



MOVING BEYOND THE ROLE OF FANTASY IN CONSTITUTING PLANNING ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR AGENCY

Michael Gunder¹

Abstract

Planning organisations are generally considered the producers of public policy plans. In this paper, drawing on the planning and organisational theory literature, I wish to consider planning organisations as also producers of fantasies. These are fantasies that organise the collective desires of a polity and construct the visions that guide and shape the agency of the organisation, itself. Further, in contrast to differentiating between fantasy and reality this paper will take a psychoanalytical approach to fantasy where fantasy helps to structure a subject's reality and, in aggregate, that of a subject's society. This is a perspective which acknowledges a constitutively unclear division between these two concepts of a materialised reality produced by our actions and the fantasies that generate this observable materialisation.

Exploring this issue is important, as the paper will argue that this fantasy construction underlies much that constitutes planning policy practice and regularly occurs even when planning actors know that these desired fantasised outcomes cannot possibly be achieved within a plan or policy. The paper will describe how a regular reliance on the improbable fulfilment of desired fantasies is why planning itself continues to be socially wanted, even though its plans often fail to achieve their stated objectives. Moreover, the paper will argue that planning needs to acquire a different relationship to fantasy, one in which planning and the human subject is no longer 'in thrall' to fantasy and the improbable desires that planning fantasies often propagate.

1. Introduction

the approach to the Real is at best fitful, the retreat from it into this or that form of intellectual comfort perpetual (Jameson, 2002, p.274)

Planning organisations are generally considered the producers of plans, and related spatially orientated policies, as well as the monitors of their implementation. In this paper I wish to consider planning organisations, be it a government ministry, a local authority planning department, or even a planning consultancy firm, as constructors of not only plans and policies, but in doing so, also as constructors of ideas that are actually desirous fantasies of what might be. These are fantasies that may partially organise both the collective desires of a polity, or society, and these are also fantasies, or visions, that may initially and subsequently guide and shape the agency of the organisation, itself. As Fotaki (2010, p.704) observes 'the role of fantasy as a stimulant of various social and political endeavours has not been given its

¹ University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand – m.gunder@auckland.ac.nz

due emphasis in political and critical social theory or public policy analyses'. This paper will argue, following Jason Glynos (2011, p.378) that 'fantasies are ineliminable and essential to action, whether these are characterized as progressive or regressive'. Further, the paper will also contend, as well as demonstrate, that 'without the explicit acknowledgement of fantasy, the workings of organizations, culture and ideology cannot be fully understood' (Fotaki et al 2010, p.641).

The paper will commence with a largely Žižekian derived Lacanian explanation of fantasy and its constituents, drawing on both the planning and organisational theory literature. This will include an explanation of the psychoanalytical role of fantasy, ideology, language, *jouissance* (enjoyment) and the inherent human desire for a sovereign good². The two sides of fantasy will then be considered, for every fantasy has two components: what is promised, and of equal importance, the reason why this promise is not being delivered. The paper will then consider the role that cynicism often plays in planning agency, especially when planning actors do not fully engage with a position, vision or fantasy construct being proposed by their organisation, but they somehow have to carry on planning, anyhow. The paper will then consider how fantasy and our, at best, often only cynical defec resistance to it, tends to maintains the status quo and restrict our range of alternative agency. In response, the paper will then call for a new ethical engagement with planning fantasies, a position where the illusions provided by fantasy no longer bind and restrict our agency in the world. The paper will conclude with a consideration of what this new engagement with planning fantasy might mean for doing planning more effectively.

2. Fantasy, *Jouissance* and the Ideology of Planning

In contrast to differentiating between fantasy and reality, this paper takes a psychoanalytical approach to fantasy, where fantasy helps to structure a subject's reality and in aggregate that of a subject's society. In this regard, fantasy acts as crucial means to simplify the anxiety inducing complexity and often apparent inconsistencies of reality, so that social reality appears as a coherent materialised, yet simplified, whole (Gunder, 2011a). In this psychoanalytical view, 'fantasies are not designed to allow us to flee an unsatisfactory world, but rather to render the world satisfactory by reassuring us that the Other – the social environment within which we struggle to find our bearings – possesses the correct, calming, or consoling answers to our most pressing questions' (Ruti, 2010, p.2). In planning, these might be questions of how to provide the good city and the good life; how our cities can be made more sustainable, liveable, or globally competitive, and the ilk (Gunder and Hillier, 2009).

