitively understand but somehow finds very difficult to operationalise into concrete terms. Regardless, no planning or policy document can omit the concept these days because sustainability or

'sustainable development is declared as the ultimate planning goal although it is not usually specified what it means exactly and how it is to be achieved (Briassoulis, 1999, p.889). Consequently, 'the success of the sustainable ideal… is due especially to its unifying promise, the way it seems to transcend ideological values of the past' (Ratner, 2004, p.51).

Gunder (2003b, 2004, 2005b), drawing on Lacanian theory, has identified sustainability as a master signifier of identification for many involved with the planning discipline. This theory suggests that the individual is constituted as a conscious subject in society via his/her identifications with a collection of shared master signifiers (Verhaeghe, 2001). These vary from descriptive words of actual appearance, ethnicity and gender to abstract words representing a subject's spiritual and intellectual values (Bracher, 1999, p.45). This aggregation of master signifiers constitutes a person's ego-ideal, that is the core ideals, dogmas and a sense of self constituting who, subjects mostly think, they are.

Each of our intellectual master signifiers is comprised of diverse and often contested sets of ordered signifiers that each constitutes a specific dialogue of knowledge, practices, norms and belief. Each master signifier provides an anchoring point or holder for these competing fields of diverse narratives and, by encapsulating them, under one single label gives them common identity even in their diversity (Zizek, 1989, p.88). Each master signifier acts as a container without specific meaning in its own right. It is an empty signifier. Yet this lack of specific meaning, this emptiness, allows it to contain a conflicting range of narratives under one label of master identification we can share with others.

We treasure each of our identity-bearing master signifiers for they provide our sense of self. We vigorously defend our master signifiers and many, if not all, of our assertions have a primary purpose to affirm the value and supremacy of these master signifiers and the values and knowledge sets constituting them. This ongoing defence is central to our 'ego's sense of oneness and wholeness', it defines who we are to others as socio-political actors within society (Bracher, 1999, p.45).

Because we want to protect and defend the values and 'truths' of our master signifiers, they constitute our joint groups and communities of shared interest. Master signifiers let us have collective and amicable social identifications, while at the same

time permitting us to accommodate diversity of belief and disagreement within, and across, each particular identification. They compose the structuralisation of our socio-political life (Stavrakakis, 1999, p.30). For, within our groups of shared identification, while the master signifiers themselves remain unchanged, their explanatory contents are widely variable and subject to all sorts of diverse and contrary hegemonic enunciations (Laclau, 1989, p.xiv). Take 'planning', itself, as a master signifier of identity. Communicative social planners, economic development specialists, urban designers, transportation specialists, natural resource managers and regional scientists all defend their shared identification with planning while drawing on often quite diverse knowledge sets to undertake their planning practices (Gunder, 2003b, 2005b). Regardless of this diversity, most planners share a common desire to make the world a better place, even if the very meaning of this 'betterment' is also highly contestable.

Planning as a Group Identity of Shared Mysteries and Contested Beliefs, Knowledges and Practices

The planning profession is constituted by a membership of similar-minded, but not always agreeing, practitioners. All human disciplines, or professions, distinguish themselves through the shared use of 'technical' terms, or master signifiers, whose definition is often ambiguous, difficult to learn (hence providing barriers to admittance) and always changing and/or evolving for the practitioners involved. As Gunder (2003b, p.286) reported, what ensures a discipline's homogeneity are its specific professional master signifiers whose meanings are actually a mystery[2] to all its practitioners – no one knows what they really concisely mean, but everyone assumes that all others do. Consequently, they have to be 'the real thing,' and so everyone uses them constantly (Zizek, 2002b, p.58). A master signifier is most effective where:

> It appears mysterious, nonsensical, incomplete, not only to us but even to the Other. For it is just this that appears to open it up to us, allow us to add to it, make it our own. It is just in its lack and unknowability that it calls upon us to realize it, take its place, say what it should be saying. (Butler 2005, p.56)

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[2] The archaic name, or signifier, for a guild of craftspersons or trade was 'mystery'.