Fantasy plays an important role in helping to structure 'our reality, often in the least expected scenarios, ordering our emotional investment within a larger narrative of reconciliation and stability... fantasy is what attempts to conceal all fissures... turning our worldly experience into something coherent and appealing' (Bloom and Cererstrom, 2009, p.163). Yet, in doing so, while 'fantasy formations shape the basic orientation of our existence', they also tends to 'curtail our lives by causing us to proceed mechanically exactly at those moments when a degree of self-reflexivity would help us to arrive at a more constructive outcome' (Gunder, 2011b; Ruti, 2010, p.1). Fantasies obscure and make us not look too closely at the conditions of our social reality, especially when fantasies help constitute for the subject a 'clear' sense of identity, worth and direction for action.

² That is, 'there is a Good that trumps all others; a supravalue that will allow us to resolve [all problems]' (Catlaw and Jordan, 2009, p.297).

For fantasies help facilitate our ordering of the complex world under simple hazy labels of desirable identification and apparent substance – our sublime objects of ideology (Žižek, 1989), so as to posit ‘the symbolic order as a dependable structure that ensures the solidity of meaning and cultural life’ (Ruti, 2010, p.2). Further, without this simplification, social reality would simply dissolve into an amorphous and incomprehensible mass (Žižek, 1997). In doing so, fantasy also acts as an ideological mechanism to anchor our emotions within these symbolic labels, so that narratives are allowed ‘to provide the co-ordinates for our desires and, by extension, teaches us how to organize and express our emotions’ (Žižek, 1989; Bloom and Cederstrom, 2009, p.160). In other words: ‘fantasy links a level of meaning with a level of enjoyment, or if you will, connects narrative and affect’ (Bloom and Cederstrom, 2009, p.173; Gunder, 2011a).

This is an ideological process, so that ‘the ideological significance of fantasy can be understood in the context of its capacity to “grip” the subject, whether as part of a social practice or as part of a political practice’ (Glynos, 2011, p.378). In this regard, ‘[f]antasy not only provides the framework, or affective coordinates, for integrating emotion into narrative but in fact directly structures individual experiences as eternally part of a larger affective story’ (Bloom and Cederstrom, 2009, p.164). It essentially binds us in our ideological interpellations, so that ‘individuals are constantly being inscribed into larger ideologies through fantasmatic narratives’ (Bloom and Cederstrom, 2009, p.164). Further, in doing so, this reflects a ‘constitutively blurred boundary’ between the two concepts of a materialised reality produced by our actions and the fantasies that help to generate this materialisation (Glynos, 2010, p.22).

For Lacan (1998, p.32), all considerations of social reality, including the fantasies and ideas that help materialise it, relies on language and its signifiers:

There is no such thing as as a prediscursive reality. Every reality is founded on a discourse.

Further, all organisations of government agency, particularly ones which are considered to be bureaucratic, such as a planning organisation, have as a central feature ‘an emphasis on writing as a foundational and principle practice’: that is drafting spatial plans, or alternatively phased, constructing discourses of what spatial reality should become (Styhre, 2008, p.644). Yet for Lacan (2006), language, discourse and the wider symbolic order itself is always ‘other’, an alien construct which the subject is forced to adapt to when entering society. For the ‘symbolic order includes the desires and constructions of internalized others such as parents or institutions and the conventions of language handed down through generations of others’, so that ‘[w]hen we use language... we can only express who we are in the words of others’ (Driver, 2008, p. 189). Further, these words tend to always be incomplete, because we must adapt ourselves to them, they never can say exactly what we want. Language and the symbolic are always incomplete and lacking.

Consequently, for Lacan, as well as Freud, the human subject is ‘not at home in the world as it is’ (Nichols, 2008, p.471). The subject’s reality always has a hole in it, it is lacking completeness (Žižek, 2008, p.327). This is a lack of *jouissance*, in the Lacanian lexicon, a lack of enjoyment, but not an enjoyment that may be construed as pleasure. Pleasure is produced by what Lacan calls the ‘big Other’ which in aggregate constructs the symbolic order constituting culture, society, and our very conception of social reality, itself (Žižek, 1998). *Jouissance* is external to societally sanctioned pleasure, it resides in the subject’s unconscious, in what Lacan calls the the registry of the Real (Evans, 1996, p.148). The Real is

a concept which is never clearly defined by Lacan, for it is, at best, ‘what resists regimes of representation and what remains residual to any symbolic or linguistic system’ (Styhre, 2008, p.647). In this regard, ‘Lacan (2006) helps us to comprehend how fantasy bridges our psychic life (the Imaginary) with socially constructed reality (the Symbolic) and prevents us from encountering, what Lacan calls, the Real’, that ‘which is outside everything that can be (legitimately) symbolized, is literally too terrifying and must be avoided at all costs’ (Fotaki, 2010, p.641).

Hence, *jouissance*, arising from the subjects’s unconscious, is ‘a basic compulsion to enjoy; to achieve consummate satisfaction and therefore heal the gap, or “wound” in the order of being’ (Žižek and Daly, 2004, p.3). But this resolution is never possible, what is only created is a fundamental fantasy that this ‘wound’, or lacking gap, can be resolved, so that we can be a complete and whole subject: a subject finally *at home in the world*. Essentially, this is a fundamental fantasy that ‘there is some “sovereign good” that is capable of shielding us from the terror of living’ (Ruti, 2008, p.486). Yet this is a fantasy situated in the symbolic actuality of an incomplete language of the Other, where ‘subjects are divided between the conscious effort to know identity and fulfill desire and the unconscious disruptions that inevitably make such efforts futile’ (Driver, 2009, p.56).

Jouissance is both structured and also ‘domesticated (with)in the fundamental fantasy of a harmonious world that can ultimately be constructed [at least for most English speaking first world actors] by means of establishing proper liberal democratic and capitalist social relations – our [desired] way of life’ (De Cock and Böhm, 2007, p.826). Indeed, it is planning and related design disciplines that gives the subject its literal vision of their desired *home in the world*. This is via the appearances of completeness that these disciplines provide, via the ‘material articulation of a logic that lies at the foundation of the city’: ‘the urban archetype’ of the desired city to be, as layed out in the spatial plan (Gunder, 2010; Nichols, 2008, p.471). This is always a plan promising a set of ‘stabilizing fantasies, staging a future of happiness, [which] offer the possibility for subjects to acquire an experience of stability and harmony’ (Bloom and Cederstrom, 2009, p.165). Consequently:

planning is predicated on a fantasy that the discipline successfully provides the solutions necessary in order to provide certainty and harmony for the future of our built and natural environments.... the global spatial planning community... constantly discovers or invents new iconic hooks (or master signifiers) of identification and desire on which to hang problems and deficiencies (lacks) which subtract from the security and certainty of well-being and which also provide their solution, often in terms of scientific narratives or ideas.... these are largely fantasy constructs of, at best, ideological belief, which planning practitioners then deploy locally in their practices. (Gunder and Hillier, 2009, pp.31-2)

But the writers of plans, the planners, are also lacking, hence they are themselves desiring human subjects. Accordingly, fantasy also plays a part within the function of any planning organisation, itself. Indeed, all organisations, not just planning agencies, ‘use narrative to regulate and ideologically interpellate their workforce in accordance with their institutional desires, allowing organizations to create an institutionally friendly “story event” out of an “unpatterned, arbitrary” antenarrative... setting out the shared “purpose being pursued” according to [their institutional] desires’ (Bloom and Cederstrom, 2009, p.162). But planning agencies, unlike many other organisations, then externalise these institutional desires, as part of their core function. The guiding internal fantasies of the planning agency are externalised on the polity being planned through the organisation’s products: its drafted plans and policies. Often these fantasies are initially generated by a political or other leadership vision of what

ought to be, so as to fill a particular lack of incompleteness and provide harmony; in other cases, through the application of what is considered 'best planning practice' in the name of dominant planning label or signifier such as 'sustainability', 'liveability' or 'globally competitive city' (Davidson, 2010; Gunder, 2010; Gunder and Hillier, 2009). Sometimes these two generators of fantasy are interchangeable and reinforcing of each other. For example, the overarching aim of the newly amalgamated Auckland Council's first Draft Spatial Plan is to make Auckland³ 'the most livable city in the world' and this planning vision is also echoed by the Mayor's Foreword to the document:

It is my privilege as the first Mayor of Auckland to develop a vision for Auckland. When I came into office, I said that my vision is to make Auckland the most liveable city in the world. (Auckland Council, 2011, p.1)