Practitioners and academics teaching the subject do not know exactly what these terms mean, they largely just retain a belief that they are a good 'Thing' that we have to development more knowledge about – hence the perceived value of academic research (Lacan, 2004). This is especially the case for planning, which is largely an ethical project as to what 'ought to be' in the future (Gunder, 2004, p.302). For planning, these especially include the master signifier of the 'public good' and now 'sustainability'. Planners regularly use these terms; often as justification for their professional actions, e.g. we must do this if we want a sustainable city or a sustainable end! Yet, what unites planners (and other professions) as a discipline is fundamentally their common, or shared, lack of knowledge (Zizek, 2002b, p.58). No one knows, yet alone can succinctly or comprehensively and universally define, what a sustainable city, or the common good, for that matter, actually is! At best, we can only guess towards some vague notion that lacks a clear focus. But it is this lack of clarity that allows this master signifier to be a 'good Thing' for all those that embrace it, regardless of the particularity of their individual understandings, dreams and illusions about this sublime object – which make it profoundly ideological in its very ontological nature.

As Naess (2001, p.503) observes not just planning practitioners, but authors of planning articles and books pertaining to 'planning procedures and sustainability' generally fail to 'clarify what they consider to be the substantive content of sustainable spatial planning.' Yet, it is inherently considered to be a good thing, otherwise why have it as a goal to be achieved! Hence, we seek new knowledge to fill in this lack of understanding. But this is generally without success, as new knowledge may answer aspects of our initial quest, but then it tends to shine the light on new voids and incompleteness in our understandings and we spin new illusions and fantasies to ourselves as to why this lack of understanding about this desired thing continues as it does.

The Value of Sustainability to Planning's Conceptualisation of Social Reality

While it is perhaps sometimes not straightforward to defend 'planning' and the value of planning to non-planners, other master signifiers are particularly easy to defend, for few, if any members of society, would wish to disagree with them. They are literally

'motherhood'[3] and sustainability – protecting the environment for current and future generations – is situated readily on this pedestal of unquestionable goodness for most of society. This gives this word great ideological power, particularly when used in conjunction with other signifiers, for, by its mere association, it also embosses these other concepts as 'good things' that everyone can identify with. If sustainability is unquestionably good, then sustainable cities or ends must be good, as must sustainable management, or sustainable development. Who can argue against sustainability and all that is associated with it? This provides great value to the current discipline of planning, particularly if sustainability is now the profession's core purpose and goal. For sustainability places planning's very identity and justification largely beyond public challenge.

Master signifiers, such as sustainability, convert 'the arbitrary and conventional into the regular and natural' state of the world: 'that by which an implicit order or prescription is made to seem as though it is only the description of a previously existing state of affairs' (Butler, 2005, p.19). These ideological markers construct social reality itself and once identified, they appear as ideals, which have always existed, even though they are new concepts and states of constructing our aspirations and values within the world. Planning education did address issues of ecological and environmental concern prior to the emergence of the signifier sustainability (Beatley and Manning, 1997). But it was the transcendence of this signifier into the role of master signifier of subject identification and purposeful belief that allows this field of diverse issues to coalesce into one unified and constituting theme of identification, ethical value and mission, even if the story of sustainability remains fuzzy, ambiguous and incomplete. Kant termed these incomplete and often unclear ideological labels: transcendental ideas, or ideals. If planners, or other actors, completely reject these signifiers and the hopes and even illusions that often support them, they displace social reality itself; the second any human subject removes their undefinable master signifiers from their constructed realities, *'reality itself loses its discursive-logical consistency'* (Zizek, 1993, p.88).

Further, Lacanian theory suggests that the basic functioning of social reality requires *'a certain non-knowledge of its participants'* (Zizek, 1989, p.21). Social reality is

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[3] In the Lacanian parlance of desire 'mother' is the supreme good, but one that we can never attain (Safouan, 2004, p.84).

constructed symbolically via a set of ideological illusions, or fantasies, which we take on without question so as to ensure our existence appears complete, while blatantly failing to notice what is missing (Gunder, 2003a). A rather insightful example exposing this, accordingly used before by this author (Gunder, 2003b; 2004), is the following quote regarding the master signifier 'sustainability'.

> Does the way that sustainability slides from one meaning into another, as its core challenges, problems and solutions are framed and reframed, leave you uncertain about what it all means or what should be done? Or alternatively do you find that your firm and clear convictions run into the sand time after time as other 'takes' on sustainability seem to hold sway (though it is hard to pin down how or why). (Richardson, 2002, p.353)

Similarly, Naess (2001, p.504) articulates sustainability's 'chameleonic' ability to constantly change its spots, or at least contain a manifold range of diverse ideas under the one rubric.