For Lacan (2006) subjectivity is constituted by 'the concept of the fragmented and split subject defined by the impossibility of ever fulfilling its desire to achieve unity (with the other) and to attain the state of blissful wholeness', this is a subject who, therefore, forever desires and seeks an impossible 'object that was never there' (Fotaki, 2010, pp.706-7). Accordingly, 'the fantasy of effective policy, of purposeful organization and of harmonious society' all derive 'from an impossible desire' for this harmony, security and unity (Fotaki, 2010, p.710). In this regard, being 'the most liveable city in the world' acts as a metaphorical call for an aspect of this sovereign good of perfect completeness. This is a vision that is first, so claimed, 'inspired' the mayor and then the planners who drafted the Spatial Plan which the Council then subsequently imposed on the wider Auckland community, for who could possibly oppose being *at home* in the 'most livable city in the world'!

3. The two sides of fantasy

Contemporary spatial planning is 'encouraging the emergence of particular development trajectories' (Healey, 2008, p.8). These are desired future ideas of how we should be, or trajectories of becoming. If realistic and potentially achievable, these are perhaps appropriate aspirations. If they are improbable states unlikely to be achievable, these desired states are, at best, mere fantasies. Yet by delineating them in a strategic spatial plan, or similar, these fantasies are given material substance and virtual being as though they already exist (Hillier, 2007, p.100). They help constitute our materialised social reality. But here the frequent failure of desired planning fantasies to be able to deliver also requires another dimension of fantasy construction.

Accordingly, two narratives tend to comprise every fantasy: what the fantasy promises to deliver and also why the fantasy fails in this delivery. Every 'fantasy names a narrative structure involving some reference to an idealised scenario promising an imaginary fullness or wholeness (the beatific side of fantasy) and, by implication, a disaster scenario (the horrific side of fantasy)' (Glynos, 2011, p.376). This is the alternative dimension to fantasy. This is the explanatory fantasy of why the desired harmonious fantasy has not been permitted, or cannot be permitted, to be fulfilled. Importantly, this de-stabilizing fantasy tends to be 'not benign in nature', rather it most often is inclined to 'be perpetrated by malicious forces aiming to destroy what an individual hosts most sacred' (Bloom and Cederstrom, 2009, p.165).

Žižek (1989, 1997) calls one common trope in this ideological process of justification: 'the

³ The eight local councils of the Auckland region of New Zealand were amalgamated into one metropolitan council in October 2010 (see: Gunder, 2011a, p.334).

theft of our enjoyment'. In this regard, 'the concept of scapegoat plays an important fantasy role in suggesting that our enjoyment might be regained, but only as a state of future potential, if we maintain the prevailing ideology by being resolute against this 'thieving' Other' (Gunder, 2011a, p.334). While the structure of the obstacle to the achievement of the fantasy may vary, it plays a very important role. For the full realisation of a desired fantasy is impossible. This is because a 'subject (as a subject of desire) survives only insofar as its desire remains *unsatisfied*⁴' and 'the obstacle, which often comes in the form of a prohibition, or a threatening Other, transforms this impossibility into a "mere difficulty", thus creating the impression that its realization is at least potentially possible' (Glynos, 2011, p.377). Indeed, for Lacan (2006), the very 'concept of desire emphasizes the persistent *absence* of satisfaction, rather than the pursuit of attaining it' (Catlaw and Jordan, 2009, p.292 – emphasis in original). Perhaps this is the reason that the final goals of most spatial and related strategic land use plans are never achieved, indeed most plans are replaced by new ones long before their original plan period duration has been reached, be it originally five, ten, twenty years, or longer (Gunder and Hillier, 2009, p.24).

Another significant facet of many fantasy narrative constructs concerns their transgressive dimension. Here the subject may gain *jouissance* by intentionally transgressing the values, or ideals, that the subject openly professes and are required in the fulfilment of the fantasy narrative. For the fantasy of becoming a 'sustainable city', this might be this might be a planner who intentionally travels by car when publically asserting the 'need'; to only use public transit (see: Gunder and Hillier, 2004), or by cynically arguing for the need to act sustainably, while actually acting in a non-sustainable manner (Davidson, 2010). So for many fantasy narratives, 'what gives a narrative a specifically *psychoanalytic* inflection is the fantasmatic logic structuring the subject's desire: it furnishes the subject with an ideal, an impediment to the realization of an ideal, and the enjoyment linked to the transgression of an ideal' (Glynos, 2011, p.377).

4. The decaf cynicism of planners in their workplace

By their very nature, plans and their related visions act 'as a strategic means for implementing specific institutional changes... in this mode of control, individuals [tend to] relate their organizational commitment to their own dreams and longings... they attribute negative feelings to, and view as unstable to these desires, those who seek to "dash their dreams"' by opening challenging the plan or policy (Bloom and Cederstrom, 2009, 172). This even applies in cases where actors know that the proposed vision, or fantasy, that is being presented cannot possibly happen. Yet to show solidarity, they often go along with the 'impossible' fantasy. For example, an economic GDP per capita growth rate of five percent which underlies the forecasts of the Draft Auckland Plan (Auckland Council, 2011, p.71) cannot be maintained in a developed economy year-on-year for decades⁵. Even knowing of this impossibility, Council planners were still able to publically state that this will occur, as a consequence of achieving the Spatial Plan. Further, they could quite cynically maintain that this forecasting illusion was

⁴ Perhaps best exemplified by the negative consumer experience that most of us experience after the big purchase. This is the feeling of disappointment, let-down and emptiness that often occurs once the highly desired new consumer item – the car, TV, computer, or whatever – that we have pined after for months is finally ours; and, hence why for most of us, the only resolution of this emptiness is to go out and shop some more (see: Gunder and Hillier, 2009, pp.84-7)!

⁵ Particularly, when historical economic growth rates for the Auckland region had averaged only 1.0 percent for the five year period 2005-2009 (Auckland City Council, 2010, p.15), not to mention the impact that this 5% annual economic growth rate would have on other Spatial Plan objectives for liveability, such as those of affordable housing and greater transportation mobility.

possible in public meetings about the plan, even when acknowledging, off the record, that the growth rate underlying the plan was, at best, a politically inspired aspirational goal that was indeed impossible (personal conversation).

Žižek (1989, p.32) refers to this as ‘cynical distance’. This applies where ‘the material fact [is] that the vast majority of today’s subjects continue to act as if they did not know what they say they know’ (Sharpe, 2004, p.112). We know the fantasy cannot possibly be true, it is simply an ideological foil to obscure the inconsistencies within society, or to provide an optimistic vision of hope, but we publically pretend to believe in it anyhow (Davidson, 2010, pp.394-5). As Davidson (2010, p.403) observes: this cynicism equates ‘to the “real” politics of the city, seeing the rhetoric (or rather ideology) veneer as a mask’ obscuring the actual practices being undertaken.

Even when this cynicism is openly manifested, it is often done so only in humour or skepticism. Cynicism ‘involves an open acknowledgement that if we give workers and management the chance, some of them will tell us that they are not really buy into the dominant ideology’, yet ‘even if workers know and profess not to be in the gaze of power, even if they can see very well what is happening and are not duped by corporate visions, mission statements, and rituals and instead actively rearticulate their own sense of self, they nevertheless still submit to it in practice’ (Contu, 2008, p.371). In the Žizekian, or Lacanian discourse, these acts of cynicism are a form of resistance or even acts of transgression, but in being so, they ‘are akin to a decaf resistance, which changes very little’; rather it ‘is resistance without the risk of really changing our ways of life or the subjects who live it’ (Contu, 2008, p.367). Decaf resistance is how ideology often works, we know better, consequently we are cynical, but we still do what is expected of us, anyway! Indeed, this ‘is the very fantasy sustaining and reproducing our way of life in liberal capitalistic workplaces’, including that of the planning office (Contu, 2008, p.372).

However, this is not without a significant cost. The ‘more subjects are invested in fantasies, the more likely they are to read all aspects of their practice in terms of that fantasmatic narrative, and the less likely they are to “read for difference”’, that is, they are less likely to challenge the narratives and logics constructed by that fantasy (Glynos, 2010, p.33). As Gunder (2011b) observes, this tends to reduce innovation, or the acceptance of alternative perspectives, that conflict with the values of the accepted fantasy construct. A dominant exemplar of this is sustainability. If the underlying premise of a plan, no matter how much a fantasmatic vision, is legitimised by assertions that it is consistent with sustainability, it is very difficult for planners to support an alternative course of action, for to do so would seem less ‘sustainable’. Yet sustainability, in itself, ‘is the clearest expression of the structure of fantasy in the Lacanian sense’; for it is an unquestionable and unchallengeable *statement of motherhood* in its apparent implicit protection of nature, even though it is without any clearly definable meaning in itself (Gunder, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2010, p.310). At least for planning agency, sustainability acts as Žižek’s (1989) definitive *sublime object of ideology*. It is an object, or perhaps better stated: *fantasy*, not open to challenge, or question, once deployed.