> As the saying goes, a pet child gets many names. Concerning the use of the concept of sustainable development, one might perhaps as well say, "a pet name gets many children". Today, a manifold range of strategies and projects are promoted with the claim that they are derived from the very concept of sustainable development. It has become politically impossible not to be a supporter of sustainable development, so there is clear danger that the [original] concept will be watered out.

 'Sustainability' is a master signifier that fixes, or anchors, the competing discourses of 'heterogeneous material into a unified ideological field' and this 'is perceived and experienced as an unfathomable, *transcendent*, stable point of reference' where it is near impossible to disagree with its broad remit – whatever it actually may be (Zizek, 2002a, p.18)! Yet it lacks coherent definition beyond some undefinable platitude 'to meet the needs of the present without compromising the abilities of future generations… to meet their own needs', whatever they might be (Moriarty, 2002, p.233)! Consequently, this very lack of clarity gives rise to considerable ideological power and value to the planning discipline and all others that act in the name of the master signifier. Yet, this is not without cost. In sustainability's looseness is the potential for this ideal to produce unintentioned, or even intentioned, pernicious

effects. The following section will suggest that this may be particularly so in regards to social justice.

The Pernicious Nature of Sustainability as an Imperative

> To think that their present circumstances and their present societal arrangements might be sustained – that is an unsustainable thought for the majority of the world's people. (Marcuse, 1998, p. 103)

The sustainability imperative, has been interpreted, at least for the Australian city, to imply 'a profound reconfiguration of urban morphology that would reduce the ecological footprint (resource demands and waste outputs) of cities and their hinterland[s]' (Gleeson *et al*, 2004, p.351). This is a reconfiguration of settlement that has little regard to the cost induced on those that currently live in, or those who will live in, these environments. As Bauriedl and Wissen (2002, p.109) observe, sustainability tends to be perceived as 'a broadly accepted norm' that is considered 'to be in everybody's interest'; consequently, planning regulation often 'neglects that what is sustainable for the one can threaten the living conditions of the other'. These authors also observe that state regulation justified in the name of sustainability effectively controls aspects of both the environment, and implicitly, but often obscurely, the very 'social contradictions of capitalist societalization' (p.109). As Markusen (2003, p.704) observes:

> Political organizers often look for umbrella concepts that can pull strange bedfellows together – "sustainability" might be an example. Or, someone wishing to obscure a hegemonic or power relationship might choose to use a rhetoric of inclusion.

As Marcuse (1998, p.104) observes in regards to the deployment of the master signifier 'sustainability' as a mechanism of ideological inclusion in relationship to housing policy and urban development:

> Sustainability is both an honourable goal for carefully defined purposes and a camouflaged trap for the well-intentioned unwary. As a concept and a slogan, it has an honourable pedigree in the environmental movement which has, by and large, succeeded in its fight to have the standards of sustainability generally accepted by all sides…. The acceptance of sustainability, at least in principle, in the environment arena by virtually all

actors has led to the desire to use such a universally acceptable goal as a slogan also in campaigns that have nothing to do with the environment but where the lure of universal acceptance is a powerful attraction… "sustainability" is a trap.

The master signifier 'sustainability' is, more than not, deployed simply as an ideological tool to unquestionably anchor or quilt the discourse to us as an unassailable object of desire and importance (Zizek 1989, p.88). It implies that everyone has a common stake in 'sustainable transport', 'sustainable housing', 'sustainable development' or 'sustainable cities'; 'that if we all simply recognized our common interests everything would be fine, we would end poverty, exploitation, segregation, inadequate housing, congestion, ugliness, abandonment and homelessness' (Marcuse, 1998, p.105).

Yet, Marcuse (1998, p.105) continues with his argument that this is a ruse, because the very 'idea of universal acceptance of meaningful goals is a chimera.' The urban problematic is constructed of conflicting positions and desires, where one's gain is another's loss (Gunder, 2005a). The land developer's gain (profit) is the home purchaser's loss; a new 'sustainable' rail corridor means noise, vibration and loss of amenities for residents adjacent to the new alignment, little different to the adverse effects of an new 'unsustainable' motorway. Similarly, high density residential development without expensive design and construction may mean low residential amenity at the level of local place, even though it goes hand in hand with the desirable ability to sustain public transit at the regional level (Dixon and Dupuis, 2003). This list could be long!