5. Changing our relationship to planning fantasy

If fantasies largely ‘determine the ways in which we relate to the world, and consequently influence the ways in which the world responds to us, the disbanding of fantasies, potentially at least, allows us to begin to imagine alternative ways of living and relating’ (Ruti 2010: 1). Accordingly, Glynos (2011, p.378) following Lacan’s ‘Ethics of the Real’, calls for a alternative orientation to fantasy, that is ‘not abandoning fantasy or going beyond fantasy, but

rather acquiring a different relationship to fantasy, one in which the subject is less “in thrall” to it’. For the problem with fantasy construction and its affect ‘arises when the subject uses fantasy primarily as a way to protect itself from ambiguities, uncertainties and other features that evoke intimations of anxiety’, rather an ‘ethical use of fantasy would entail a much greater openness to ambiguity and thus possibilities for critical distance and alternative becomings’ (Glynos, 2011, p.382).

For Lacan (1992, p.237) the ethical act should not be pathological, nor at the service of any sovereign good. This also implies to not to do just what is expected of us, ‘to do the right thing’, simply if we wish to be perceived as ‘good’ by the Other (see: Gunder and Hillier, 2004, pp.229-31). Rather, for Lacan (1992), the true ethical act is to be authentic to some strong inner certainty of what constitutes correct action. This is in contrast to some superficial desire ‘to do the right thing’ that serves our personal self-interest, perhaps by keeping the ‘boss’ happy, so as to get a ‘well done’ pat-on-the-back, or at least the avoid of her displeasure. For Lacan:

“The heart of all ethics” is encountering “something that happens to us, surprises us, throws us out of joint”, something that causes a “rupture, a break or interruption”—this is the Lacanian Real (Zupancic, 2000, p. 235). It is the examination of this dissonance; such as an expectation that we will do something even though we may think that it is not right or good, and the subsequent adaptation of our actions to ignore, accommodate, or overturn this ‘dis-ease’, that constitutes the ethical act. (Gunder and Hillier, 2004, p.231)

Accordingly, an ‘Ethics of the Real is an ethics of taking risks and making radical decisions, [by] not compromising a fundamental desire’ (De Vries, 2007, p.40). For Žižek (2008, 2009) this is a revolutionary act that risks everything, the agent’s status, respect, her very identity, everything that the subject holds dear. Rather than ‘the “decaf” co-option of acts of resistance... the only solution seems to be the idealization of another category of real acts of pure resistance, which are impossible to co-opt and neutralize’ (Stavarakakis, 2011, p.308). Consequently, at least for Žižek, a ‘Real’ ethical act is one ‘that changes the sociosymbolic network in which we and our way of life makes sense’ (Contu, 2008, p.374). This is the radical, or even revolutionary, act that fundamentally changes the symbolic order – the social reality – of the world that we know. Yet, Stavarakakis (2011, p.307) asks, following Johnson: is this standard of Žižek’s radical transgression, as to what constitutes a ‘Real’ ethical act, not too high?

Rather, what Stavarakakis (2011, p.311 – emphasis in original) proposes that ‘what is needed is to move in the direction of articulating an alternative conception of the act, one which may link Lacan’s insights (operating at both the real and symbolic levels) with a radical democratic project, able to promote the idea of a continuous re-enactment of the act as well as to imagine and construct a (conceptual, affective and material) *space* where such re-enacting becomes possible here and now.’ Further, Stavarakakis (2011, p.311 – emphasis in original) continues that this ‘is today the challenge not only for political theory and practice, but also for planning theory and practice... an act that presupposes a certain *reflexivity*, an awareness of its own limits, of the fact that it will never lead to the full realization of subjectivity’. Phrased differently, Stavarakakis is calling for a radical challenge to the way we do politics and planning, a challenging that is not just a one off nihilistic act, but rather, a radical challenging that is ongoing and reflexively cognate that any fantasies that our imaginary discourses construct promoting satisfaction and completeness – that is, constituting an utopian promise – are doomed to fail and can never fully deliver. Further, I would suggest that this is an act consistent with the Lacanian clinical goal which is ‘concerned with orientating the subject

towards the truth of her being and disentangling the subject's desire from externally imposed demands, values, wants, or ideals not in order that we can get what we really want but to reveal the singular way in which we will never get it' (Catlaw and Jordan, 2009, p.292)!