The Sustainable Imposition of Social Injustice

Urban policy is both socially produced and helps to make the urban problem seem natural, taken for granted. Dominant understandings of urban policy both reflect and influence the ways in which people experience urban living; urban policies help to define the urban "problem" or even the urban "crisis". They are not just responses to those problems but help to constitute them. (Cochrane, 2000, p.540)

Planning driven by the master signifier 'sustainability' is no longer concerned about balancing the public good between that of the market and social justice, now it is

primarily concerned with pursuing 'sustainable cities that balance environmental concerns, the needs of future populations, and economic growth' (Beauregard, 2005, in press). Now the urban crisis appears to be that our cities are simply not sustainable. What has happened to planning's concern about fairness, equity and social justice? Under this crisis of 'unsustainability', issues such as homelessness, racism, or inequality no longer appear to be burning urban issues. Yet, they have not gone away. Exploitation still occurs, it is just no longer considered an urban problem of major concern, especially in relation to the importance of reducing our ecological footprint! Is this obscuring of injustice not ideology at its most insidious!

Worse, in contrast to the honesty of the radical ecological position, the majority of takes on sustainability derive from the politically palatable view of the Bruntdland Commission (WCED 1987) that 'economic development is essential to meet social goals of sustainable development' (Haughton, 1999, p.234). This is what Davoudi (2000, p.128) and others, such as David Harvey, refers to as ecological modernization: where 'economic prosperity is essential for achieving environmental improvements.' This is a discourse largely framed by 'Northern elites' and directly constrained, if not indeed constructed by, market imperatives of competition, growth and globalisation, the very causative factors of capital generating inequality and exploitation of both the first and developing world's urban masses (Barry and Paterson, 2004; Bryne and Glover, 2002; Doyle, 1998)!

Indeed, while the Bruntdland Commission's work is 'translated usually into the simultaneous satisfaction of three objectives: economic efficiency; environmental protection; and social justice' (Briassoulis, 1999, p.890), the main focus often appears to be the tension between that of the market and the environment, with social equity being, at best, a distant third (Marcuse, 1998). Further, concerns for social equity are inherently political and outside the techno-rational scientific approach central to and dominate within considers of market efficiency and environmental protection (Briassoulis, 1999), not to mention, demanded by recent trends in international planning education, as documented in a prior section of this paper. While it is consistently argued that social equity is intrinsic to sustainable development, one or more dimension, be it inter-generational, intra-generational, geographical procedural human equity, or even that of inter-species equity, is generally overlooked in many instances of sustainability's practice lead planning implementation (Haughton, 1999).

This is perhaps because it is contrary to the dominant ideological values deployed and, even if it is not, it may be too hard to quantify from a rational perspective. For example, how should we determine the net present value of the needs of future generations in our local development plans, or the impacts of global warming on residents of oceanic atolls on the other side of the earth?

'Programmes and policies can be sustainable and socially just, but unfortunately, they can be sustainable and unjust' for sustainability 'and social justice do not necessarily go hand in hand' (Marcuse, 1998, p.103). The dominant approach adopted by planners to sustainability is one of city redesign towards more sustainable urban forms. This approach often has, at best, implicit, rather than explicit regard towards equity issues (Haughton, 1999, p.238).

> The search for sustainable urban development under which cities develop and operate imposing minimum stress on the environment has led, in its first phase, to the acceptance of well-intentioned but empirically unsupported policies of containment. They have been buttressed by notions of "the urban" which are at variation with the aspirations and behaviours of the great majority of the population. (Troy, 2000, p.552).

Urban containment to minimise the environmental footprint results in the promotion of techniques of social regulation and imposed settlement patterns that are contrary to the majority's perception as to what constitutes a higher quality of life. Intensification and nodal development promoted in the name of sustainability facilitating the viability of public transit infrastructure tends to ghettoise the working poor into high-density environments of poor build quality, amenity and service (Dixon and Dupuis, 2003; Troy, 1996). Parking restrictions and the forcing of public transit usage on the public, whether they want it or not, or if adequate provision actually exists, are justified by practitioners as a 'sustainable end' for the 'sustainable city' (Donnison, 2005).