Hence, perhaps the concept of a trajectory of becoming, which may be subject to frequent change and re-direction, as our collective desires and circumstances change, as proposed by Hillier (2007, 2011) in her Deleuzian predicated multiplanar approach to strategic planning, might be one way to conceive such a radical way to do planning. This might be considered a move away from highly desired end states of transcendental utopian ideals and the impossible fantasies that our traditional planning, or should I say dreaming, tends to promise. The desire to have an undefined but desired principle of trying to create a 'liveable city' for as many residents as possible, might be one such realistic trajectory of becoming, rather than a seeking the impossible aspirational utopian ideal of being 'the most livable city in the world' for all of a city's residents.

Rather, than striving for one impossible absolute end state, which is set in concrete, this approach allows a series of ongoing acts, a trajectory in a general direction of betterment. Further, this is consistent with a Lacanian ethics of the Real because it allows 'an ethics situated beyond the sovereign good' of the existing symbolic order constituting what we think constitutes our social reality, so that we have 'the possibility of experimenting with new post-fantasmatic types of ordering and space' (Stavrakakis, 2011, p.312). Further, this is a 'disbanding of fantasies' that will enable 'us to better listen to the idiosyncratic particularity of our desire, and in so doing to begin to forge a singular identity apart from the social conventions that seek to determine the parameters of our being' (Ruti, 2008, p.486). This is a move away from allowing our fantasies to 'restrict our movement in the world, holding us captive to the idea that the basic structure of our lives is determined in advance rather than constituted in the process of living' (Ruti, 2008, p.497). Perhaps this type of approach can break the ideological spell of our fantasies. Perhaps it will allow us to engage the world in new and creative ways, ways that can fully engage with our diverse, and evolving desires, in a world of ever changing circumstance.

6. Conclusion

This paper has considered the role of fantasy in planning organisations and as it is imposed by planning practice on wider society. It has examined fantasy from a psychoanalytical perspective drawing on the work of Lacan and Žižek. It considered how fantasy relates to the human subject through the unconscious seeking of *jouissance* and what this implies for ideology. The paper then considered the two sides of fantasy: its promise and its justification for failing to deliver its promise. The 'decaf' cynicism of the 'knowing' planners in their workplace was then explored. The paper then called for a new engagement with fantasy.

The regular reliance on the fulfilment of improbable, but desirous fantasies is why planning itself continues to be popularly desired, even when its plans often fail to achieve their stated objectives. Accordingly, planning largely maintains the status quo of space in our neo-liberal world of globalisation (Gunder 2010, 2011a, 2011b). This paper calls for radical change to the conservative role for planning. It calls for a new engagement with fantasy, one where planning actors are no longer 'in thrall' to fantasy. This is a new dimension to reflexive planning. One that is aware of both the conscious, and also the unconscious dimensions of the human subject, so as to truly take on board Kant's (1990) call for enlightenment: to dare to know for oneself! To do so, at least for planners and the planned, calls for planning to stop giving the illusion of delivering the security of certainty. Rather, this is a call for planning to

move on from its contemporary fantasy creation role and begin to effectively engage with the uncertainty that actually constitutes the world.

References:

- Auckland City Council. 2010. State of the City Report 2010. <<http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/council/documents/.../docs/chapter1.pdf>> [Accessed 24 January 2012].
- Auckland Council 2011. Draft Auckland Plan, <<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz>> [Accessed 6 October 2011].
- Bloom, P. and Cederstrom, C. 2009. 'The sky's the limit': fantasy in the age of market rationality. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 22(2), pp. 159-80.
- Catlaw, T. and Jordan G. 2009. Public Administration and 'the Lives of Others': Towards an Ethics of Collaboration. *Administration & Society* 41(2), pp.290-312.
- Contu, A. 2008. Decaf Resistance: On Misbehaviour, Cynicism, and Desire in Liberal Workplaces. *Management Communications Quarterly* 21(3), pp. 364-79.
- Davidson, M. 2010. Sustainability as ideological praxis: The acting out of planning's master-signifier. *City*, 14(4), pp.390-405.
- De Cock, C. and Böhm, S. 2007. Liberalist Fantasies: Zizek and the Impossibility of the Open Society, *Organization* 14(6), pp.815-36.
- De Vries, P. 2007. Don't compromise your desire for development! A Lacanian/ Deleuzian rethinking of the anti-politics machine. *Third World Quarterly* 28(1), pp.25-43.
- Driver, M. 2008. New and Useless: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Organizational Creativity. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17(3), pp.187-97.
- Evans, D. (1996) *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
- Fotaki, M. 2010. Why do public policies fail so often? Exploring health policy-making as an imaginary and symbolic construction. *Organization* 17(6), pp.703-20.
- Fotaki, M, Böhm, S. and Hassard, J. 2010. The failure of transition: Identities, ideologies and imaginary institutions in the times of global capital crisis. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 23(6), pp. 637-50.
- Glynos, J. 2010. *Lacan at Work*. In: C. Cederstrom and C. Hoedemackers, eds. *Lacan at Work*. London: MayFlyBooks, pp.13-58.
- Glynos, J. 2011. On the ideological and political significance of fantasy in the organization of work. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 16(4), pp. 373-393.
- Gunder, M. 2006. Sustainability: Planning's Saving Grace or Road to Perdition? *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 26(2), pp.208-21.
- Gunder, M. 2010. Planning as the Ideology of (Neo-Liberal) Space. *Planning Theory*, 9(4), pp.298-314.
- Gunder, M. 2011a. A Metapsychological Exploration of the Role of Popular Media in Engineering Public Belief on Planning Issue, *Planning Theory*, 10(4), pp.326-245.
- Gunder, M. 2011b. Fake It Until You Make It, and Then.... *Planning Theory*, 10(3), pp.201-12.

- Gunder, M. and Hillier, J. 2004. Conforming to the Expectations of the Profession: A Lacanian Perspective on Planning Practice, Norms and Values. *Planning Theory and Practice* 5(2), pp.217-235.
- Gunder, M. and Hillier, J. 2009. *Planning in Ten Words or Less: A Lacanian Entanglement with Spatial Planning*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Healey, P. 2008. Making choices that matter: the practical art of situating strategic judgement in spatial strategy-making. In: j. van den Broek, F. Moulaert and S. Oosterlynck, eds. *Empowering the Planning Fields: Ethics, Creativity and Action*. Leuven: Acco, pp.23-41.
- Hillier, J. 2007. *Stretching Beyond the Horizon: A Multiplanar Theory of Spatial Planning and Governance*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Hillier, J. 2011. Strategic navigation across multiple planes: Towards a Deleuzian-inspired methodology for strategic spatial planning. *Town Planning Review* 82(5), pp. 503-527.
- Jameson, F. 2002. *The Political Unconscious*. London: Routledge.
- Kant, I. 1990 What is Enlightenment. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment*, London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, pp.83 - 90.
- Lacan, J. 1992. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*. London: Norton.
- Lacan, J. 1998. *The Seminar, Book XX, 1972-1973*. London: Norton.
- Lacan, J. 2006. *Ecrits*. London: Norton.
- Nichols, J. 2008. Lacan, the City and the Utopium Symptom: An Analysis of Abject Urban Space. *Space and Culture* 11(4), pp.459-74.
- Ruti, M. 2008. The Fall of Fantasies: A Lacanian Reading of Lack. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytical Association* 56(2), pp.483-508.
- Ruti, M. 2010. Life beyond Fantasy: The Rewriting of Destiny in Lacanian Theory. *Culture, Theory and Critique* 51(1), pp.1-14.
- Sharpe, M. 2004. *Slavoj Žižek: A Little Piece of the Real*. London: Ashgate.
- Stavrakakis, Y. (2011). The radical act: Towards a spatial critique. *Planning Theory* 10(4): pp. 301-24.
- Styhre, A. 2008. Management Control in Bureaucratic and Postbureaucratic Organizations: A Lacanian Perspective. *Group and Organizational Management* 33(6), pp.635-56.
- Swyngedouw, E. 2010. Trouble with Nature: 'Ecology as the New Opium for the Masses', In: J. Hillier and P. Healey, eds. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Planning Theory*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp.299-318.
- Žižek, S. 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. 1997. *The Plague of Fantasies*, London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. 1998. Cyberspace, or, How to Traverse the Fantasy in the Age of the Retreat of the Big Other. *Public Culture* 10(3), pp.483-513.
- Žižek, S. 2008. *In Defense of Lost Causes*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. 2009. *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. and Daly, G. 2004. *Conversations with Žižek*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Zupančič, A. (2000) *Ethics of the Real*. London: Verso.