As some argue: 'sustainable development requires not just altering behaviour patterns in relation to the environment, but about changing the broader systems that shape human behavior.' (Haughton, 1999, p.235). In this regard, some planner's take the position that the ends justify the means and that they should have the right bestowed

upon them in the name of 'sustainability' to impose their vision and the necessary behavioural changes to achieve such an outcome.

> A need for sharing the vision for a sustainable future and bringing the community along with the profession in pursuit of this vision is long overdue and can be achieved through an appropriate framework for education and behaviour change utilising existing structures and authorities to deliver such a message. (Donnison, 2005, p.18)

Is this approach, where the planner induces behaviour change on the public via their self-decreed authority to know best, justifiable? The next section illustrates how sustainability may be a powerful signifier of belief and identification, while predicated on justifications that are little more than rationalisations and rhetoric. Further, these may be justifications that simply give grounds for new disciplinary structures of control, regulation and normalisation, which sustain and enhance the authority of the planner who acts in the name of sustainability.

In the Name of the Master: Sustainability as an Authoritarian Delusion

> 'If the sustainability of a measure is taken as a goal, the term can become either tautological or perverse' (Marcuse, 1998, p.106)

Gunder (2003a; 2004; 2005a; 2005b), as well as Hillier and Gunder (2003; 2005) have explored the value of Lacan's (2004) Four Discourses for understanding planning theory, practice and education. The four discourses comprise that of the master, the university (or bureaucracy), the hysteric and the analyst. These four effects are central to human agency within the processes and practices of planning policy formulation and in its implementation. Lacan's 'discourses define social groups… they formalise their symbolic and social belonging' even if human subjects are unaware of this structuring (Leupin, 2004, p.68). This is applicable to planners, residents who they plan and the politicians and leading academics who resolve that we must act in the name of sustainability.

The master asserts that we will be sustainable, the university or bureaucratic discourse of the planner applies knowledge and practices in the support of the master's signifier – sustainability – to make it so. The planned resident when having sustainable

practices forced on them becomes dissatisfied and asserts the hysterics discourse by asking - why? The analyst's discourse struggles to find the motivation underlying the master's initial assertion: THAT WE MUST BE SUSTAINABLE. This is necessary because the master fails to understand his/her unconscious motivation for asserting their position as the truth. This is a truth that cannot be stated but only indirectly supported – rationalised – by the structured knowledges and practices of the university and bureaucracy. So, the discourse circle of public policy debate continues until forced by the authority of the master to be materialised as action (Gunder, 2005b).

Politician most often partake in the master's discourse because it allows them to cut through the complex considerations, analyses and deliberations of an issue to assert 'a simple "Yes" or "No"' making a 'gesture that can never be fully grounded in reasons,' because it is the affirmation of the master who will be obeyed (Zizek, 1998, p.76)! In the commanding discourse of the master, the master signifier acts as agency to shape the listener's reality and obedience. The masters must be obeyed because they are the indisputable authorities. Their power is without requirement of legitimisation: it just is! It is truth, whether the truth of political will or spiritual faith, or the 'truth' of doctrinaire scientific or academic belief. The master does not care about fact, per se, just the certainty of his/her belief (Ragland, 1996, p.134). WE MUST BE SUSTAINABLE!

While planners may want to affirm incontestable authority and control, the master's discourse can seldom be simply asserted by the expert. At best, the expert can speak on the master's behalf. 'The Great Man [sic] has said this, so we apply it, and you the student or citizen, perform it no matter what' (Lacan in Leupin, 2004, p.78). Consequently, the planner and the planner's knowledge is the slave to the master, but the slave is not precluded from drawing on the master's authority (Lacan, 2004, pp.7-8). Driven by the truth of the master signifier the agent of the university/bureaucratic discourse imparts knowledge to shape and constrain the enjoyment, hence behaviour, of those spoken to: the planned (Bracher, 1993).

The university discourse provides 'a sort of legitimation or rationalization of the master's will', here the planner presents the master signifier's truth – sustainability – as its agent (Fink, 1995, p.132). The planner transmits dominant sub-codes of knowledges, practices and values as both justification for sustainability and to

materialise the master's command for sustainability as a state of action. As Gunder (2005a, p.101) reported 'the expert policy planner's agency might be to provide knowledge and regulations (e.g. road pricing) to increase public transit ridership "driven" by the "truth" of sustainability.'

In contrast to the masters who does not know what motivation makes them assert their position, the truth for the planner in the university or bureaucratic discourse is that of the master signifier, itself. This is what warrants knowledge as being valid – the quilting or anchoring label under which the knowledge set is situated – the master's name, its signifier: sustainability. The 'truth of the university discourse… is power, i.e., the master signifier: the constitutive lie of the university discourse is that it disavows its performative dimension, presenting what effectively amounts to a political decision based on power as a simple insight into the factual state of things' (Zizek in Butler, 2005, p.142). Lacan warns that the agent of the university/ bureaucratic discourse may use rhetorical, or even false, knowledge as rationalisation to legitimise, or implement the intent, of any master signifier (Fink, 1995). Sustainability purports to be a scientific discourse, grounded on facts, even if it is an undefinable concept. Yet, as Cardew (1999) reported in the earlier section on planning education, it is actually a social construct largely concerned with human endeavours such as energy consumption and transport issues, not at all directly concerned with environmental quality, or an object of direct study by environmental, or other formal, physical sciences. Sustainability and the discourses that unsuccessfully attempt to articulate it are ideological social constructs. Sustainability and its diverse and conflicting knowledge sets are not irrefutable scientific principles, such as the laws of thermodynamics. Yet, planners deploy the signifier sustainability, literally in the name of the 'master', as though it were an incontestable scientific edict – the one and only truth.

Of course, there is a scientific basis to the environmental problematic underlying the broad sustainability context. Issues of bio-diversity, global warming and related matters are profoundly important areas of scientific inquiry and concern. However, of apprehension to this author, is the extrapolation of these global issues as the logic and justification underlying site-specific local planning regulation. Newman and Kenworthy's (1989) broad-brush analysis of energy usage and urban density is often cited as the justification for policies of urban containment and intensification.

However, the broad assumptions used in their calculations do not stand-up to challenge across a range of site-specific empirical studies (Breheny, 1995; O'Connor, 2003). Consequently, as Troy (1996, 2000) has repeatedly pointed out, there is little or no empirical research underlying many of the policy and regulatory prescriptions for compact cities made in the name of sustainability.

Apart from making a good marketing jingle for the public (see: Gunder 2003b; 2005a), what is the scientific reason and justification, i.e., the empirical scientific research, supporting Melbourne's policy objective that 20 percent of all motorised Melbourne trips should be on public transit by 2020 (Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2005); why not 15 or 25 percent? Further, what is the justification for the choice, as one regulatory means to accomplish this, to restrict inner-Melbourne residential car parking permits (Donnison, 2005). How is the imposition of this policy justified when now a simple doctor's visit may require a parent to undertake a two hour marathon on public transit with her three under five year old children, when if permitted access to a car this could be done in one fifteen minute trip. Similarly, how can this policy be fair to unrelated low-income service workers sharing the rent of a small house for reasons of affordability, when only permitted one car permit between several of them working unsocial hours in diverse locations, all poorly served by public transit (Donnison, 2005)? What is the empirical justification, if any, for this injustice? As Lefebvre (2003, p.166) suggested, planning policy is often constructed by drawing on a strategy that mixes ideological values and beliefs with rationality, as though it is all technological science. This makes the rationality of planning, at best, an arbitrary ideological construct supportive of the planners' beliefs and values. It is hardly objective, or based on valid and reasonable grounds for the injustices it often produces (Gunder, 2005a, p.187).

Lacan's university or bureaucratic discourse suggest that this process inherently destabilises the concept of objectivity in the support of the master signifier, thus the fundamental 'classical requirement of science' for unbiased rigour and repeated testing of assumptions in the continued search for facts is illustrated 'to be a mere illusion' (Verhaeghe, 2001, p.31). The 'discourse of the university is thoroughly mystifying, concealing its true foundation' that of the ideologically inspiring master signifier 'obfuscating the unfreedom on which it relies' (Zizek in Butler, 2005, p144). Anything is justifiable in the name of the master. In the name of sustainability society

must be made to change its behaviours, desired or not, by a 'combination of law, coercion, education, religion, social structure, myth, taboo, and market forces' (Orr, 1992, p.22).

This is where, from a Deleuzian perspective of creating metastability out of dysfunctional human immanence, governance and control derived from the bureaucratic discourse becomes a 'never-finished work of regulation which operates to bring deviations from system requirements' of sustainability 'back into line', defined by whatever dominant, or even arbitary, discourse of the day, prevails (Osborne and Rose, 1999, p.749). This is what Deleuze and Guattari (2004, p.425) call the striated social space of regulation and control. This is the place of planning's authority which is now predicated on ensuring that all subjects – those that are planned – are normalised into behaviours and actions that fit the perceived qualities characteristics of a sustainable cities, however they might be defined, at any one time, by the planning discipline.

> Striations are elements of transcendence which structure the social field channelling the creative flows of immanence. Striations include laws, regulations, guidelines and also measures of governmentality, subjection and subjectification. They are molar constructs, anchored by Lacanian master signifiers, such as 'sustainability'. (Hillier, 2005, in press)

In the achievement of this molar construct, this transcendental end, articulated by the master who is just supposed to know, but without knowing why; which then induces planning, under the bureaucratic/university discourse, to attempt to make social reality conform to a constructed, imperfect and lacking idea of what this unknowable ideal might be. It tries to produce, so called, sustainable behaviours, where the 'planned' are normalised, controlled and regulated to desire and accept as the societal expectation that they should live in sustainably 'rational' high density communities that facilitate, or demand, non-motorised or public forms of transport. Further, planning attempts to make this a virtuous obligation of good citizenship (Osborne and Rose, 1999). This has little, or no regard, to the actual diversity of human desires, needs, or even the availability of necessary services such as efficient public transport to make the idealised construct work. Perhaps worst, it assumes a common desire for 'the monotony of a single and universalising… model [that] is based on the assumption that humans are essentially uniform and that their behaviours and the

behaviour of their localised aggregate, can be predicted based on the behaviours of other [idealised] humans and their aggregates' (Bonta and Protevi, 2004, p.199). Here all values and actions can be justified in the name of the master to achieve a sustainable end, even if that end-result might be unknowable, yet alone achievable, by all! In this illogic of fantasy and ideology of desired wish fulfilment resides planning's new disciplinary role, at least for some, as the agent and authority of sustainability.

Conclusion: Saving the Baby, But Throwing out the Pernicious Bath-Water

Sustainability as an ideal societal goal, in itself, as embodied by ecological modernisation's sustainable development may well only protect the status quo of competitive globalisation and facilitates the maintenance of the interests of groups or individuals who already have largely achieved what they desire and want. It certainly does not address the needs of the disadvantaged. Building ten thousand units of social housing in one year may not be sustainable in the long term, but it is better than building only a hundred units a year, sustainably, when ten thousand families are effectively homeless today! Further, for this author, in dealing with issues of social justice, such as the problem of homelessness, poor housing provision, or high-density 'ghetto-isation', meeting immediate existing needs is more important than providing the needs of future generations. The well-off may desire a pristine environment for themselves and their children, but the first and developing world's disadvantaged want and deserve that their basic human needs are met now, even if this is not, in itself, a sustainable action.

Sustainability has emerged as a dominant signifier of planning education and practice (Gunder, 2004). Ecological sustainability, for this author, is indeed, a profoundly important principle, but it should not be used as a blunt ideological instrument perpetrating social injustice and the neo-liberal values of globalisation, particularly as deployed under the rubric: sustainable development. Triple/quadruple bottom line sustainable development is not the same as single bottom line 'ecological sustainability'. To conflate them together is to negate both the environment and the social in the name of sustainable wealth creation for the dominant minority profiting from competitive globalisation. This induces the cost of excluding the many and reifying all as a commodity.

Planning educators have a responsibility to ensure that social justice is not swept aside in the dualistic tension between market efficiency and environmental protection. To achieve this, this author, like Davoudi (2000) and Sandercock (1997) suggests that planning education must develop in students the core skills of critical enquiry and of ethical judgement. In particular, while supporting scientific rigour in developing knowledges for ecological sustainability, such as how to foster low impact community design, students should also develop skills in ideological deconstruction as to how discourses, such as those of sustainability, or others, can be twisted and manipulated to other ends. Unfortunately, this also requires both students and their academic mentors to critically reflect on how their imperatives, while enhancing the authority of the discipline, can also impose pernicious effects of injustice on those that are 'planned' within society. Sadly, this author suggests that this critical reflection often appears lacking in the planning literature and especially planning practice, particularly when it pertains to the dominant ideal, the new vision of planning empowerment: sustainability.

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